# The Societal Impact of Business School Research

A scholarly, organisational/governmental, and societal impact approach

ABDC AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS DEANS COUNCIL

## About the Australian Business Deans Council

The Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) is collective voice of Australian business schools. We champion quality and impact in business education and research, driving excellence and innovation to benefit students, industry, and society.

The ABDC's 37-member business schools educate 16% of all domestic university students and 39% of international students.

As their peak body, ABDC's role is to ensure that those with political, social, cultural and economic influence appreciate and support the contribution that business education makes to Australia's future.

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## Executive summary

The broader university sector faces growing pressure to demonstrate societal impact alongside their scholarly, organisational, and governmental impact. In particular, for business schools, demonstrating societal impact is complex. Existing models and frameworks to assess scholarly, organisational, governmental, and societal impact have largely been designed for STEM disciplines with linear pathways (discover, product development, and commercialisation) to societal impact, while the broader societal value of business research is frequently under-recognised and is often less linear.

This project, conducted under the auspices of the Business Academic Research Directors Network (BARDsNet) of the Australian Business Dean's Council (ABDC) aimed to develop a rigorous scholarly, organisational, governmental, and societal impact framework tailored to business schools. The multi-stage and triangulated approach comprised five stages:

- Stage 1: Review of academic literature
- Stage 2: Review of current societal impact evaluation practices
- Stage 3: Consultations with business schools in Australia and New Zealand
- Stage 4: Conceptualisation of the societal impact framework, and
- Stage 5: Development of case studies

This resulted in the development of a framework with a strong theoretical foundation and the integration of business school context-specificity. The White Paper suggests ways that business schools can capture and communicate the societal value of their research, strengthening their legitimacy and strategic positioning. The framework's innovative theoretical foundation is a pragmatic tool that can be used to effectively communicate a business school's societal impact.

## Foreword

This White Paper officially launches a Societal Impact framework to capture scholarly, organisational, governmental, and societal impact for business schools. It outlines the rationale and justification for its development, as well as providing guidance for its application and operationalisation. Business schools are cognisant that their value must be shown not only through research and teaching excellence, but through clear evidence of positive societal impact. As governments, funding bodies, and communities demand more visible contributions from higher education institutions, universities are responding with pan-organisation strategies to embed societal impact at their core.

For business schools, the current situation is both a challenge and an opportunity. While their research has long generated significant societal value, its contribution is often under-recognised. The ABDC's societal impact framework responds to this need. It offers business schools a way to capture, evaluate, communicate and present the journey to broader societal impact contributions, ensuring the value of their research is seen and felt across society. More importantly, it signals a future where business schools are recognised as active partners in tackling pressing contemporary challenges.

This year-long project, consisting of Professor Tracy Taylor (Chair of BARDsNet, ABDC, RMIT), Professor Karin Sanders (Chair of the Societal Impact Project, ABDC, UNSW), Dr. Chelsea Phillips (Postdoctoral Researcher, ABDC), and Caroline Falshaw (Executive Officer, ABDC) commenced in January 2025. They adopted a triangulated approach, involving reviews of academic literature, of existing impact frameworks, and consultation with ABDC members and business researchers. From these three sources, the ABDC Societal Impact Framework for Business Research (ABDC SIF) was developed to assist business schools in evaluating and demonstrating the societal impact of their research.

We thank the business schools within the ABDC membership, including the Business and Research Directors Network (BARDsNet) who contributed to the development of this framework. In particular, we thank the societal impact steering committee members and Associate Deans of Research for their guidance and continued feedback: Australian Catholic University (Professor Joy Parkinson), University of Canberra (Professor Rebekah Russell-Bennett), University of Canterbury (Professor Sarah Wright), University of Melbourne (Professor Michal Carrington), University of Newcastle (Professor Jamie Carlson), and Monash University (Professor Russell Smyth). We also acknowledge the business school researchers who volunteered their time to participate in the case studies provided in this White Paper: Australian Catholic University, University of Canberra, University of Canterbury (NZ), Monash University, University of Melbourne, UNSW, University of Newcastle, QUT, and RMIT.

It is our hope that this White Paper will serve for business schools to demonstrate and amplify their societal impact, and to foster dialogue on the societal impact of business schools.

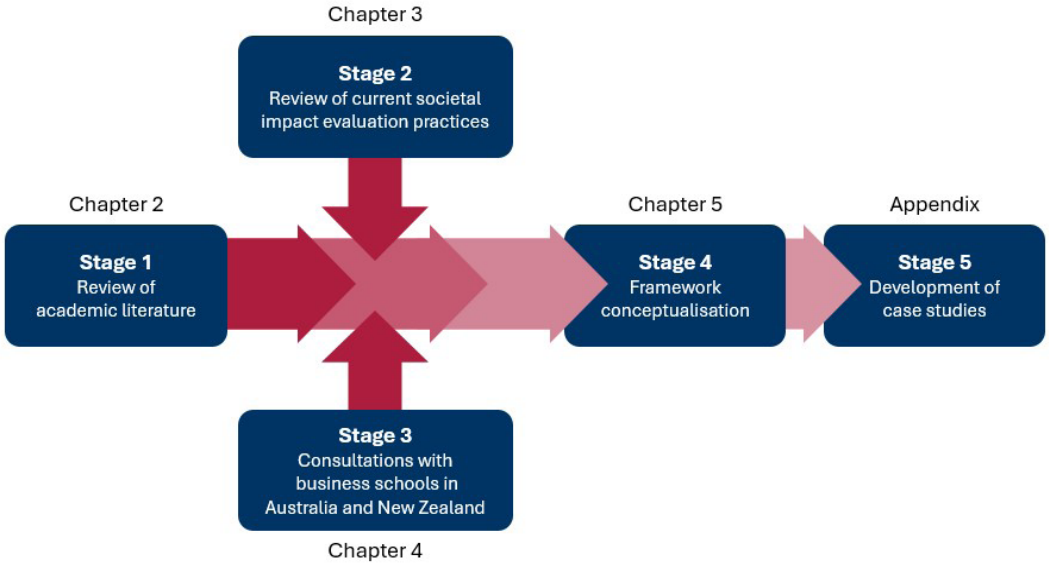
# 1 Introduction

Business schools and universities at large face pressures to demonstrate their legitimacy, not only through high-quality education and excellence in research, but also through evidence of positive societal impact[1]. While societal impact can be generated from research, teaching, and engagement activities[2] research is central in generating societal impact and is the focus of this White Paper. As a project within the BARDsNet group[a] of the ABDC, the scope of societal impact was centred on research, noting that there is crossover into other business school activities, such as teaching and engagement.

At an international level, governments are increasingly embedding societal impact measures into policy and research funding instruments (such as the Australian Government's former Engagement and Impact Assessment[b] and the UK's Research Evaluation Framework[c]). At a sector level, many universities have institution-wide strategies for societal impact.

Business schools have unique internal and external considerations to take into account in demonstrating their societal impact[1]. Multi-level ecosystem pressures contribute to the need to be able to capture and demonstrate societal impact of business school research. Accreditation bodies (such as AACSB[d] and EQUIS[e]) encourage business schools to document the societal impact of their research activities as part of the (re)accreditation process. However, demonstrating societal impact as a social science discipline can be challenging, as evaluation frameworks have largely been designed for the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, who have more linear pathways to impact[3].
This White Paper sets out the process used in the development of a societal impact framework for business schools to capture and amplify the societal impact of their research. A five-stage triangulated approach was used to develop the societal impact framework (Figure 1) and provides the structure for this White Paper.

Figure 1: Research process for societal impact framework




In Chapter 2, we first explain the theoretical foundation of the societal impact framework. These findings are explored through a review of the current societal impact evaluation practices and consultations with business schools in Australia and New Zealand in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively. Chapter 5 presents the proposed Societal Impact Framework for Business Research (ABDC SIF), with reference to nine case studies supplied in the Appendix. In Chapter 6, we conclude the White Paper.

a Business Academic Research Directors' Network
b https://www.arc.gov.au/evaluating-research/ei-assessment
c https://2029.ref.ac.uk
d Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
e EMFD Quality Improvement System

# 2 Societal Impact: Theoretical models

This project drew on a societal impact conceptual foundation. The first step involved conducting a literature review to understand the theoretical conversations occurring in academic circles. Societal Impact scholarship is characterised by two schools of thought: attribution-based approaches and contribution-based approaches[4]. Attribution-based approaches seek to identify discrete activities and link them to societal impact claims. Contribution-based approaches reflect upon the interactions and relationships between academic and external stakeholders that led to societal impact. While attribution-based approaches are used in evaluation practices, they fail to fully capture the nature of societal impact. Contribution-based approaches—though still emerging—better reflect societal impact. However, theoretical understanding of contribution-based approaches is comparatively less developed.

This research developed a societal impact framework that embodies both an attribution and contribution-based theoretical approach via 'productive interactions.'

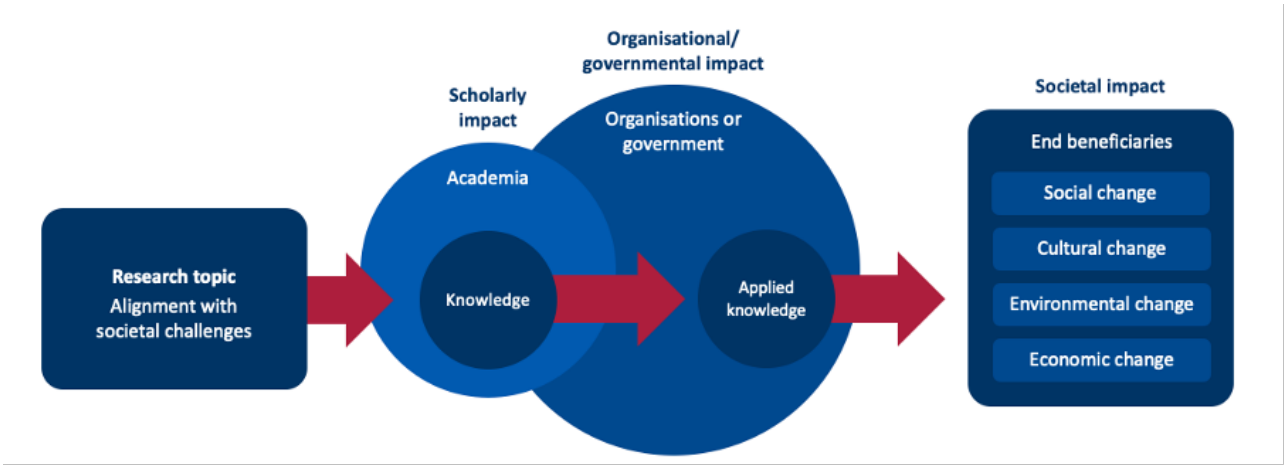
The concept of 'productive interactions' views societal impact as a result of exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and value by both science and society. This chapter explains the first stage of the project where theoretical understanding was sought to develop a theoretical basis for the societal impact framework. The chapter is structured accordingly:

- **Section 2.1** outlines the **definition of societal impact** and related types of research from business research
- **Section 2.2** describes the **characteristics** of societal impact
- **Section 2.3** introduces the **theoretical approach** to the societal impact framework, productive interactions
- **Section 2.4** summarises the **key insights** from the literature that informed the development of the societal impact framework

## 2.1 Definition and conceptualisation of societal impact

This White Paper defines societal impact as the dissemination and application of knowledge by business schools for and with stakeholders outside of academia[5] that creates social, cultural, environmental, and/or economical change[6,7,8] or addresses grand societal challenges through its research topic[9]. Societal impact can be generated when research is designed from the outset to align with societal challenges, reflected in the research topic. Business schools can achieve societal impact by exploring new knowledge and skills, and/or applying existing knowledge to benefit society[10].

Figure 2: Conceptualisation of impact from research




Societal impact is just one way of creating impact from business research. There are other types of impact that business research can achieve including scholarly impact, organisational, and governmental impact (Table 1).

Table 1: Types of impact from business research

| Impact type | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Scholarly impact** | The contribution business school research makes to theory and methodology which remains in the academic community[2] |
| **Organisational impact** | The transfer and application of scholarly knowledge on managerial practices and organisational decision making[2] |
| **Governmental impact** | The application of scholarly knowledge for policy, government practices, and/or government processes (adapted[11]) |
| **Societal impact** | The dissemination and application of knowledge from academic research within universities to stakeholders outside of academia that creates social, cultural, environmental, and/or economical change or addresses grand societal challenges through its research topic (by authors) |

While societal impact is often assumed to be positive, it can also be negative or may simultaneously have unintended negative effects. Societal impact pathways are not normative, nor does research always follow a linear pathway from discovery to societal impact.

## 2.2 Characteristics of societal impact

There are several characteristics that are common across disciplines. In the following we discuss the different elements more in detail.

Tenets of societal impact


### 2.2.1 Occurs within an ecosystem

Societal impact involves the culmination of academic and non-academic people and activities. Thus, societal impact is generated from a broader and interconnected ecosystem, where it is achieved through coordination and collaboration between multiple stakeholders[12]. Societal impact is not necessarily the result of one singular project but can be the product of multiple streams of research coming together[13]. Societal impact can be direct, indirect, or even unintended[4] from the research activities. Societal impact is not necessarily the result of, and cannot be attributed to, an individual activity or interaction.

In the business school ecosystem, stakeholders related to societal impact can be diverse and include students, faculty, industry, government, and society at large[14]. Business school stakeholders can be grouped across internal and external stakeholder categories. Internal stakeholders largely consist of faculty and staff[14], while external stakeholders include broader academia, practitioners and organisations, as well as government groups and regulators[15].

### 2.2.2 Dynamic and context dependent

Societal impact is dynamic and is highly context dependent, meaning the type of societal impact depends on its context and use of research insights[16]. There is no 'single way' to measure societal impact nor 'gold standard' for its evaluation because of this context dependency[13]. For instance, in a business schools the way societal impact is understood in the economics discipline might be differ from marketing. As such, the variety of stakeholders involved can be highly contextual as well, with often divergent expectations[17]. This means that societal impact is often difficult to compare across research contexts.

For business schools, this context dependency may be reflected by the types of research and engagement activities that researchers perform. This may include consulting, sitting on boards of directors, conducting entrepreneurial activity, doing research with industry partners, publishing in practitioner-oriented outlets, and publishing in popular business press, among other activities[10].

### 2.2.3 High temporality

Third, societal impact is highly temporal, commonly with a time lag—often several years—between the research activities and the realisation of impact[4]. Societal impact is not just an 'end result,' but can include intermediate outcomes on a long-term timeline[13]. Societal impact can arise directly from a specific action or indirectly through a pathway of effects over time[12]. This means that it can be measured at multiple points in the research process[8]. These temporal characteristics are a reason why societal impact is difficult to evaluate[4]. Considering this, societal impact is easier to evaluate in hindsight but can be difficult to anticipate[18].

Societal impact from business school research develops over time—both through the maturation of knowledge outputs and the careers of researchers[19]. From a linear perspective of societal impact—where impact originates from a knowledge output, such as a publication—it is reasonable that time is required for knowledge to be disseminated and applied before its effects become visible. What is less apparent are the cumulative outputs that shape an academic's actual and perceived expertise, influencing the resources that enable the societal impact of their research. For instance, an established publication record in leading journals enhances an academic's chances of securing grants[19].

### 2.2.4 Distinguishable from scholarly impact

Finally, highly citable academic research does not necessarily correlate with societal impact[20] as societal impact involves the dissemination of knowledge into society. Business school research is often characterised as overly focussing on academic metrics such as citation counts, journal impact factors and individual h-index, producing research that is self-referential and detached from economic, environmental, and societal challenges[21]. Focusing on these academic metrics presents the concern that business research many be decoupled from real economic, environmental, and societal challenges[22].

Many business journals encourage authors to provide strong managerial implications to increase relevance, visibility, and impact of scholarly work to the practitioner community[22]. This practice benefits from deliberate consideration[22]; however, researchers may treat it as a box-ticking exercise when aiming to meet publication requirements. The readership of journals remains within academia; therefore it is important for researchers to write managerially-oriented interpretations of research to expand readership and generate potential impact[22].

## 2.3 Schools of thought for societal impact

There are two main theoretical models when it comes to societal impact evaluation: attribution and contribution.

### 2.3.1 Attribution-based approach

The attribution-based approach involves linking (research) activities to its societal impact generation. In other words, this approach establishes a causal relationship between research activities and the generation of societal impact. It adopts a logic model approach to document how activities and inputs result in specific outcomes and impacts[23].

An attribution-based approach to societal impact is centred on the return on investment of research funds[17]. An attribution-based approach has been characterised as having a difficult fit for societal impact due to the societal impact's unpredictable nature. At an operational level it is difficult to directly attribute activities to societal outcomes, and it can be challenging for researchers and research managers to distinguish between impact measurement with inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes[24]. As such, there is a move towards coming up with ways to measure and recognise focussing the actual interactions/relationships transfer of knowledge products from science to society; termed as a contribution-based approach[4].

### 2.3.2 Contribution-based approach and productive interactions

A contribution-based approach focuses on the relationships and interactions that take place between various stakeholders that can result in societal impact and refers to the concept of 'productive interactions.'

> Productive interactions are defined as 'exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant'[4].

Productive interactions do not assume a linear model of knowledge dissemination from research to user but rather assumes that influences arise in complex networks that are dynamic and multidirectional. The concept of productive interactions is that for impact to have taken place, a contact between researchers and non-academic stakeholders must have occurred[25]. The interaction is deemed productive when stakeholders do new things or do things differently can one say impact has taken place[26]. Productive interactions posit that influences arise in complex networks that are dynamic and multidirectional. Thus, productive interactions focus on the journey, rather than inputs or outputs, embodying the true nature of societal impact.

As a social science, business research often follows non-linear pathways to impact compared to other scientific domains such as STEM[27]. As such, business schools can benefit from a productive interactions approach.

## 2.4 Summary of theoretical considerations

A theory-based societal impact framework provides a rigorous foundation, which makes impact evaluation consistent and transferable across different business disciplines. We have drawn out five implications for the societal impact framework:

**Theoretical considerations**

1. Capture the ecosystem that generates societal impact
2. Allow for societal impact evaluation to be conducted on a case-by-case basis
3. Consider both short and long-term timelines of societal impact
4. Distinguish societal impact from scholarly impact, and
5. Explore a contribution-based approach via productive interactions

# 3 Current Societal Impact Evaluation Practices

The second phase of the project involved examining existing frameworks and practices for evaluating societal impact in the higher education sector. The rationale of incorporating this was to advance prior societal impact evaluation efforts. The high-level overview conducted provides both national and university sector societal impact evaluation practices. At the time of this White Paper, the Australian Research Council's Engagement and Impact Assessment Exercise (ARC EI) was paused[f].

In the following sections we explain the two themes that provided insights into the development of a societal impact framework:

- **Section 3.1:** Reflection on national societal impact evaluation practices
- **Section 3.2:** Societal impact evaluation practices in universities

## 3.1 National societal impact evaluation practices

In Australia, the Australian Research Council (ARC) introduced the Engagement and Impact (EI) Assessment in 2018 to evaluate how well researchers engaged with end-users of research. The exercise identified and highlighted excellence across all research conducted in Australia's higher education institutions. Research case studies were assessed by panels to evaluate the ability of universities to translate their research beyond academia for economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits. The anticipated 2023 EI round did not proceed. A similar nation-level exercise is conducted by the UK's Research Evaluation Framework (REF) exercise, which informs the allocation of public funding of research. This occurred in 2014, 2019, and planned for 2029. Other countries, such as Hong Kong, Norway, and Sweden, have adopted similar methods.

Previous evaluation practices require researchers to articulate the societal impact of their research and attribute key inputs and outcomes of their research to that impact.

The practice of evaluating societal impact drawing on an attribution-based approach challenges the nature of how societal impact is generated.

Current national societal impact evaluation frameworks and exercises represent an attribution- and not a contribution-based approach. This is no doubt because as knowledge progresses toward being societally impactful and reaching external stakeholders, it becomes harder (and more costly) to measure[5]. It is more efficient and convenient to be able to link controllable and trackable scholarly activities to supposed societal outcomes, rather than observing how relationships take place between researchers and external stakeholders and evolve over time (embodying productive interactions). However, EI and REF evaluation practices indicate a tried and tested way of communicating societal impact via narrative case studies.

**Takeaway**

The framework can incorporate narrative case studies employed by national evaluation practices to communicate the societal impact of research.

## 3.2 Societal impact evaluation in universities

Universities are increasingly adopting institution-wide strategies to meet government, funding body and community expectations to demonstrate how their research addresses societal challenges. These strategies often encompass activities beyond research to include teaching, engagement, and operations and governance. The frameworks underpinning these strategies seek not only to capture and demonstrate societal impact but align initiatives across the institution to inform resource allocation for such efforts.

Some members of the ABDC already have institution-wide societal impact strategies. For instance, UNSW recently launched their societal impact strategy, *Progress for All*, which contains nine strategies pillars to guide their efforts in addressing critical global challenges for the next ten years. Monash University is channelling their efforts through their *Impact 2030* that charts the path for how the university will contribute to addressing local and global challenges

f https://www.arc.gov.au/evaluating-research/excellence-research-australia

through its research and education, in collaboration with government, industry, alumni, donors, and community. Research-specific societal impact strategies include The University of Melbourne's *Advancing Research 2030: Excellence for Impact* strategy, which is in place to guide decision-making for research to address complex social, environmental, political and economic challenges.

The ABDC's membership contains a diversity of business schools whose approach to impact is informed by their university category, such as Go8s, IRU, ATN and RUN[28] as well as non-group/non-aligned metropolitan and regional universities with varying research intensity. Business schools obviously need to to align to these societal impact university strategies.

**Takeaway**

The societal impact framework should complement, rather than challenge, existing university societal impact strategies and practices

## 3.3 Summary of evaluation practice considerations

By examining existing frameworks and university practices for evaluating societal impact within the higher education sector, two considerations were identified as central to the framework:

**Evaluation practice considerations**

1. Narrative case studies provide a highly effective means of conveying societal impact
2. The ABDC framework can support existing university societal impact strategies

# 4 Consultation with Business Schools in Australia and New Zealand

The third phase involved consultation with ABDC BARDsNet members. This included a BARDsNet survey (2023) survey on assessing and measuring societal impact, conversations with selected researchers who generate societal impact, and the review of business school accreditation standards for societal impact.

In the following sections we explain the two themes that provided insights into the development of the societal impact framework:

- **Section 4.1:** The role of accreditation and institutional ambition for societal impact
- **Section 4.2:** Enabling and limiting factors in business schools for societal impact

## 4.1 The role of accreditation and institutional ambition for societal impact

Many (Australian) business schools signal quality assurance and recognition by peers through international accreditation of their business school. In relation to societal impact, some international accreditation bodies (e.g. AACSB and EQUIS) encourage business schools to use mission statements to demonstrate their commitment to creating public value[29]. These mission statements often define the value they produce for various communities within the business schools' networks.

This project's societal impact framework does not address international accreditation[g] requirements. However, the accreditation process does offer three valuable insights for understanding how business schools relate to societal impact. This includes (1) understanding when and (2) how business schools evaluate their societal impact, and (3) pre-existing societal impact focus areas.

### 4.1.1 When business schools evaluate societal impact

The accreditation and continuous improvement process serves as a key moment for business schools to reflect on and demonstrate the societal impact of their research. In particular, business schools are encouraged to reflect upon their research (and education) activities and align these to societal impact focus areas that are relevant to their school. This practice occurs every three to six years depending on the accreditation body. Additionally, a business school's reflection on societal impact may depend on the timeline established for the university's broader institutional impact ambitions. This may occur annually or in line with broader university strategy cycles, sometimes only once every ten years.

The challenge is for business schools to continuously reflect on and evaluate their societal impact and not just for their accreditation or internal university reporting.

**Takeaway**

While addressing accreditation or aligning to institutional societal impact ambitions is not the framework's focus, its timelines provide a consistent opportunity for business schools to document societal impact.

### 4.1.2 How business schools evaluate societal impact

Furthermore, business schools collect activity-based data when addressing accreditation standards and/or to demonstrate alignment to university societal impact strategies. The accreditation process and alignment to university societal impact ambitions provides two factors for the framework's scope. First, business schools gather various forms of data to demonstrate their alignment with accreditation standards and to university societal impact strategies. This includes the number of academic and industry research publications, white papers, research centres, research initiatives, grant funding received, among other engagement activities. Business schools also typically monitor activities such as social media activity, Category 2-4 income generated, service on advisory boards, consultation services for community, professional and government bodies, and more (survey data, 2023).

**Takeaway**

The type of data collected for accreditation and evidence of alignment to university societal impact ambitions suggest the level of detail business schools can practically consider when capturing societal impact.

g Discipline-specific accreditation (e.g. accounting specific, AMBA) is not considered as it largely focusses on curriculum rather than research

### 4.1.3 Pre-existing societal impact focus areas

Finally, accreditation body standards relating to research impact do not impose focus areas or societal impact goals for business schools to achieve. Rather some accreditation bodies (namely AACSB and EQUIS) encourage business schools to demonstrate how their activities align with their mission. Moreso, business schools operate within their own university ecosystem which may have university-level ambitions for societal impact across faculties. Therefore, the societal impact framework considers this scope. As previously mentioned (Chapter 3), the ABDC membership contains a diverse array of business schools. Each have their own societal initiatives at a school and/or university level. According to the BARDsNet survey data (2023), this commonly includes SDG-related classification of research activities, outputs, outcomes and impact at either business school or university levels.

**Takeaway**

To best support business schools, the framework should complement existing societal impact ambitions at the school and/or university level.

## 4.2 Enabling and limiting factors in business schools for societal impact

In consultation with business school researchers, it is evident that many academics self-identify as conducting either discovery research or applied research, with societal impact often generated by applied researchers by pursuing a societally relevant research topic from the outset. However, applied research is not the only way to generate societal impact. Discovery scholarship is crucial to advance the business field and allows impact-focused research to leverage previous scholarship.

### 4.2.1 Enabling conditions for societal impact

Through informal one-on-one meetings (UNSW ethics approval: 9349), applied researchers shared what it was like for them to generate societal impact from research. Enabling conditions for generating societal impact from research largely rely on support from business school management. If societal impact is rewarded or acknowledged for career progression, it can act as an enabling factor for generating societally impactful research.

Some business schools within the ABDC membership have specific individual metrics for engagement and impact for academic promotion, such as joint industry publications, industry HDR supervisions or internships, policy impact, and industry/government engagement (2023 survey).

**Takeaway**

The framework should be able to capture and recognise the diverse activities that contribute to societal impact.

### 4.2.2 Barriers for societal impact

Business school academics report that the 'publish or perish' culture does not necessarily align with the time and effect required to action the diverse array of research and engagement activities that generate societal impact. The traditional model for academic excellence prioritises the rigor of an academic's scientific validity and rigour[10]. This is reflected in promotion criteria, where scholarly research activities are highly valued. As such, in pursuing academic recognition, business schools may at times place greater emphasis on analysis and problem identification than on developing and implementing practical solutions[30]. These expectations are perpetuated by long-standing social norms dictating what an academic is supposed to look like[10].

In our discussions with academics, they highlighted there is a need to progress the mindset within academia and creating a performance management system and culture that values both scholarly impact and societal impact activities. Some universities do take this approach, which is exemplified in allowing different types of workload configurations, and the appointment of Professors of Practice and Clinical Professors.

**Takeaway**

The framework should recognise both societal impact activities and scholarly activities.

## 4.3 Summary of business school consultations

Through consultation with ABDC BARDsNet members, applied researchers, and a review of accreditation processes and alignment with institutional societal impact initiatives, we gained insight into how the framework could be effectively operationalised within business schools. This informed five considerations to incorporate into the framework:

**Current considerations for business schools**

1. Business schools consistently engage with societal impact evaluation through accreditation processes
2. The framework can leverage the type of data typically collected for reporting on related accreditation standards
3. It is important that the framework supports, rather than conflicts with, existing societal impact activities of business schools and universities
4. A variety of scholarly and engagement activities contribute to societal impact
5. Creating opportunities to equally recognise societal impact activities and scholarly impact activities

# 5 The Societal Impact Framework

This project gave us the unique opportunity to create a framework that wholly reflects the theoretical underpinning of societal impact, as revealed in Chapter 2. This theoretical understanding was complemented with a review of current societal impact evaluation practices (Chapter 3) and consultations with business schools (Chapter 4). The resulting societal impact framework provides a basis to translate theory into practice, by building on existing evaluation methods and meeting the unique needs of business schools.

In the following sections we explain the rationale and present the Societal Impact Framework:

- **Section 5.1:** Principles for the Societal Impact Framework
- **Section 5.2:** Presenting the ABDC Societal Impact Framework for Business Research
- **Section 5.3:** Explaining the framework's heatmap
- **Section 5.4:** Explaining the societal impact pathway
- **Section 5.5:** Using a narrative case study to demonstrate societal impact
- **Section 5.6:** Case studies of societal impact from business research

## 5.1 Principles for the Societal Impact Framework

Based on our theoretical understanding of societal impact five principles governed the design of the societal impact framework:

**Societal Impact Framework principles**

1. The framework draws on data associated with accreditation to account for the range of people and activities contributing to societal impact
2. Narrative case studies can be used act as a standalone framework
3. Both scholarly and engagement activities are recognised along a continuum, and are not treated as separate activities
4. Accreditation timelines and reporting can be used as a temporal anchor for when societal impact is evaluated by business schools
5. An integrated attribution and contribution-based approach allows for productive interactions and meeting external attribution requirements

These principles were developed by reinforcing the theoretical tenets of societal impact (Chapter 2) with current evaluation practices (Chapter 3) and insights from business school consultations (Chapter 4) (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of insights informing principles of the societal impact framework

| Tenets of societal impact Chapter 2 | Evaluation practices Chapter 3 | Business school consultations Chapter 4 |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Capture culmination of people and activities | | Utilise the type of data collected for accreditation |
| 2. Case-by-case evaluation | Use narrative case studies for communicating societal impact | Keep framework standalone from preexisting evaluation practices |
| 3. Distinguish between academic and non-academic achievement | | Recognise academic and non-academic activities performed by diverse academics |
| 4. High temporality | | Use accreditation timelines as a temporal anchor for societal impact evaluation |
| 5. Productive interactions | Utilise a merged attribution and contribution-based approach | |

## 5.2 Presenting the ABDC Societal Impact Framework for Business Research

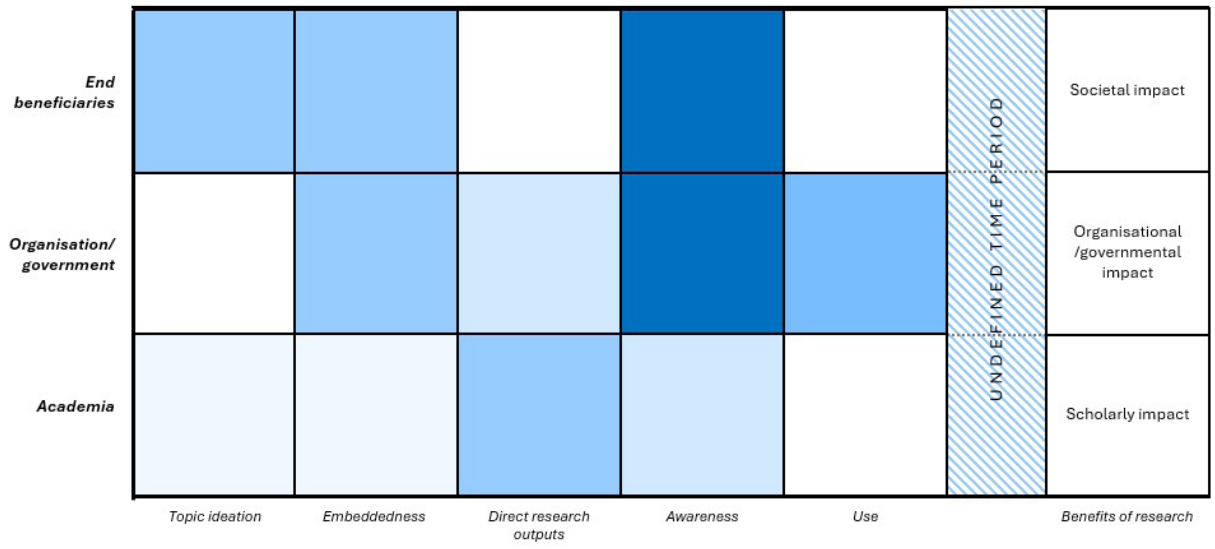
The proposed ABDC Societal Impact Framework for Business Research (ABDC SIF) adopts a scholarly, organisational/ governmental, and societal impact approach, and is a heatmap-based framework that is a visual collective indicator for societal impact (Figure 3). Here the number of activities a body of research has performed is mapped according to stakeholder groups and stages of the societal impact pathway. Thus, the heatmap reflects the engagement activities conducted from a body of research.

A frequency heatmap allow for the capture of diverse scholarly and engagement activities performed by academics along a continuum. Instead of being a discrete metric or score, the heatmap serves as a collective visual indicator for societal impact by embodying the logic that the more the research engages with end beneficiaries of the research topic, the greater the chance for societal impact to occur.

> The heatmap is a strategic tool for business schools that enables them to reflect all research activities that contributed to generating societal impact.

The engagement heatmap is achieved by organising the number of activities (considered as evidence of these interactions, illustrated in blue) against two axes: stakeholder type and stage in the societal impact pathway. The 'evidence' that populates the heatmap is activity-based data that is typically collected for the accreditation process. Rather than relying on a linear, logic-based approach, the visual reorganisation of engagement activities reveals strategic insights from existing data. It merges attribution and contribution-based approaches to societal impact as business schools may attribute clusters of interactions (productive interactions) to societal impact.

Figure 3: The ABDC Societal Impact Framework for Business Research




The engagement heatmap can be regarded as an indicator-approach for reflecting on societal impact evaluation. Indicator-based approaches are viewed as tools for identifying and organising relevant evaluation methods, rather than as a standalone method[13]. Therefore, the adoption is a multi-stage process.

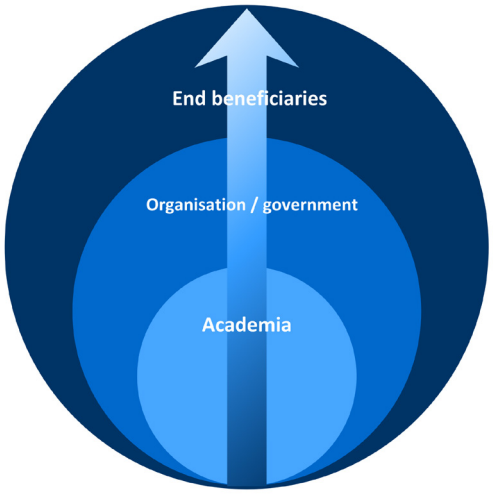
The engagement heatmap is the central component of the framework, but its application involves two additional stages. Once the heatmap has been generated, business schools can use the visualisation to identify the productive interactions which led to their societal impact. This can then be communicated in a narrative case study to demonstrate societal impact of business research.

In the following sub-sections, we explain the framework in more detail.

## 5.3 The engagement heatmap

### 5.3.1 Stakeholders of societal impact

The heatmap contains three categories of stakeholders of societal impact: academia, organisation/government, and end beneficiaries, positioned on the vertical axis of the heatmap. These categories represent the stakeholder groups within the ecosystem that can engage with research activities, reflecting the micro, meso, and macro levels of a research topic. This ecosystem approach reflects the nature of societal impact where the generation of knowledge (academia) is disseminated to the outside world (organisation/government and end beneficiaries).




It should be noted that stakeholders belonging to the end-beneficiary category is open to interpretation. End beneficiaries of some business research are very likely to also be organisations or conduits to end beneficiaries. Therefore, delineation between end beneficiaries and organisation stakeholders should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The bottom-row placement of the academic stakeholder group reflects the foundational role of discovery research in generating societal impact, and the opportunity for applied researchers to build upon the legacy of past scholarship. These ecosystem levels reflect the transfer or translation of knowledge from within academia to stakeholders outside of academia. Note: the arrows used to reflect the transfer of knowledge between ecosystem levels (above) are illustrative and not included in the final framework to avoid implying a hierarchy of stakeholders.

**Stakeholder categories**

**Academia** refers to stakeholders within the academic world. This includes researchers, research teams, research centres, universities, and scholarly interest groups.

**Organisations/government** refers to individual organisations or peak bodies, and government entities.

**End beneficiaries** refer to individuals or groups who are the ultimate users of the research.

### 5.3.2 The societal impact pathway

The horizontal axis of the societal impact framework reflects the pathway to societal impact, comprising of six interconnected stages: (1) topic creation, (2) embeddedness, (3) direct research outputs, (4) awareness, (5) use, and (6) benefits of research (impact).

Societal impact pathway


Stages 1 and 2, topic creation and embeddedness, were identified separately during a BARDsNet workshop. Stages 3 to 6 (direct research outputs, awareness, use, and benefits of research) were adapted from Ozanne's relational engagement approach to societal impact[5] (mentioned in Chapter 2). It should be noted that while the stages in societal

impact pathway are ordered, its sequence is not normative. In fact, direct research outputs may be generated after stakeholder use, or activities may advance to other stakeholder groups, rather than progressing down the impact pathway.

> The framework should be used descriptively, which may mean that the pathway to societal impact does not necessarily follow a linear trajectory.

The reality is that researchers perform a variety of activities over time that generate societal impact. By combining the axes, the frequency heatmap organises such activities according to each stakeholder group, and stage, in the societal impact pathway. Some activities naturally belong in certain stages. However, the **activities serve as evidence that an interaction or relationship between the research and a stakeholder group has taken place**. This mapping visually reflects productive interactions.

In this section, we describe each stage of the societal impact pathway, and provide examples of types of activities (evidence) for each stage, summarised in Table 3:

Table 3: Summary of stages in the societal impact pathway

| Stage of societal impact pathway | Definition | Example activities |
|---|---|---|
| Topic creation | How the research topic was determined and if it was endorsed and/or verified by a stakeholder group, signalling relevance of the research | Research grants, contracts for research, industry HDR scholarship |
| Embeddedness | The degree to which the research collaborated with other stakeholders during the research process, reflecting how deeply the research was intertwined with the research context | Data collection with end beneficiaries, consulting services, awards for community engagement, partnerships with organisations |
| Direct research outputs* | Knowledge artefacts produced from the research which are both endorsed and consumable for stakeholder group/s | White papers, academic articles, government reports |
| Awareness* | The dissemination of research outputs to stakeholder groups, irrespective if it has been consumed | Media interviews, conference presentations, news articles, Altmetric scores |
| Use* | Research has been adopted or implemented by users external to the research team | Academic citations, citations in policy documents, service on external advisory boards, Overton |
| Benefits of research (Impact)* | The research has been used outside of academia and has generated change depending on each stakeholder group: scholarly impact (academia), organisational or governmental impact (organisation or government), and societal impact (end beneficiaries) | NA |

*adapted[5]

**Topic creation**

Topic creation focuses on relevance, and how the research topic was determined. While societal impact can be unintended, we argue that societal impact from business research can also be intended from the outset. This may be reflected in the choice of addressing a grand societal challenge, or even responding to an organisational need. In essence, the research has been verified by a stakeholder group which demonstrates that the topic was worth pursuing and there is a need for the research.

At a general level, evidence of this verification typically includes the award of research funds, which can range from a grant to even funding for an HDR student. Contracts for research projects also provide evidence of the verification of the research topic by stakeholder groups. Evidence is not always monetary; however, funding often demonstrates strong support for the research topic by allocating resources to the cause.

**Examples for activities for topic creation:**

- Research grants
- Contracts for research for organisations
- Industry HDR scholarships

**Embeddedness**

Embeddedness refers to the stage in the societal impact pathway where researchers were **involved in the research context with different stakeholder groups.** We propose that selecting a relevant research topic is important, but its value is fully realised when the research meaningfully engages with the research context.

A diverse range of activities reflect embeddedness. For instance, researchers may collect data straight from end beneficiaries via focus groups, engage in action research, or be physically embedded in an organisation for a project. Recognition through a community engagement award can also serve as evidence of embeddedness. While activities can be broad, they all acknowledge that the research engaged with the research context.

**Examples for activities for embeddedness:**

- Data collection with end beneficiaries
- Industry secondments at an organisation
- Awards for community engagement

**Direct research outputs**

Direct research outputs are **knowledge artefacts that result from the research process**, accessible by different stakeholder groups. These direct research outputs are 'endorsed' by the stakeholder group for its consumption; thus, the artefact has gone through some form of the peer review process. It is the part of the research process most researchers are familiar with as it is the tangible form of output of their research.

The form in which direct research outputs may take is diverse, ranging from research articles (therefore endorsed within academia), government reports (endorsed by government) to White Papers (endorsed by organisations).

**Examples for activities for direct research outputs:**

- Research articles
- Government reports
- White papers

**Awareness**

The awareness stage of the societal impact pathway refers to how research outputs are disseminated to different stakeholder groups. Here the researcher has usually taken an active role in promoting their research. As a result, it is easily recordable because of this intentional dissemination.

Forms of dissemination are diverse depending on the stakeholder group. However, awareness activities can include media interviews, conference presentations and news articles. Altmetric scores can also be used to indicate overall awareness of an academic's research.

**Examples for activities for awareness:**

- Media interviews
- Conference presentations
- News articles
- Altmetric scores

**Use**

By the term use, we refer to the crucial stage in the societal impact pathway where **research has been adopted or implemented by stakeholders**. Any form of impact, be it scholarly, organisational/governmental, or societal, is not possible if the research has not been applied. Research can be used in three ways; conceptually, instrumentally, or politically[5]. This stage of the societal impact pathway is crucial, yet it is the most difficult to capture as the primary users (often external stakeholders) operate outside of scholarly data collection metrics (e.g. number of citations).

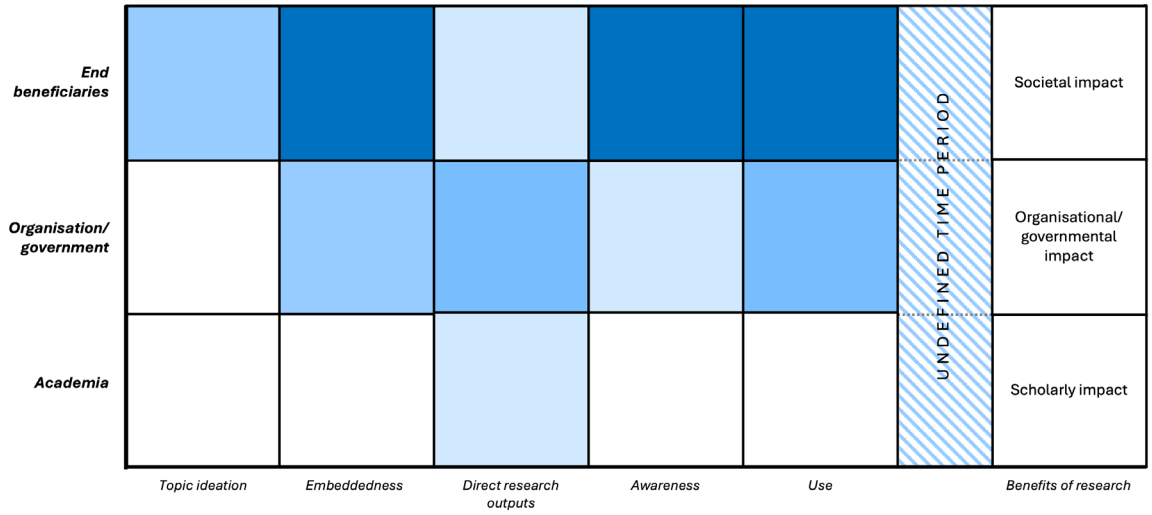
Evidence of research use does include citations but also extends to citations in policy documents or government reports. This can also include applying an academic's expertise by serving on an external advisory board. Overton scores can be used to demonstrate how a researcher or research group's work is being utilised by external stakeholders.

**Examples for activities for use:**

- Academic citations
- Citations in policy documents
- Service on an external advisory board
- Overton scores

The resulting heatmap will reveal concentrations of activity, illustrating where the research has focused its efforts (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Example of an applied engagement heatmap




**Benefits of research (Impact)**

The final stage of the societal impact pathway is about generating impact itself. At this stage, the research has been used outside of academia and has created change. For academic stakeholders, this impact is termed 'scholarly impact', for organisational and government stakeholders, this impact is termed 'organisational and governmental impact' respectively, and for end beneficiaries, this impact is termed 'societal impact'. This is summarised in Table 1 (explained in detail in Chapter 2). How to demonstrate societal impact is explained in section 5.5.

Table 1: Types of impact from business research (duplicated from Chapter 2)

| Impact type | Definition |
|---|---|
| **Scholarly impact** | The contribution business school research makes to theory and methodology which remains in the academic community[2] |
| **Organisational impact** | The transfer and application of scholarly knowledge on managerial practices and organisational decision making[2] |
| **Governmental impact** | The application of scholarly knowledge for policy, government practices, and/or government processes (adapted[11]) |
| **Societal impact** | The dissemination and application of knowledge from academic research within universities to stakeholders outside of academia that creates social, cultural, environmental, and/or economical change or addresses grand societal challenges through its research topic (by authors) |

## 5.4 Identifying productive interactions

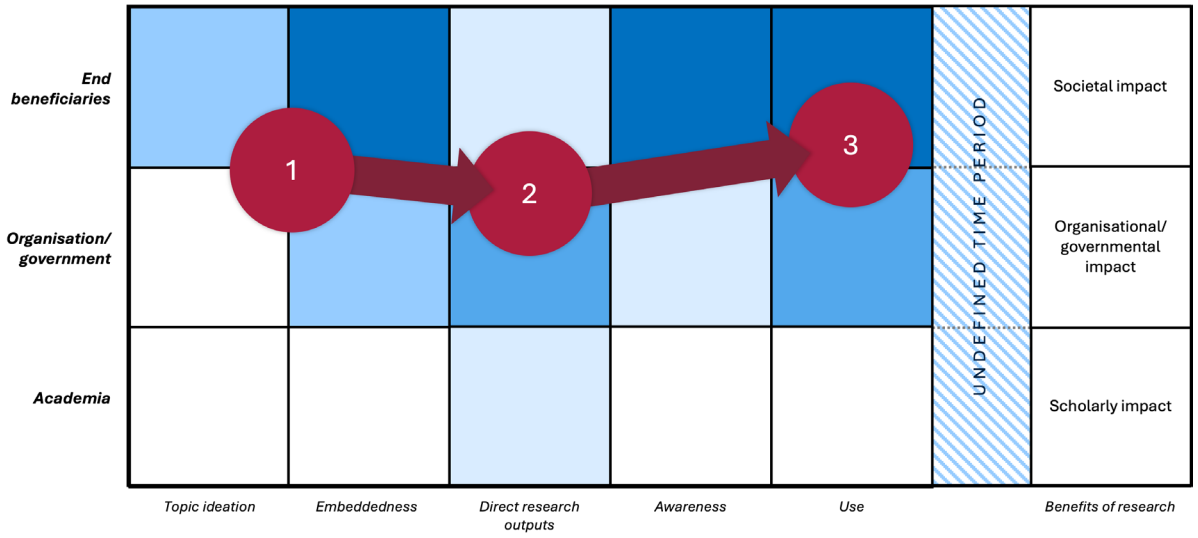
By mapping activities by stakeholder group and stage of the societal impact pathway, the heatmap enables researchers to identify clusters of activities that contributed to societal impact. These clusters are viewed as their productive interactions.

> Productive interactions are viewed as clusters of co-creation activities in which the relationship between researchers and stakeholders is mutually valued.

The process of identifying productive interactions is highly intuitive and relies on the researchers who conducted the activities or were deeply involved in the research process. In the context of societal impact, these interactions primarily centre on the researchers' relationships with the end beneficiaries of their work.

Productive interactions are not always based on the concentration of the activities of the heatmap, as it reflects the quantity of evidence, sometimes not richness of the interactions. The types of productive interactions that take place can be diverse and are often interconnected to reflect their journey to societal impact. Based on our conversations with researchers, some case studies shared similar productive interactions and societal impact pathways, which we use as an example for how to identify productive interactions below (Figure 5).

Figure 5: An example of applied productive interactions on the engagement heatmap



**Productive interaction 1: Consulting with end beneficiaries**

A common productive interaction centres upon the request of research and data collection with and by end beneficiaries. An organisation who is an end beneficiary or conduit to end beneficiaries of the societal challenge may request the expertise researchers. This request for research may be to understand a problem they are facing or be able to demonstrate and communicate the impact of their work.

**Activities within this productive interaction can include:**

- Receiving a contract for research (topic ideation with end beneficiaries)
- Focus groups with end beneficiaries (embeddedness with end beneficiaries)
- Award for community engagement (embeddedness with end beneficiaries)
- Partnership with peak bodies

**Productive interaction 2: Developing tangible insights**

Using the collected data, researchers develop a white paper or report for end beneficiaries or peak bodies, providing a clear and accessible summary of the research findings.

**Activities within this productive interaction can include:**

- Number of organisational reports (direct research outputs for end beneficiaries)
- Organisational framework (direct research outputs for end beneficiaries)
- Co-authored white papers with industry

**Productive interaction 3: Usable insights**

From the first and second productive interactions, the end beneficiary is able to use the insights developed by the researchers to inform future decision-making and generate societal impact.

**Activities within this productive interaction can include:**

- Number of organisational reports (direct research outputs for end beneficiaries)
- Organisational framework (direct research outputs for end beneficiaries)
- Co-authored white papers with industry

Based on this example, the researchers generate an indirect form of societal impact by providing research that was used instrumentally to expedite and increase societal impact by the organisation. These productive interactions are reflected in some of the case studies (Section 5.6 and the Appendix), in particular from Monash Business School and the University of Newcastle.

## 5.5 Narrative case study

To demonstrate societal impact, the productive interactions are then described via a narrative case study. The format of this narrative case study may differ across business schools; however, we recommend including two essential elements to apply the framework: an overview of societal impact, and communication of the journey to societal impact. This approach assists in aligning to and communicating societal impact in line with our definition of societal impact, which involves: the dissemination and application of knowledge from academic research within universities to stakeholders outside of academia that creates social, cultural, environmental, and/or economical change or addresses grand societal challenges through its research topic.

This is demonstrated via the case studies included in this White Paper (Section 5.6 and Appendix), however a checklist for each element is provided below:

**Checklist: Overview of societal impact**

- Outline the context of the societal challenge and articulate the problem to be solved
- Highlight key stakeholders (such as an organisation) that the research centred upon
- Feature the main outcomes of the research
- Describe the research's conceptual, instrumental, and/or policy use
- Describe how the research informed change in the societal context
- Describe/measure the extent of the change

**Checklist: Communication of journey to societal impact**

- Describe stakeholders
- Highlight key productive interactions in societal impact journey
- Provide detailed description for each productive interactions in chronological order
- Describe the evidence that supports each productive interaction
- Highlight the projected societal impact of future initiatives

## 5.6 Case studies of societal impact from business research

This section overviews the nine case studies from ABDC member business schools (UNSW ethics approval: 9349). Data were collected through interviews and a survey to trial the useability of the framework and its refinement. The case studies are from UNSW, RMIT, QUT, Monash University, Australian Catholic University, University of Newcastle, University of Canberra, University of Canterbury, and the University of Melbourne (Table 6).

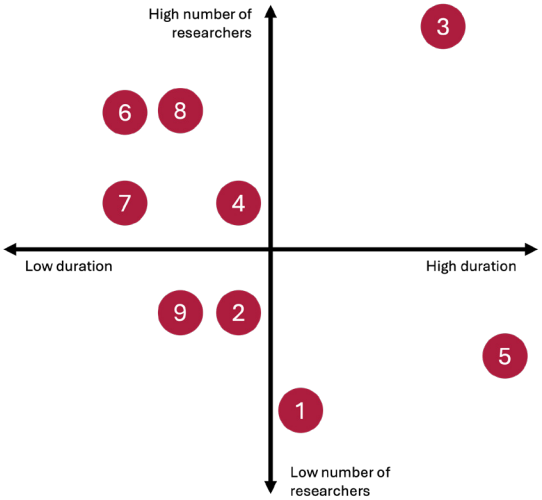
Table 6: Overview of societal impact case studies

| | Case study | Start year | End year | # researchers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **UNSW**<br>UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic | 2019 | ongoing | 1 |
| 2 | **RMIT**<br>Enhancing the coordination of housing, health and social care in Australia | 2020 | ongoing | 3 |
| 3 | **QUT**<br>Translating operational risk into warnings that support public understanding and safety during disasters | 2014 | ongoing | 10 |
| 4 | **Monash University**<br>The One Box Collaboration — Tackling Food Insecurity in the Australian Community | 2020 | ongoing | 4 |
| 5 | **Australian Catholic University**<br>Engaging employers in the workplace inclusion of underrepresented groups | 2011 | ongoing | 2 |
| 6 | **University of Newcastle**<br>The Australian Workplace Index for organisational productivity | 2022 | ongoing | 5 |
| 7 | **University of Canberra**<br>Skills Shortages in the ACT | 2022 | ongoing | 4 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **8** | **University of Melbourne**<br>Is Australia's Modern Slavery Act Really Working? | 2021 | ongoing | 5 |
| **9** | **University of Canterbury**<br>Repair Cafes in Aotearoa, New Zealand | 2021 | 2025 | 3 |

These case studies can be distinguished by the number of researchers involved (ranging from 1 to 10 researchers) and the duration of the research (ranging from 3 years to 15 years) (Figure 6). The nine cases were selected as they had established evidence of contributing to societal impact, allowing the framework to be applied in a confirmatory manner with respect to its effectiveness in capturing societal impact from research.

Figure 6: Categorisation of societal impact case studies




The case studies demonstrate the three stages of implementing the framework: (1) creating an engagement heatmap based on research and engagement activities, (2) identifying productive interactions, and (3) capturing these insights via a narrative case study. These case studies provide an illustrative exemplar of how business schools and researchers can capture and communicate their societal impact (see Appendix).

## 6 Conclusion

This ABDC project developed a rigorous societal impact framework tailored specifically to the needs and contexts of Australian and New Zealand business schools. The ABDC SIF moves beyond traditional markers of research translation and impact and focuses on conceptualising how business school research generates societal impact. The resulting framework combines a strong theoretical foundation, and is designed to capture, amplify, and promote the societal contributions of business schools in a clear and meaningful way. By offering both practical utility and conceptual innovation, the ABDC SIF strengthens the legitimacy and strategic positioning of business schools and provides a valuable tool for articulating and amplifying their societal impact.

# Appendix

## Case study 1: UNSW

### The UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic

Roughly 90,000 Australians experience serious and severe financial hardship and distress with tax-related issues each year. These people are especially vulnerable, having an over-representation of mental illness, survivorship of domestic abuse, and pre-existing reliance on financial government support. Given their intersecting disadvantage and complex needs it is almost impossible for these Australians to navigate the tax system without professional advice – a service which they cannot afford. This impasse results in debt cycles, 'tax policy-induced poverty' and bankruptcy – which, in turn, has profound ripple effects on accommodation, employment, finance, and child custody.

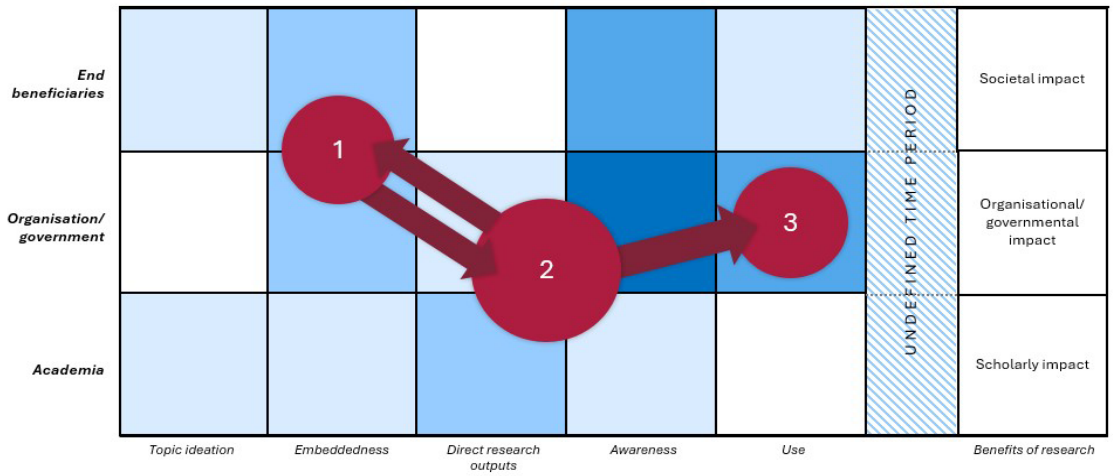
The UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic (hereafter referred to as 'the clinic') identifies people with tax-related issues who also lack access to tax and business advice. Described as "a godsend" by Financial Counselling Australia, the clinic provides free tax advice to people in serious financial hardship, often at critical risk of bankruptcy or homelessness. From this personalised tax advice, people can receive professional support across all stages of the tax dispute resolution lifecycle; including lodging individual and business returns, audit, objections, litigation, debt discussion and hardship, and general advice. Now they have someone 'in their corner' to better navigate the tax system and overcome their tax-related issues.

The clinic has delivered transformative support for over 500 people experiencing severe financial distress, and continues to positively influence immediate circumstances and generating projected long-term outcomes. The clinic has generated and continues to generate social and economic societal impact by tackling injustices on the frontline and then using these first-hand insights to inform research and shape government policy for systemic societal change.

### Journey to Societal Impact

The clinic has been in operation since 2019, led by Founding Director and researcher Prof. Ann Kayis-Kumar. Key to generating societal impact is that they have successfully identified, engaged, and delivered value with the most impactful stakeholders in the context of financial taxation distress. End beneficiaries are people directly experiencing financial distress, and organisational/governmental stakeholders include taxation bodies, professional organisations, and government agencies involved in tax-related policy development. The clinic generates societal impact by engaging with people and activities via three productive interactions: (1) working on the frontline of financial distress, (2) bridging the science-to-society divide, and (3) pioneering informed policy change.

Appendix Figure 1: UNSW — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap




#### (1) Working on the frontline of financial distress

Key to their societal impact is the clinic's engagement directly with end beneficiaries. To meet their clients' needs, the tax clinic engages with peak taxation bodies such as The Tax Institute, Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, CPA Australia and the Institute of Public Accountants among others. The clinic collaborates with Johnson Winter Slattery for their pro bono tax and legal advice services for clients. The clinic houses enrolled UNSW students and student volunteers who work alongside these pro bono accountants to provide critical tax services to those in need. Beyond working on cases of tax-related distress, the clinic conducts community-based education and outreach activities

aimed at supporting the community better understand and navigate tax obligations. The clinic's embeddedness within the taxation community and frontline has been recognised by the Australian Financial Review's Higher Education Awards for Community Engagement as a finalist in 2022 and 2023.

### (2) Bridging the science-to-society divide

The tax clinic's impact is magnified by its cyclical engagement between client casework and research (productive interactions 1 and 2). Prof. Kayis-Kumar, Director of the UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic, published groundbreaking research in the Australian Tax Forum (Australia's most prestigious ABDC A*-ranking tax journal) titled, 'Squeezing blood from stones? A comparative analysis of tax relief for victim-survivors in Australia and the United States.' Here she coined the term 'sexually transmitted tax debts,' offering evidence-based recommendations to modernise Australia's tax laws and regulations to recognise and respond to financial abuse. This paper was picked up by multiple forms of media, inclusive of television features and radio interviews with the ABC and has been broadly disseminated beyond academic audiences. She continually amplifies key insights of her research, bridging science and society, to make her insights accessible to those who may be experiencing financial abuse and/or distress, and with the professional taxation ecosystem.

### (3) Pioneering informed policy change

What began as grassroots insights from casework in 2019 has evolved into rigorous, policy-shaping research that has (and continues) to enact legislative, policy and administrative change. This research-driven advocacy has the potential to be trajectory-changing for millions of Australians experiencing severe financial hardship. Prof. Kayis-Kumar's research has been directly adopted as several government recommendations and policy, including the Commonwealth Government-established Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to End Gender-Based Violence, the Final Report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, the Federal Government's 'Building Australia's future: Labor's commitment to women' election promise in the 2025 Australian Federal Election, among others. She continues to lead ongoing meetings and conversations with government and policymakers including the Treasury, Australian Taxation Office, the Tax Ombudsman, and various Ministers Offices. She serves on several government and industry committees to ensure that case-derived research continues to create policy change, driving societal impact.

## On the Horizon

The UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic continues to generate societal impact by solving injustices on the frontline of financial distress and taking what cannot be immediately solved to inform policy change with research. As the clinic grows, so may its influence, and is anticipated that subsequent policy reforms may serve as a best-practice model for other jurisdictions, amplifying the clinic's societal impact at a global scale.

## Case Study 2: RMIT

### Enhancing the coordination of housing, health and social care in Australia

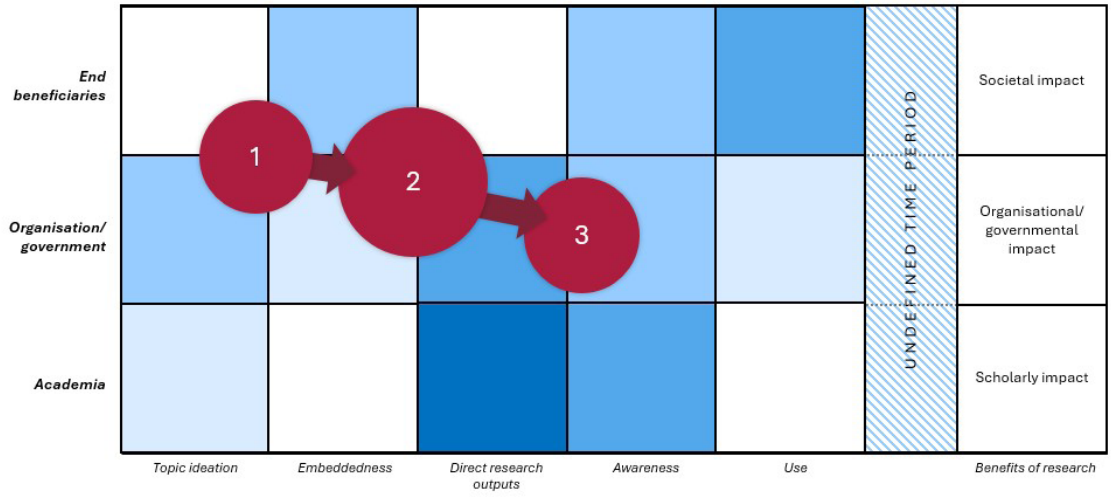
Securing affordable housing can be tough for many individuals experiencing vulnerability, however the transition to independent living can also prove difficult. Secure and stable housing provides the foundation for health and wellbeing, and social and economic inclusion, ensuring people feel connected and included within their communities. Knowing this, the role of modern community housing organisations no longer concerns simply delivering access to housing. Instead, they now act as coordinators across government siloes (e.g. family violence, substance misuse, refugee healthcare, and mental health systems) to ensure the best chance of social inclusion for tenants. However, these organisations are still held to success metrics based on their historic role of purely housing provision. Thus, housing organisations struggle to demonstrate their true impact.

A team of RMIT researchers addressed -and continue to address- the complex context of community housing across two key areas. First, the researchers collaborated with housing organisations to measure their true impact, focusing on social cohesion and the service innovations that these organisations deliver but often lack the capacity to document. Second, the researchers conducted research to break down the organisational barriers between services and other stakeholders that inhibit sharing of policy innovation across the community housing sector. RMIT researchers have delivered both indirect and emerging systemic societal impact by enabling organisations to demonstrate their true, not assumed, societal impact for government support, while continuing to tackle the siloed nature of government services for better long-term tenant outcomes.

### Journey to Societal Impact

This program of research began in 2020 by RMIT researchers Prof. Cameron Duff, Prof. Guy Johnson, and Dr. Nicholas Hill, and also included Dr. Sean Randall (Curtin University), Dr. Chris Martin (UNSW), Prof. Kylie Valentine (UNSW), and Prof. Wendy Stone (Swinburne University). End beneficiaries of this research program are tenants of community housing, and community housing agencies. These agencies include Launch Housing, and Legal Aid NSW. Organisations include peak bodies such as Homes Victoria, Queensland Shelter, and Community Housing Industry Association, as well as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The researchers generated indirect and systemic societal impact via three productive interactions: by (1) discovering the hidden role of community housing agencies, (2) investigating the challenges facing community housing agencies, and (3) doing what community housing agencies cannot.

Appendix Figure 2: RMIT — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap




#### (1) Discovering the hidden role of community housing agencies

Roughly 20 to 25 years ago, the funding of public housing moved from state provision to a mixed public/private model where community housing agencies were to work with commercial developers to create affordable housing. Fast forward to recent years, and the metrics linked to this goal suggested underperformance of housing agencies. RMIT researchers received funding from AHURI to investigate how housing providers were addressing housing insecurity, given that reported data suggested insufficient housing provision. By collaborating with other institutions (Curtin University, UNSW, and Swinburne University of Technology) they discovered that the role of community housing

agencies had transformed from the provision of housing to the provision of social care for tenants. Housing agencies now managed the activities that foster social inclusion, knowing that this contributed to long-term housing success. Thus, smaller community housing agencies found themselves managing increasingly complex challenges beyond their original mandate.

### (2) Investigating the challenges facing community housing agencies

From this, the researchers published a report with AHURI articulating the expanded role of community housing agencies. The researchers received additional funding to expand upon their previous findings. As a result, their research comprised a series of linked studies that drew on multiple methods with end beneficiaries and peak bodies. The research included rapid reviews of existing scholarly and practitioner literature, along with new analyses of administrative datasets spanning housing, health, and social care services. Field research was conducted through interviews and focus groups with tenants, as well as staff and managers working across these sectors. This was made tangible by another report for AHURI in 2024. Their work has been reflected in several academic papers and presentations.

### (3) Doing what community housing agencies cannot

Rather than assuming housing agencies should return to their traditional focus on housing provision, the researchers recognised their crucial and evolving role within the sector. Accordingly, they sought to strengthen the infrastructure supporting housing agencies' expanded focus on social inclusion in two key ways. First, the researchers aimed to develop success metrics for housing agencies to assess housing outcomes related to social inclusion. They provided a policy evidence summary for encouraging transition from 'output-based' to 'outcomes-based' funding arrangements for the sector, reflecting their actual role in the problem (2024). Second, they engaged in policy advocacy to address systemic service delivery challenges by fostering collaboration and innovation across government agencies that tenants access. This was also provided in policy evidence summaries that recommended improving discharge and transition planning in a range of institution settings across NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, and Western Australia (2022), and including social housing tenants in policy conversations (2024).

## On the Horizon

The researchers continue their work in policy advocacy with government groups to pursue the idea of developing a national clearing house to foster policy and practice innovation. Community housing organisations perform agile service innovation, but don't have the means to document it, let alone disseminate it to other state-based groups. The researchers aim to encourage this diffusion of innovation at a national level to improve housing outcomes for tenants long-term and at a greater scalability.

## Case study 3: QUT

### Translating operational risk into warnings that support public understanding and safety during disasters

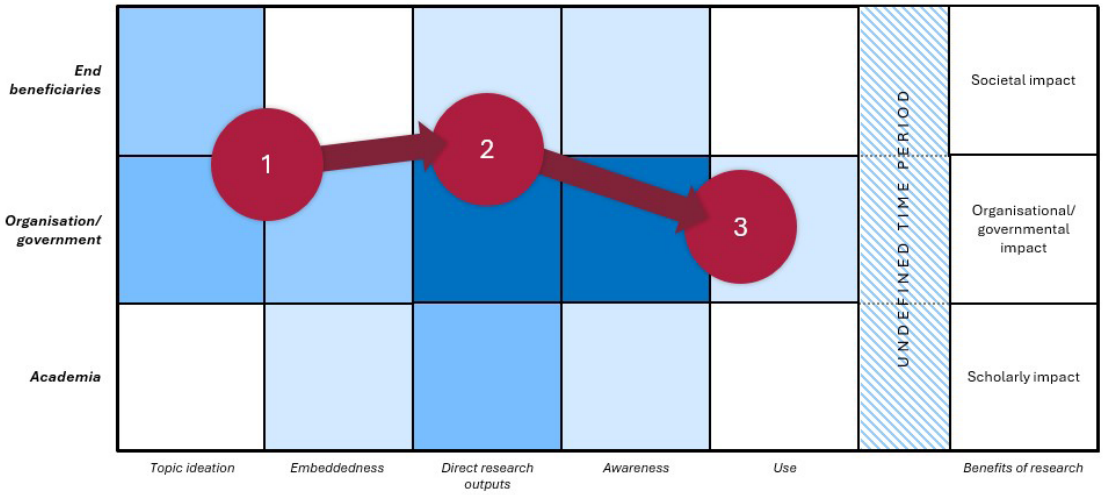
Timely and effective communication from emergency services to communities during natural hazard events (such as bushfires and floods) is essential to saving and protecting lives and minimising damage. Yet, Australian natural hazard warnings have been structured by operational risk classifications that are not easy for community members to understand and translate into action. Though change was encouraged by various post-disaster inquiries and Royal Commissions, evidence was needed to support long-standing national practice.

Through multiple projects with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC), researchers from the QUT Business School worked with approximately 15 State and Federal Government partners from 2014 to 2021 to transform existing practice into community-oriented bushfire and flood warnings. Here, QUT researchers addressed the challenges faced by emergency services agencies in delivering clear messaging for communities to take protective action during natural hazards. This led to the development of tools for public information teams to deliver behaviour-focused messaging during natural hazards events, which has had international exposure. Thus, this research generated environmental and economic societal impact by equipping agencies with evidence-based tools that lessen the human and economic toll of natural hazards with effective communications.

### Journey to Societal Impact

The research began in 2014, and has been led by QUT Business School researchers, Prof. Amisha Mehta, Prof. Dominique Greer, and Assoc. Prof. Paula Dootson in collaboration with numerous academics from health, law, psychology, engineering, anthropology, sociology, cartography, human geography, and visual design. End beneficiaries of this research include public information officers who are tasked with designing and managing communication during natural hazard events, and community members who receive and benefit from this improved messaging. The research engaged with an extensive network of organisational and government stakeholders from its inception, including 15 State and Federal Government partners in the natural hazard ecosystem. This research generated societal impact via three productive interactions: (1) embedding societal impact from the outset, (2) creating immediately applicable research insights, and (3) driving wide-spread impact through engaged researchers

Appendix Figure 3: QUT — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) Embedding societal impact from the outset

This body of research began with a foundational program of research from 2014 to 2017 ($676,813) with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC) and was proceeded by a second BNH CRC funded program of research from 2017 to 2021 ($801,697). Both involved many organisations and end beneficiaries in the natural hazards ecosystem. Through co-design between researchers, industry partners, and approximately 20,000 end users, societal impact was ensured from the outset by the research being heavily embedded in the research context. Crucially, the research project design provided the connection to lead end users who were responsible for implementing the research. Over time, the research has led to 14 commercial research and consulting projects ($831,534; 2016-present), grants via Natural Hazards Research Australia (new federal disaster funding body; $2,207,084.60; 2022-present), and local and international research collaborations (e.g., University of Maryland, US National Institute for Science and

Technology).

### (2) Creating immediately applicable research insights

The researchers produced over 100 commissioned reports, 8 book chapters (including some co-authored with industry), 20 journal articles, 30 industry and academic conference abstracts, posters, papers, and presentations, 50 workshops and seminars, practitioner artefacts (e.g., Hazard Notes), and international collaborations. These research outputs were shaped by the project's deep integration within the natural hazards ecosystem, enabling their immediate adoption into public information and warning practices. This, in turn, led to invitations to input into the Australian Warning System and national doctrine that now underpins multi-hazard and multi-platform warnings across all States and Territories. The outputs included tools and checklists for public information and warnings teams to deliver behaviour-focused messaging during natural hazard events, ultimately saving lives.

### (3) Driving wide-spread impact through engaged researchers

Central to the societal impact of this research was the active engagement of each researcher to drive the application of their findings. Prof. Mehta offered strategic counsel to the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (Queensland), led practitioner workshops in Australia and abroad, and informed state and national policy. Assoc. Prof. Dootson advised the AFAC Public Information and Warnings Group, led new interdisciplinary and multi-institution projects in fire mapping, community response, and multi-hazard platforms, published tools and research artefacts on the UN's Prevention Web, World Economic Forum, and is a member of the WHO Thematic Platform for Health-Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Research Network, contributing knowledge and scientific evidence of risk management. Prof. Greer advised the AFAC Public Information and Warnings Group and the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (Queensland) and contributed to projects on multi-hazard platforms and hazard readiness, and informed state and national policy.

The reach of this project extends beyond Australia with research impact noted through the UN's Prevention Web, World Economic Forum, and current research projects addressing goals set by the Early Warnings for All (initiative by United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Meteorological Organization, International Telecommunications Union, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).

## On the Horizon

Recognising the need for ongoing improvement in risk communication research and practice, the team is currently leading projects to support public fire prediction products, design multi-hazard public information and warnings platforms, and design flood risk systems in planning and development contexts. Having generated wide-ranging societal impact across diverse natural hazards with national and international reach, the research team exemplifies the interdisciplinary value of business research by translating environmental knowledge into clear, usable insights for communities.

## Case study 4: Monash University

### The One Box Research Collaboration – Tackling Food Insecurity in the Australian Community

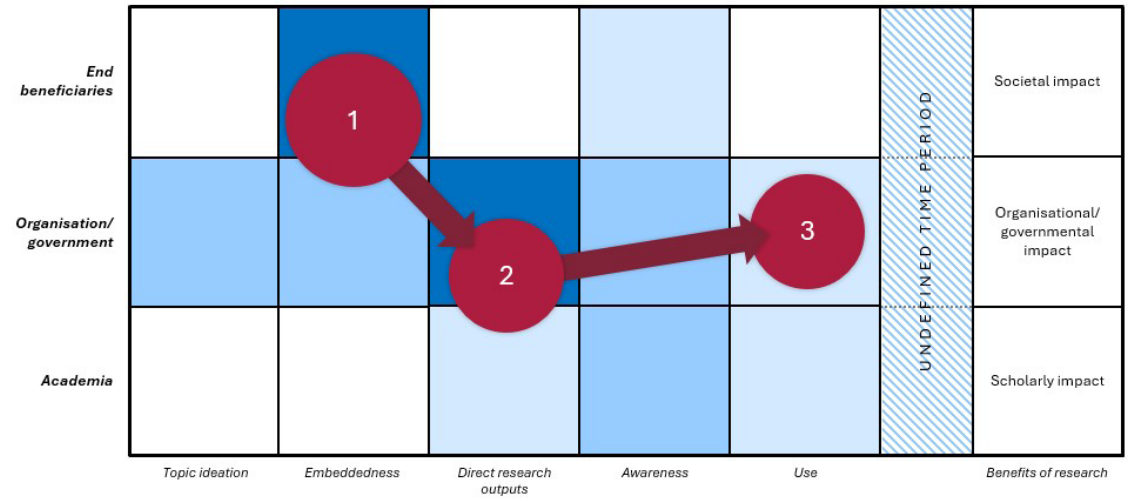
The One Box (TOB) is a registered charity that provides free boxes of fresh fruit, vegetables, and bread each week of the school year to families experiencing food insecurity. The charity leverages the infrastructure of its parent company, The Fruit Box (corporate supplier of fruit boxes), and is the major funder of TOB. With pickup points at schools, the key value proposition of the program is that unlike traditional food banks, families receive a consistent and reliable source of healthy food which is not processed nor rescued. Thus, the initiative nurtures the dignity of those who need it most.

TOB knew that while they generated social impact, they didn't have the means to demonstrate or communicate it to drive future philanthropic funding. TOB reached out to the Monash Business School to understand how they could measure their social impact and report on TOB's benefits to those experiencing food insecurity. By engaging with beneficiaries of TOB, the researchers developed the Social Impact Framework which captured TOB's social impact, signalling a return on social investment for philanthropic donors. From this research, TOB has been able to expand from delivering 40,000 boxes in 2020 to an anticipated 120,000 in 2025, helping 2,500 families each week. As an ongoing collaboration, the Monash Business School continues to generate indirect societal impact by enabling TOB to communicate their own impact and scale their outreach via increased philanthropic donations.

### Journey to Societal Impact

Monash Business School researchers have collaborated with TOB across several projects since 2020. These researchers include Prof. Ralph Kober, Prof. Paul Thambr, Dr. Zhiyun Gong, and Dr. Cynthia Wu. End beneficiaries of this research are recipients of the food box (families) and also the schools that distribute the boxes (consisting of school coordinators and senior school staff), and also TOB frontline staff. However, TOB itself is considered an organisational stakeholder. The researchers generated -and continue to generate- indirect societal impact via three productive interactions: (1) gathering first-hand insights from end beneficiaries, (2) developing the Social Impact Framework, and (3) providing the language to communicate social return on investment.

Appendix Figure 4: Monash University — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) Gathering first-hand insights from end beneficiaries

To fully understand the benefits of the food box program, the researchers decided the most effective approach was to speak to the recipients themselves. Having partnered directly with TOB, the researchers had ready access to interviewing end beneficiaries of TOB through the schools that act as distribution points for the food box initative. To date, the research team has received 6 grants from TOB totalling over $100,000 for their research. They have also conducted over 100 interviews with end beneficiaries of TOB, including families, TOB frontline staff, and senior school staff. Their interviews garnered rich behavioural data that continues to shed light on the benefits of the food box program. Such interviews revealed that recipients of TOB receive nutrition and wellbeing benefits, are able to build community and receive support, and receive financial savings. This research adds insights beyond quantitative results of simply food boxes received over time. In recognition of their collaborative approach with end beneficiaries, the researchers won the Social Impact Measurement Network Australia (SIMNA) Award in 2024.

### (2) Developing the Social Impact Framework

By using insights gathered from end beneficiaries of the food box program, the researchers developed The Social Impact Framework for TOB. This framework is specific to TOB and provides an operational and strategic tool to evaluate and communicate their impact. TOB's social impact occurs along three dimensions pertaining to well-being: nutrition and well-being, community building and support, and financial savings. The Social Impact Framework was the main contribution from the researchers to TOB, as it translates research insights into a format that is clear and actionable for the organisation.

However, beyond this framework, the researchers have also provided TOB with 12 reports based on their research findings, thereby increasing scientific understanding of the societal challenge of food insecurity. These reports have included comparative analysis of TOB against other food charities, highlighting beneficiary outcomes of the program, and understanding the lived experiences of food insecurity as well as food relief. This research has also been published in ABDC A* journals for accounting journals, signalling high quality of their research beyond an applied context.

### (3) Providing the language to communicate social return on investment

By providing the language for TOB to communicate their impact (via the Social Impact Framework), TOB were able to increase their funding and expand their program. TOB uses Monash's research and Social Impact Framework in their Impact Reports and Annual Reports, as well as for grant application and when pitching for funds. Using the language for demonstrating impact, they are able to demonstrate the social return of investment of investing in TOB, which then drives philanthropic funding. In testimonials, TOB executives have attributed their ability to clearly demonstrate impact to Monash's research, which has helped the organisation expand the size of its program threefold over five years — from 40,000 to 120,000 boxes.

## On the Horizon

Monash continues to work closely with TOB operationally and for research. They are included in operational meetings of the company, and the framework provides a consistent structure for measuring outcomes year after year for research. They will continue to study the benefits of TOB longitudinal for reporting purposes. Building upon behavioural insights, the researchers aim to work with education researchers to understand how TOB effects the academic performance of students who receive their food boxes.

## Case study 5: Australian Catholic University

### Engaging employers in the workplace inclusion of underrepresented groups

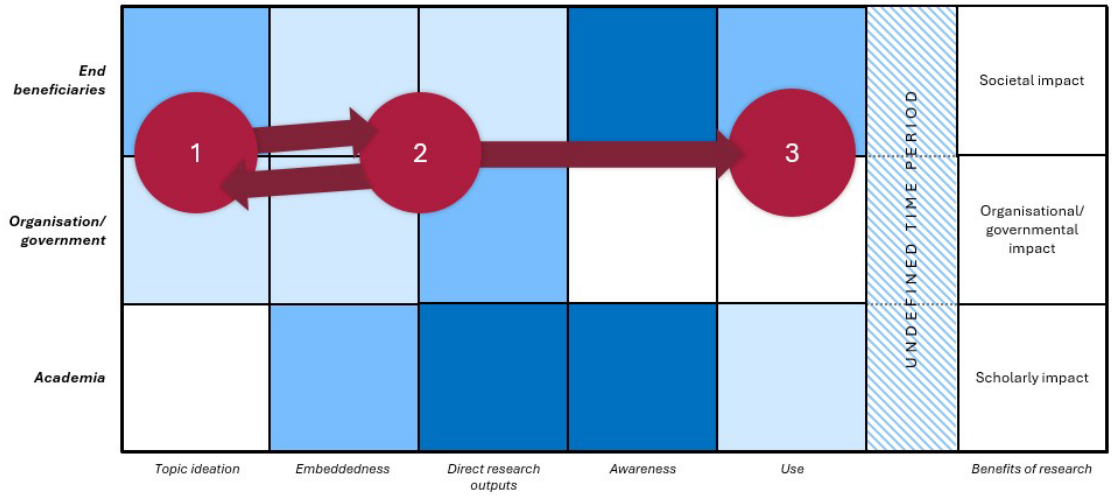
Individuals experiencing unemployment often encounter barriers to workforce participation, especially if they have no prior employment history, live with disabilities, are parents, or are First Nations people. These individuals are described as 'hidden talent cohorts' owing to the alternative strengths they offer organisations, despite limited employer awareness of these groups. As a result of employing hidden talent cohorts, businesses can meet EDI/CSR requirements but also leverage the benefits of having a diverse talent group. Benefits to the economy include increased productivity due to maximising human talent, and the reduction of economic and societal costs of unemployment such as poor health outcomes and poverty. However, according to the government statistics, only 15% of businesses in Australia recruit from employment services for hidden talent cohorts.

To encourage employment of hidden talent cohorts, government employment services focus on supporting candidate job readiness and employability. However, this perspective captures only part of the challenge of securing jobs for hidden talent cohorts. Prof. Jo Ingold from ACU found that these employment services only address the supply side (job readiness) of the societal challenge of underemployment, and not the demand side (referring to business needs). Spanning 15 years of research across countries, she has found that businesses face challenges navigating the complex government systems to employ hidden talent cohorts in the first place, contributing to the limited success of such services in Australia. By being embedded within the employability service industry, this research has led to significant adoption of best practices and has influenced policy makers for systematic change. Thus, this research has generated social and economic societal impact by guiding practices and policies for greater employability of diverse groups.

### Journey to Societal Impact

This research began in 2011 and is the result of cumulative work in the UK and Australia and across institutions. ACU researchers include Prof. Jo Ingold and Dr. Qian Yi Lee. External collaborators include Prof. Mark Stuart (University of Leeds) and Prof. Angela Knox (University of Sydney). End beneficiaries of this research are individuals within hidden talent cohorts, as well as businesses who benefit from employing such individuals. Organisations and government groups in Australia (including peak bodies) include the Institute of Employability Professionals, Asuria, National Employment Services Association, The Fair Co., Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Jobs Skills Industries and Regions, Social Ventures Australia, Disability Employment Australia, Department of Social Services, Centre for Inclusive Employment. Given the long-term nature of this research, its societal impact is a result of the research's cyclical response to emerging needs and challenges over the past 10+ years. This is evident via three productive interactions: (1) moving a periphery problem into focus, (2) developing responsive resources from research insights, and (3) challenging normative assumptions for policy makers.

Appendix Figure 5: Australian Catholic University — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) Moving a periphery problem into focus

Driven by persistent labour and skills shortages, along with social procurement obligations in specific industries (e.g. large construction projects), businesses are showing greater interest in recruiting from hidden talent cohorts. However, the complexity of existing employment service models makes it difficult for businesses to engage and hire hidden talent. Prof. Ingold's research found that employers struggle to navigate the complex system in place to hire hidden talent

cohorts, and the enduring supply side focus of the employment service delivery model has hindered improvements to the employer-facing system. This is reflected in the 2023 submissions to the Australian Government's Federal Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services, of which Prof. Ingold's submission was the only submission to provide demand-side evidence of the labour market crisis, which was applauded by the Committee. This research substantiated the issue of effective employee engagement with the hidden talent labour market, bringing into focus the issues facing employers navigating the ecosystem.

### (2) Developing responsive resources from research insights

By virtue of being deeply involved in the employment services ecosystem, Prof. Ingold's research agenda is responsive to the needs of the sector and is reflected in the wide variety of research outputs. This has included books and book chapters developed with practitioners in Australia and the UK, as well as other academics in the US, UK, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Research outputs have also included co-authored industry reports, handbooks on skills development and labour market programmes, as well as academic publications exploring the demand side of hidden talent labour market policies. The forms of resources created for organisations has evolved over time, reflecting the research's responsiveness to the needs of the employability sector. As such, this research is currently developing an employer engagement toolkit that looks at how businesses can hire, attract, and select talent from hidden talent cohorts.

### (3) Challenging normative assumptions for policy makers

Prof. Ingold's role in labour market challenges is to deliver research insights to policy makers to challenge systemic normative assumptions and promote a demand-side approach to labour market initiatives. Reflective of this role, she was invited to give evidence to the House of Representatives Select Committee Inquiry on Workforce Australia in 2023 and has been cited multiple times in subsequent recommendations for the Select Committee Inquiry. Beyond policy advocacy, Prof. Ingold's work has also led to changed service delivery models for UK government services, city councils, and Public Health England. She has also advised various peak bodies and membership groups, reaching over 11,000 professionals and leaders in the employability sector.

## On the Horizon

A key feature of this research is the embeddedness of Prof. Ingold, and the attunement of the research to the needs of the sector. As such, having been able to inform how to get people into jobs by transforming programs, the next stage of the research focuses on retention and broader talent management of hidden talent cohorts.

## Case Study 6: University of Newcastle

### The Australian Workplace Index for organisational productivity

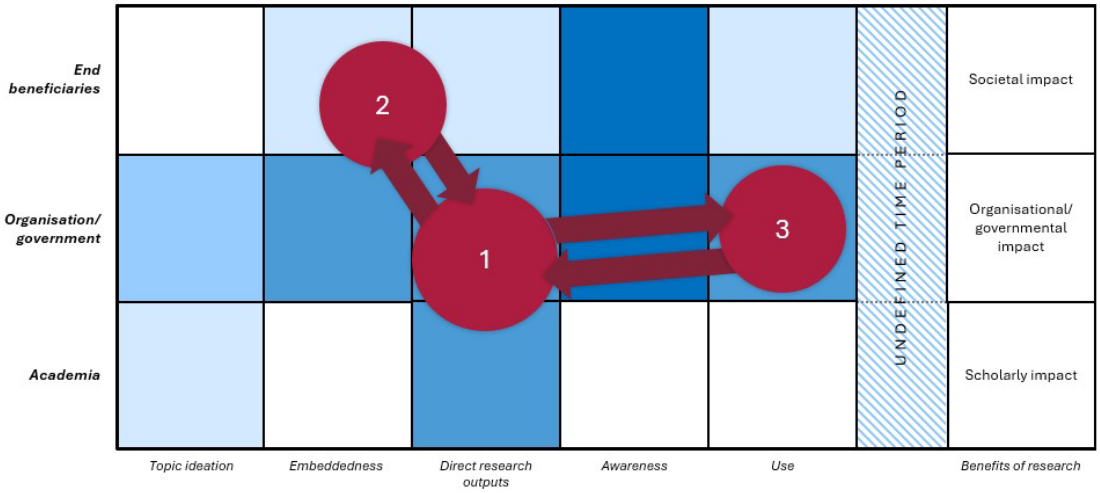
Australia's productivity growth has fallen to half its 25-year average in in recent times, largely due to poor leadership and management practices within Australian workplaces. Currently, the nation ranks behind the USA, Japan, Canada, and all major European economics in management practices. The Australian Workplace Index (AWI) is a data-driven, national benchmarking project that delivers executives future-focused business insights and intelligence in the areas of workplace leadership, wellbeing, and productivity. AWI acts as an interactive national database that can support better leadership and management decisions by making data on workplace productivity, leadership and employee wellbeing available to all Australian employers. The AWI has a vision to "empower all Australians to thrive at work". For employers and policy makers, the "AWI aims to make Australian workplaces the best in the work".

The AWI was established through a partnership between The University of Newcastle and The Australian National University (ANU). Through the AWI, organisations can benchmark themselves against other organisations to see how they compare against national averages and high performing workplaces on their leadership, wellbeing and productivity practices. Having collected data from over 10,000 employees across all Australian states and territories, the AWI generates indirect economic impact by providing knowledge, data and intelligence to drive executive conversations aimed at improving organisational productivity, leadership, and importantly, employee wellbeing across all of Australia.

### Journey to Societal Impact

Having been in development since 2005, the AWI was officially launched in 2022. However, it was first launched as a prototype in 2011 as a High Performing Workplace Index at the Prime Minister's Future Job Forum after a pilot with 5,500 Australian employees. The AWI was developed by Prof. Christina Boedker (University of Newcastle) and Prof. Kieron Meagher (Australian National University), following collaborations with Prof. Richard Vidgen (UNSW), Prof. Yuli Suseno (RMIT), and Dr. Heidi Wechtler (University of Newcastle). End beneficiaries of this research include executive directors and their leadership teams in both private and public sector organisations. The government stakeholder group consists of state and federal level departments across NSW, Victoria, and the ACT. Private sector participants range from large technology companies, such as Microsoft in Sydney to small NDIS organisations in South Australia and manufacturing companies in Western Australia. Academic stakeholders include researchers from The University of Newcastle, ANU, and RMIT joined up in a strategic partnership established to reach employers across all Australian states and territories. The AWI has generated indirect economic societal impact via three interlinked productive interactions: (1) the AWI serving as a starting point for research via national benchmarks, (2) employee data feeding into the AWI database and revealing organisational gaps, strengths and weaknesses, and (3) organisations using AWI benchmarking data to guide strategy and drive performance.

Appendix Figure 6: University of Newcastle — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) The AWI serving as a starting point for research via national benchmarks

Available indicators of firm performance include leadership, wellbeing, and productivity dimensions, such as employees' sense of empowerment from their leaders, leaders' psychopathic personality traits, employees' positive and negative emotions, feelings of workplace loneliness, psychosocial hazards arising from high job demands or low job resources,

target pressure, performance anxiety, and employees' productivity in accomplishing daily work tasks. For organisations newly engaging with the AWI, the index offers an interactive dashboard that serves as an accessible starting point to understand their relative performance. To date, the AWI has had participation from over 160 government departments and private sector organisations.

### (2) Employee data feeding into the AWI and revealing organisational gaps

Using AWI benchmarking data, university researchers work with employers to collect employee insights and assess their leadership, wellbeing, and productivity performance. This process turns previously unseen organisational challenges into visible areas for improvement which, when addressed, can enhance performance. Importantly, research data benchmarks are translated into industry use via an AWI benchmark report and to enable data visualisation and comparison. For example, in 2022 the research team engaged with Lake Macquarie City Council led by their CEO to understand how they might empower leadership at multiple levels of the organisation. The researchers conducted an in-depth study across 22 business units on over 100 KPI dimensions. Via the AWI dashboard, the AWI provided insight into how the Council was performing and offered opportunities for improvement and leadership intervention in priority organisational areas.

### (3) Organisations using AWI benchmarking data to guide strategy and drive performance

When obtaining their results, organisations use the AWI dashboard to benchmark themselves against the national dataset to see how they perform comparatively and if they need to shift their performance standards. These insights then inform their future strategy and help to identify pathways through which they can strengthen their leadership, wellbeing, and workplace productivity. When aggregated, improvements in performance across multiple or all Australian organisations contribute to enhanced economic activity and a stronger overall Australian economy. As organisations continue to implement digestible research insights, they can return to the interactive AWI dashboard to track their progress against national benchmarks.

## On the Horizon

The AWI currently leverages data from across all Australian industry sectors and company sizes, including large and small private and public sector organisations, federal and state government departments, and manufacturing and services organisations. The next phase of the AWI aims to broaden participation from more organisations through the university networks and to scale the size and reach of the national data base.

## Case Study 7: University of Canberra

### Skills Shortages in the ACT

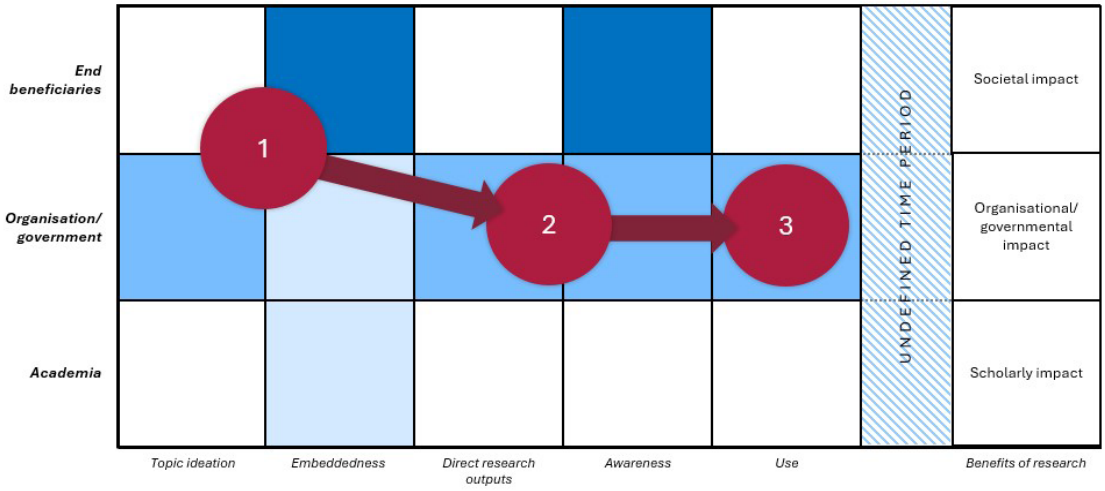
Skills shortages have emerged as a significant issue across nations and industries, with employers facing ongoing challenges in filling key roles. Of note is the ACT, who despite housing Australia's capital city, faces both metropolitan and regional skills shortages due to its prevalence of government groups and geography within the enclave of regional NSW. Evidence of the territory's labour challenges is reflected in the ACT Government's annual Skills Needs Lists, which identify current workforce and skill shortages, enabling targeted interventions and helping employers secure the skilled workers they require. These skills shortages include workers in information healthcare, cybersecurity, hospitability, retail, and construction, among others.

The Economic Development Division (EDD) in the ACT, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, sought to better understand the nature of skills and workforce shortages within the ACT and investigate the key barriers to addressing such challenges. In partnership with EDD, the University of Canberra conducted a multi-phase research project to identify the issues that impact skills development and shortages in the ACT workforce, and provide recommendations to government to overcome such barriers, of which some were implemented by the ACT Government and businesses within the region. This research generated indirect economic societal impact by providing evidence-based recommendations to the ACT Government to overcome identified skills shortages in the ACT.

### Journey to Societal Impact

This research began in 2022, and included University of Canberra researchers, Prof. Raechel Johns, Prof. Naomi Dale, Prof. Xiaodong Gong, and Prof. Ben Freyens. Organisational and governmental stakeholders included the ACT Government, the Canberra Business Chamber, and industry groups for tourism, retail, and construction, amongst others. End beneficiaries included employers and prospective employees for organisations within the key sectors experiencing shortages, and the overall business community within the ACT region. This research's societal impact is evident via three productive interactions: (1) embedding the research within the skills shortages ecosystem, (2) maximising awareness of research findings with key stakeholders, and (3) providing evidence-based recommendations for the ACT Government.

Appendix Figure 7: University of Canberra — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




### (1) Embedding the research within the skills shortages ecosystem

The research team was funded by the ACT Government to investigate the nature of skills shortages in the ACT. In particular, the government sought to verify the accuracy of the publicly released skills shortage lists, which serves to address workforce gaps in the region and consider industry-specific strategies for implementation. The researchers embarked on a multi-phase research project to investigate the prevalence and nature of the skills shortages in high-priority industries; retail, hospitalitiy and tourism, health, cybersecurity and building and construction. They consulted with the peak bodies for each sector, and conducted interviews and disseminated surveys with employers to understand the experience of employee recruitment. Focus groups with employees in each of the sectors, and with employees who had relocated to the ACT in the past five years were then undertaken. This research provided the territory government with a crucial 'reality check' on the true nature of skills shortages within the ACT.

### (2) Maximising awareness of research findings with key stakeholders

The research revealed that the hospitality and tourism sectors in the ACT were the worst hit by staff shortages, and highlighted several attracting and detracting factors for working in the ACT. Unique to the ACT is the prevalence of the government sector, and its high transitory nature, due to its regional characteristics for a metropolitan city and professional employment opportunities. There is also a relative lack of service employees to fill significant job vacancies. Research with employers revealed that the pandemic provided the opportunity for service workers to reflect on what was important to them, namely job stability and workplace flexibility, hence the attrition from many service roles, into other more office-based roles (e.g. the public sector), or to relocate out of the ACT. The researchers concluded that the identified skills shortage industries were accurate in highlighting areas of concern, however that there were certain skillsets that needed more understanding, particularly to be implemented by SMEs – namely, AI/robotics. From these findings, the researchers disseminated their evidence to both the ACT Government and provided seminars to industry bodies (such as the Chamber of Business), attracting subtantial media attention and dissemination to the general public. The 2023 report, 'Assessing Workforce Shortages and identifiying barriers to workforce attraction in the ACT' was prepared and shared widely with communities of interest, with a series of workshops to support this dissemination.

### (3) Providing evidence-based recommendations for the ACT Government

Within the report, 'Assessing Workforce Shortages and identifiying barriers to workforce attraction in the ACT', was the provision of sixteen key recommendations for government and industry. These included short- and long-term actions to manage workforce challenges within the ACT. For the government, some of these recommendations included negotiating with the federal government to classify the ACT as a 'high-needs' region for skills shortages to inform targeted support, as well as improving transport infrastructure between Canberra and Sydney to facilitate recruitment from outside the territory. For industry, recommendations included the need to build loyalty with their existing workforce via incentives, recruit under-represented staff, and change organisational processes to include a greater use of technology. Some of these recommendations were implemented by the government and employers, in particular considering flexibility, and altering recruitment and promotional campaigns.

## On the Horizon

This project is in the emergent stage of generating economic societal impact. Since contributing to government discussions, the next stage of the project aims to advance the academic conversation of skills shortages through publications. As skills shortages remain an ongoing challenge, the next phase seeks to focus on exploring the skills shortage further and offering key recommendations for building skills in AI and robotics within the region.

## Case Study 8: University of Melbourne

### Is Australia's Modern Slavery Act Really Working?

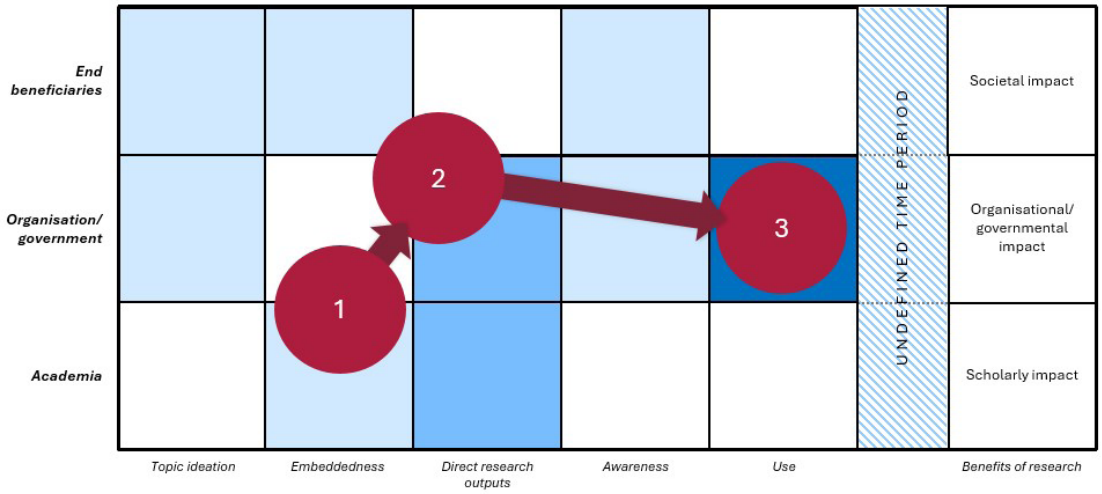
Modern slavery is an extreme form of exploitation where an individual is forced to work against their will and can feature debt bondage, forced labour, and physical/psychological abuse. Recent legislation in Australia, the Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018, has put increased pressure on organisations to audit their supply chains and identify forced labour risks to implement changes to ensure modern slavery practices do not continue. The Act is a landmark transparency law that requires large companies (>$100m revenue) to publish annual statements relating to their supply chain to combat modern slavery.

Upon securing government funding, a multidisciplinary team (law, human rights, criminology, supply chain) examined the effectiveness of the modern slavery act to determine if organisations were indeed committed to meaningful change. By evaluating company statements in high-risk sectors across Thailand, Malaysia, China, and Australia, the researchers found that only 27% of companies reviewed could demonstrate some form of action against modern slavery risks. Upon these insights, the researchers strongly lobbied for policy amendment, and their recommendations to government were adopted by the Modern Slavery Act Review Committee. This research generated social societal impact by enhancing transparency around organisational practices for mitigating modern slavery in supply chains and informing government policy for systemic change.

### Journey to Societal Impact

This research began in 2021 and included a cross-institution and cross-disciplinary team of researchers. This included Prof. Vikram Bhakoo (University of Melbourne), Prof. Justine Nolan (UNSW), Prof. Shelley Marshall (RMIT), Assoc. Prof. Martijn Boersma (University of Sydney), and Assoc. Prof. Fiona McGauchey (University of Western Australia). The research team collaborated deeply with organisational stakeholders dedicated to addressing modern slavery. Academic stakeholders included researchers and research centres from law, organisational studies, criminology, and supply chain disciplines. The societal impact of this research is evident via three productive interactions: (1) assembling a multi-disciplinary team to reflect the complexity of modern slavery, (2) evaluating organisational intent to combat modern slavery, and (3) addressing gaps in the Modern Slavery Act for policy change.

Appendix Figure 8: University of Melbourne — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) Assembling a multi-disciplinary team to reflect the complexity of modern slavery

In 2021, researchers successfully secured a grant for the National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery from the Australian Department of Home Affairs. Industry partners included the Human Rights Law Centre, Baptist World Aid, the Uniting Church, and the Business and Human Rights Law Centre. Notably, the group of researchers reflected the complex nature of modern slavery via the multi-disciplinary team. The research team analysed public modern slavery statements and employed a multi-method research design with diverse stakeholders. From this, it became clear how Australian businesses were responding to the Act and highlighted potential gaps in the modern slavery framework proposed by the Australian Modern Slavery Act in 2018.

### (2) Evaluating organisational intent to combat modern slavery

To investigate the efficacy of the Australian Modern Slavery Act, the researchers examined four high-risk sectors for modern slavery — seafood trade (Thailand), healthcare PPE manufacturing (Malaysia), garment importation (China), and horticulture (Australia). Auditing modern slavery statements showed that companies failed to identify or disclose obvious modern slavery risks, and demonstrated superficial and incomplete compliance with reporting requirements. A year later, the researchers found that over two thirds of these companies could not evidence their articulated commitment to modern slavery risks. The researchers concluded that some organisations treated the Australian Modern Slavery Act as a "box-ticking" exercise, providing vague statements without evidence of action. Further findings were captured in the report 'Broken Promises? Two years of corporate reporting under Australia's Modern Slavery Act' with the Human Rights Law Centre, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, the UNSW Australian Human Rights Institute, University of Melbourne, Baptist World Aid, Baptist World Aid, the RMIT Business and Human Rights Centre, University of Western Australia and University of Notre Dame Australia.

### (3) Addressing gaps in the Modern Slavery Act for policy change

After revealing prevalent inaction, the researchers highlighted organisations failing to follow through on their modern slavery commitments. As such, the researchers developed and provided a series of recommendations to the review committee for the Statutory Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2018. One key recommendation was the creation of an Anti-Slavery Commissioner, a role formally appointed by the Governor-General in 2024. Further, the researchers' 'Fit for Purpose' report was presented to both the Attorney General's Department and the UN Global Compact Network Australia. Overall, 32 public submissions drew on or cited their research. This included the Salvation Army, Deloitte, the International Justice Mission, the International Organisation for Migration, Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Council of Trade Unions, Amnesty International Australia, Australian Red Cross, and the Law Council of Australia. The researchers' societal impact was officially recognised by the University of Melbourne's Reel Impact Prize in 2023.

## On the Horizon

The researchers continue to contribute to ongoing government consultations on the review of the Modern Slavery Act. Notably, their work is extending beyond Australia, with invitations to present key research findings with the EU and several Canadian universities. Going forward, they are focusing on high-risk sectors (namely fisheries and construction industries) to understand the role of local NGO's and supplier perspectives on mitigating modern slavery. As such, the researchers strive to develop sector-specific solutions to drive societal change.

## Case Study 9: University of Canterbury

### Repair Cafes in Aotearoa, New Zealand

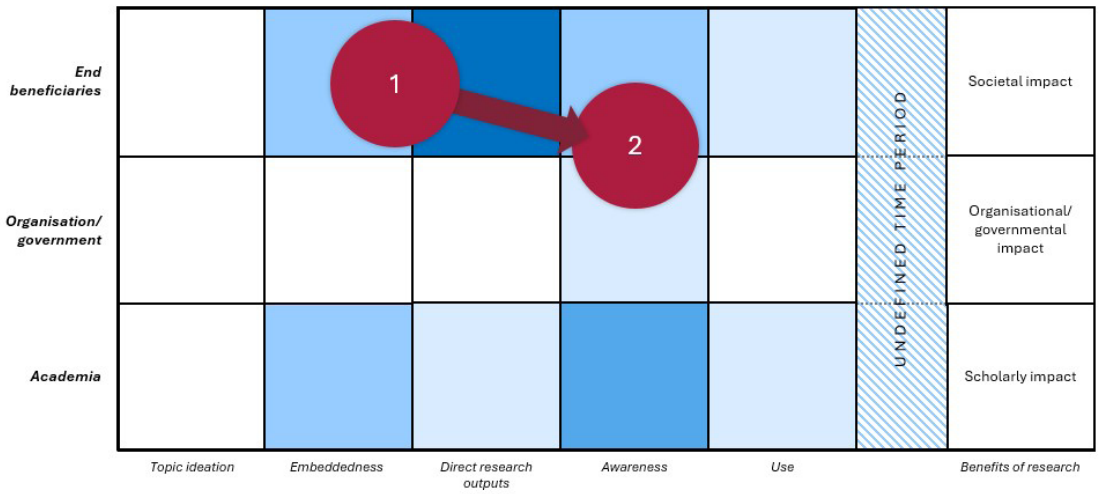
Various community approaches to sustainability exist to address environmental, social, and economic challenges. One such approach includes the concept of repair cafes. Repair cafes are a global community initiative where volunteers assist people in repairing broken household items, such as clothing, small electronics, and furniture. These volunteers not only apply their technical skills but also foster collaboration, learning, and a sense of community empowerment through hands-on repair. Repair cafes seek to reduce waste by keeping items out of landfills, help people save money, and foster community connections.

Having studied community approaches to sustainability, Prof. Lucie Ozanne began researching what motivates communities to start repair cafes, and what motivates volunteers and participants to get involved in this form of community sustainability initiative. Prof. Ozanne became involved with Repair Cafes Aotearoa New Zealand (RCANZ), the national organisation behind repair cafes in New Zealand. Through the support of RCANZ she was able to gain access to the repair café community and participants for research. This research contributes to emerging environmental societal impact by examining the behaviours surrounding repair cafes to keep products in use as long as possible, and away from unnecessary waste and landfill.

### Journey to Societal Impact

This research project began in 2021 with University of Canterbury business researcher Prof. Lucie Ozanne, and included Prof. Girish Prayag (University of Canterbury) and Prof. Julie Ozanne (University of Melbourne). End beneficiaries of this project include repair café organisers, volunteers, and visitors participating in repair activities. The main organisational stakeholder is Repair Cafes Aotearoa New Zealand (RCANZ). The researchers contributed to societal impact via two productive interactions: (1) engaging with repair cafes to generate meaningful research insights, and (2) developing research outputs that support systemic discussions.

Appendix Figure 9: University of Canterbury — Applied productive interactions on engagement heatmap.




#### (1) Engaging with repair cafes to generate meaningful research insights

The researchers engaged with over 1,500 visitors and volunteers (via surveys and interviews) from repair cafés to understand their motivations for participating. The research found that not only are there tangible benefits to participating in repair cafes, but the community initiative provides a positive social opportunity for meaningful interactions between community members. However, repair cafes face several factors that impede the use and expansion of repair cafes in Aotearoa, namely the capabilities of volunteers, and repairability of products by design. Across several pro bono reports for RCANZ, the researchers outlined a range of interventions that repair cafés, policymakers, product marketers, and manufacturers in Aotearoa New Zealand can adopt to help make repair behaviour more widespread.

#### (2) Developing research outputs that support systemic discussions

Included in the reports developed for RCANZ were interventions that could be utilised for local and national policy makers to support repair behaviour and the use of repair cafes as a community sustainability initiative. As an organisation, the RCANZ seeks to advocate for legislation in Aotearoa to address laws that currently obstruct the right

to repair. The research highlighted the attitudes and motivations toward repair, enabling a delineation of factors that facilitate or impede repair in Aotearoa. From the recommendations presented by the researchers in these reports, the research supported the New Zealand Government Select Committee's discussion on the proposed right to repair legislation in 2025. This research was further advocated on an external advisory board.

## On the Horizon

Given the highly hands-on research context of repair cafes, the researchers recognised that their most powerful role for generating societal impact in the right to repair context is in the creation and dissemination of research knowledge to inform impactful discussions. Their future work sees them disseminating their research further to both academic and non-academic audiences to generate indirect societal impact.

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