

Business school**Academic research award: tipping point for action**

Winners wanted more than academic acclaim — they identified ways to turn aspirations into concrete, real-world results



Troubled waters: one team of researchers showed how collaboration enabled a children's charity in India to scale up its work © Prashanth Vishwanathan/Bloomberg

Bethan Staton in London YESTERDAY



Business schools have not always excelled at conducting research that has real-world impact.

When it comes to impactful work, many academics find there is a lack of incentives: in a system where publishing papers in prestigious journals is the way to secure promotion, pursuing projects beyond the university can seem irrelevant — or even counterproductive — to ambitious scholars' career goals.

But that is changing — and the Responsible Business Education Awards identify the growing number of researchers whose work helps companies and other organisations do better.

Professor Usha Haley, the W. Frank Barton distinguished chair in international business at Wichita State University and an award judge, thinks that business school research has reached a tipping point. “People are talking — there is action.”

This year's winners and runners-up were not deterred by the usual disincentives of academic research. In an impressive range of papers, business school researchers explored topics as varied as circular fashion, bank mergers, and the links between workers' conversations and productivity.

ORGAN DONATION IN PRACTICE

There are more than 4,000 people on waiting lists for organ donations in Canada and although public willingness to donate is high, when it comes to actually signing up, people often do not follow through on their intentions: take-up is much lower than it needs to be.



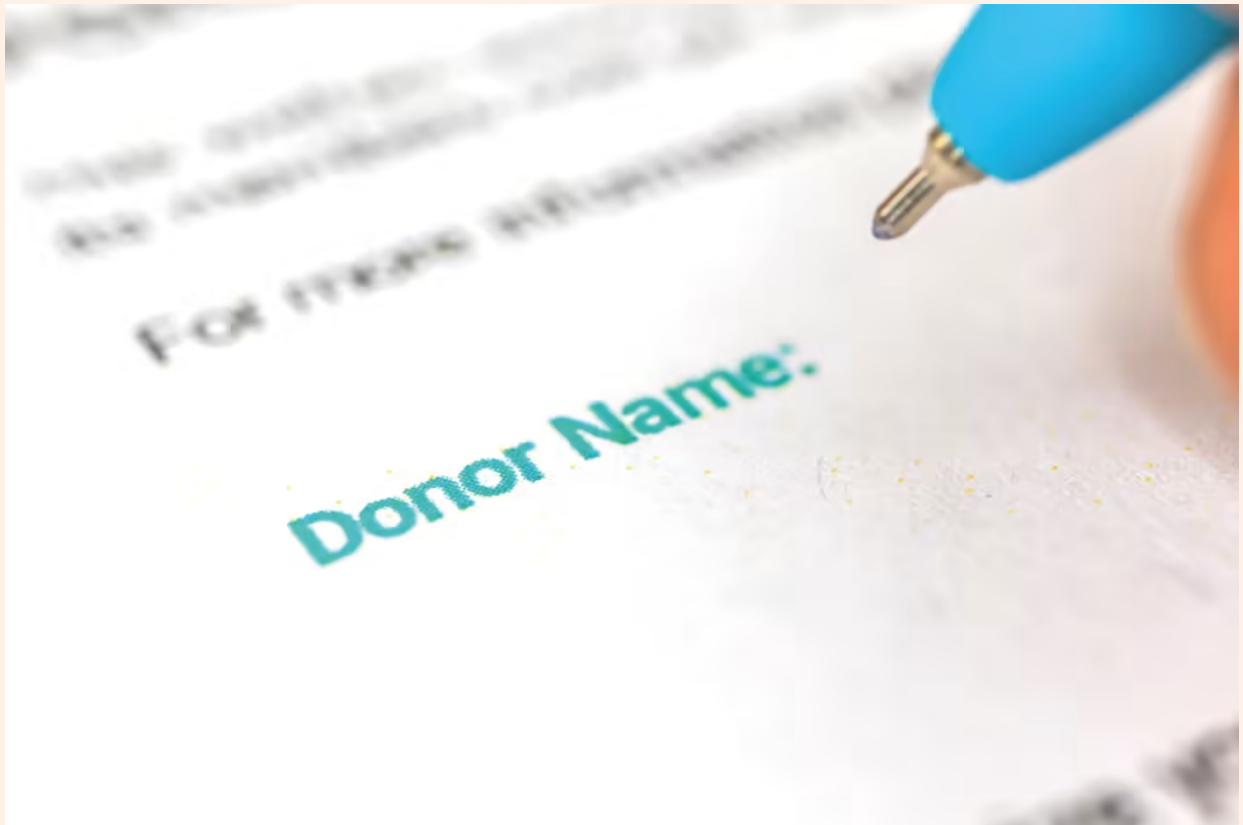
Nicole Robitaille

Nicole Robitaille, assistant professor of marketing at the Smith School of Business at Queen's University, Ontario, noticed a similar gap between intention and practice in research. Plenty of literature shows that people hold positive views about organ donation. Very little demonstrates what compels people to sign up — or not.

“You can look at a ton of questions about attitude, but behaviour change was what was really missing,” says Robitaille. Using observational qualitative research, she and her colleagues studied responses on organ donation in driving licence registrations in Ontario.

They noticed people were often unprepared for the decision or were put off by pages of complicated forms. “I spent a long time sitting in the registration office in Ontario watching what was going on,” says Robitaille.

After trying out a range of nudge interventions, by appealing to altruism and cutting red tape, the study's recommendations were adopted by Ontario's registration service. Consequently, organ donation registration significantly increased from 24 per cent of eligible adults at the time of research to 35 per cent now.



Robitaille's observational study was able to suggest ways of increasing organ donor registrations in Ontario © FellowNeko/Shutterstock

Looking at the research, the model predicted the intervention could result in new registrations provincewide each year. There are 12mn eligible, with one donor able to save eight lives and enhance 75 others, the impact is the difference between life and death.

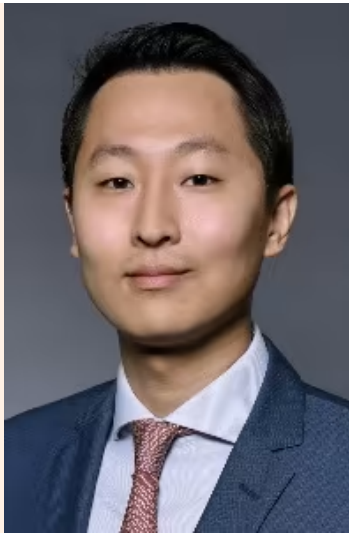
“It was the first time as an academic I cried. We are actually saving lives,” says Robitaille. “It was incredible to see this study really making a difference.”

EXPOSING GREENWASHING

In the world of asset management, the UN's Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) have fast become a primary tool for promoting work that is sustainable from an environmental, social and governance perspective.

How effective the framework really is at ensuring that investment is good for people and the planet has been intensely scrutinised — not least by Aaron Yoon, assistant professor of accounting and information management at the Kellogg School of Management.

In his paper, he took a forensic approach to how PRI signatories actually perform. He found that they attract large fund inflows, but do not necessarily show improvements in ESG practice.



Aaron Yoon

Yoon pulls no punches in his paper: a “reasonable reader” may conclude that PRI funds are “consistent with greenwashing”, he notes. And while signatories are “not superior performers in ESG” before signing, the affiliation is often quickly displayed on company websites, marketing materials and funding documents.

“Basically, my paper changed how UN PRI monitors all its signatories on disclosing funds,” Yoon says. Fiona Reynolds, chief executive of UN PRI told Institutional Investor magazine that Yoon’s work informed a consultation about reporting requirements among signatories.

When he started in 2019, Yoon says, “no one was talking about greenwashing” in academia. He says that when he first presented his findings to a group of regulators in asset management, “They looked like they were caught off guard.” One even asked where his fund sat in the ranking.

Yoon believes that, with the right scrutiny, it is possible to create value with ESG. “I want to make sure we get this correct and it helps the sustainability of capitalism,” he says.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

In her PhD research on global corporate responsibility, Gabriela Gutierrez-Huerter O, now a lecturer in international management at King’s College London, became interested in translation — how responsibilities are understood between companies with different views.



Gabriela Gutierrez-Huerter O

In her paper, she applied those ideas at the sharpest end of labour exploitation. Through interviews and observations in the construction sector, she found that collective solutions were being obstructed by dominant ideas, such as the notion that modern slavery was inevitable in our economic system.

“There’s a group of actors coming together and they all have very different views of what modern slavery is — it’s highly contested and very political,” says Gutierrez-Huerter O. “I found that was really limiting the type of responses from business.”

The work has led to material change. Contributing to the British Standard on organisational responses to modern slavery, Gutierrez-Huerter O advocated for more focus on human and labour rights. The approach was adopted, and the standard made available globally and free of charge.



Through interviews and observations in the construction sector, Gutierrez-Huerter O found that collective solutions to modern slavery were being obstructed by dominant ideas © Chris Ratcliffe/Bloomberg

“The way in which the standard has been written empowers organisations to be problem-solvers and to develop robust responses that eradicate the exploitation of human beings,” she says.

Gutierrez-Huerter O is arranging roundtables for business leaders on modern slavery. She hopes the research will help the sector come to a common understanding of how to tackle the problem collectively. “We need to go the extra mile in how we connect with businesses,” she says.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

For most scholars, tackling child malnutrition would be a formidable undertaking in itself. But Arijit Chatterjee, associate management professor at the Essec Business School in France, expanded an examination of this global problem into a bigger study, applicable to a wider range of “grand challenges”.



Arijit Chatterjee

In the paper, Chatterjee and his co-authors examined how the Child in Need Institute, an India-focused non-profit organisation that promotes child development, successfully scaled up its work in child malnutrition.

Through four years of intensive fieldwork and examining 40 years of archival data, they considered how large and small organisations can work together, combining the expertise of local actors with the scale of larger institutions to address difficult problems.

Chatterjee says he was inspired in part by a sense of powerlessness. “When small entities like us hear of grand challenges we feel helpless,” he says. He was eager to know more about how the Children in Need Institute successfully reached more than 7mn beneficiaries. The paper found success was based, in part, on “double weaving . . . a process of diagnosing and addressing problems by connecting actors and resources across locations and scales”.



Chatterjee found that a children's charity in India successfully reached 7mn beneficiaries partly by connecting actors and resources across locations and scales © Prashanth Vishwanathan/Bloomberg

Researchers spent time in communities, rather than doing what is known as “jet set ethnography”, parachuting into settings for a short time. The frameworks they created for scaling up have been used by several organisations. Professor Jennifer Howard-Grenville from Cambridge’s Judge Business School says it was “one of most exciting and impactful research papers” she handled in six years at the Academy of Management Journal.

Chatterjee hopes the paper can be used more widely to help organisations and academics reach beyond their communities. “Grand challenges are complex problems,” he says. “They cannot be solved without collaboration.”

Academic research with real-world impact: winners

Authors	Project	Journal
Arijit Chatterjee, <i>Essec Business School, France</i> , Anjan Ghosh, <i>Narxoz Business School, Almaty, Kazakhstan</i> , Bernard Leca, <i>Essec Business School, France</i>	Double Weaving: A Bottom-Up Process of Connecting Locations and Scales to Mitigate Grand Challenges	Academy of Management Journal
Gabriela Gutierrez-Huerter O, <i>King’s College London</i> , Stefan Gold, <i>Institute of Management and Business Studies</i> ,	Change in Rhetoric but not in Action? Framing of the Ethical Issue of	Journal of Business Ethics

Authors	Project	Journal
<i>University of Kassel, Alexander Trautrimms, Rights Lab, University of Nottingham</i>	<u>Modern Slavery in a UK Sector at High Risk of Labor Exploitation</u>	
<i>Soohun Kim, Kaist College of Business, Aaron Yoon, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University</i>	<u>Analyzing Active Managers' Commitment to ESG: Evidence from United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment</u>	Management Science
<i>Nicole Robitaille, Smith School of Business, Queen's University, Canada, Nina Mazar, Questrom School of Business, Boston University, Claire I. Tsai, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, Avery M. Haviv, Simon Business School, University of Rochester, US, Elizabeth Hardy, Treasury Board Secretariat, Government of Canada</i>	<u>Increasing Organ Donor Registrations with Behavioral Interventions: A Field Experiment</u>	Journal of Marketing

The judges

Brian Bruce

Journal of Impact & ESG Investing

Giana Eckhardt

King's Business School

Bill Glick

Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Business

Usha Haley

Wichita State University

Andrew Jack

Financial Times

Dan LeClair

Global Business School Network

Fiona Marshall

University of Sussex Business School

John Norris

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Dave Reibstein

Wharton/Responsible Research in Business & Management

Silviya Svejenova

International Federation of Scholarly Associations of Management

Charles Wookey

A Blueprint for Better Business

Academic research with real-world impact: highly commended

Authors	Project	Journal
Noël Amenc, <i>EDHEC Business School</i> , Frédéric Blanc-Brude, Abhishek Gupta, Tim Whittaker, <i>EDHEC Infrastructure Institute</i>	An Infrastructure Investment Primer: From Valuation to Allocation and Manager Selection	Journal of Portfolio Management
James R Brown, <i>Iowa state University</i> , Gustav Martinsson, <i>KTH Royal Institute of Technology</i> , Christian Thomann, <i>Stockholm School of Economics</i>	Can Environmental Policy Encourage Technical Change? Emissions Taxes and R&D Investment in Polluting Firms	The Review of Financial Studies
Vanessa Burbano, <i>Columbia Business School</i>	The Demotivating Effects of Communicating a Social-Political Stance: Field Experimental Evidence from an Online Labor Market Platform	Management Science
Luis Diestre, Ben Barber, Juan Santaló, <i>IE Business School</i>	The Friday Effect: Firm Lobbying, the Timing of Drug Safety Alerts, and Drug Side Effects	Management Science
Andreas Fagereng, <i>BI Norwegian Business School</i> , Luigi Guiso, <i>Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance</i> , Davide Malacrino, <i>IMF</i> , Luigi Pistaferri, <i>Stanford University</i>	Heterogeneity and Persistence in Returns to Wealth	Econometrica
Andrew Harvey, <i>Corpus Christi College</i> , Paul Kattuman, <i>Cambridge Judge Business School</i>	Time Series Models Based on Growth Curves With Applications to Forecasting Coronavirus	Harvard Data Science Review

Authors	Project	Journal
Joyce C. He, <i>UCLA</i> , Sonia K. Kang, Nicola Lacetera, <i>Department of Management, University of Toronto</i>	Opt-out choice framing attenuates gender differences in the decision to compete in the laboratory and in the field	Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America
Patricia Hein, <i>Ivey Business School</i> , Shaz Ansari, <i>Cambridge Judge Business School</i>	From Sheltered to Included: The Emancipation of Disabled Workers from Benevolent Marginalization	Academy of Management Journal
Michael G. Jacobides, <i>London Business School</i> , Ioannis Lianos, <i>University College London</i>	Regulating Platforms & Ecosystems	Industrial and Corporate Change
Jeremy Kress, <i>University of Michigan Ross School of Business</i>	Reviving Bank Antitrust	Duke Law Journal
Siobhan McQuaid, <i>Trinity College Dublin</i> , Esmee D. Kooijman, <i>University College Dublin</i> , Mary-Lee Rhodes, Sheila M. Cannon, Marcus J. Collier, <i>Trinity College Dublin</i> , Francesco Pilla, <i>University College Dublin</i>	Innovating with Nature: From Nature-Based Solutions to Nature-Based Enterprises	Sustainability
Alexandra Niessen-Ruenzi, <i>University of Mannheim Business School</i> , Mengqiao Du, <i>University of Mannheim</i> , Vidhi Chhaochharia, <i>University of Miami</i>	Counter-stereotypical female role models and women's occupational choices	Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization
Francesca Romana Rinaldi, <i>SDA Bocconi School of Management</i> , Claudia Di Bernardino, Virginia Cram-Martos, Maria Teresa Pisani, <i>United Nations Economic Commission for Europe</i>	Traceability and transparency: enhancing sustainability and circularity in garment and footwear	Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy
Jason James Sandvik, <i>Eller College of Management</i> , Richard E Saouma, <i>Michigan State</i>	Workplace Knowledge Flows	The Quarterly Journal of Economics

Authors	Project	Journal
<p>University, Nathan T Seegert, University of Utah, Christopher T Stanton, Harvard Business School</p> <p>Dong Liu, Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology, Yang Chen, School of Business Administration, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Nian Li, West China Medical Center, Sichuan University</p>	<p>Tackling the Negative Impact of COVID-19 on Work Engagement and Taking Charge: A Multi- Study Investigation of Frontline Health Workers</p>	<p>Journal of Applied Psychology</p>
<p>Simon JD Schillebeeckx, Ryan K. Merrill, Gerard George, Singapore Management University</p>	<p>Digital Sustainability and Entrepreneurship: How Digital Innovations Are Helping Tackle Climate Change and Sustainable Development</p>	<p>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</p>
<p>Traci Sitzmann, University of Colorado, Elizabeth M. Campbell, University of Minnesota</p> <p>Adrian Woods, Huddersfield Business School, Motuma Tolera, Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources, Matthew Snell, Huddersfield Business School, Peter O'Hara, University of Huddersfield, Afework Hailu, Ethio-Wetlands and Natural Resources Association</p>	<p>The Hidden Cost of Prayer: Religiosity and the Gender Wage Gap</p> <p>Community forest management (CFM) in south-west Ethiopia: Maintaining forests, biodiversity and carbon stocks to support wild coffee conservation</p>	<p>Academy of Management Journal</p> <p>Global Environmental Change</p>