

# THE ENGAGED BUSINESS SCHOOL



**Anthony Sturgess**

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# The Engaged Business School

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# **Preface**

## **Overview of the Engaged Business School: Fulfilling Potential or Thwarted Ambition?**

The Engaged Business School is a road map to unlocking the potential between business and business schools at a time when it really matters: responding to a global, economic and social recovery. It is a call for academics and businesses to come together and realise the potential that frustratingly is so often unfulfilled.

This call to act has at its core a simple question, which is where the first chapter begins. It would seem to be self-evident that businesses and business schools should be natural partners, the one benefiting from its engagement with the other. Yet frequently this is not evident in practice. This prompts the questions: Why does something that seems to intuitively make sense end up being so hard to do?

Chapter 1 sets out the rationale and case for the engaged business school from the perspectives of both business and business school. The intent is first to make the argument for why engagement matters, and then in subsequent chapters explore how this might be realised. Business and business school needs, national policy and global crises all combine to make a compelling case for engagement, not only reinforcing that it matters, but that it matters now: there is an urgency to the call.

The road map introduces a new model for the engaged business school supported by a framework and process. The flow of the discussion in the book firstly explores the framework, model and process, setting out what is meant by the Engaged Business School. However, there are long-standing and deep-rooted tensions inherent in the relationships between business and business schools. Understandably, they need to be addressed before progressing to explain the engagement model in detail. Then the focus turns towards action and considers what the engaged business school could look like in practice and explores ways in which it could respond and contribute to recovery from crisis.

## **The Model, Framework and Process of Engagement**

The book develops the idea of an engaged business school using three descriptive tools: a framework, a model and a process. A framework surfaces different levels and varying depths of engagement and clarifies what is meant by effective

engagement. It provides a structure for businesses and business schools to better understand what effective engagement means and how it is defined. Then the model shows how factors for successful engagement are interconnected in order to bring engagement to life. Finally, the process identifies the steps and stages which will need to be considered to translate the model and framework into action.

Engagement is an often used term in higher education with many different interpretations, and as a result is not well understood. The intent of the framework is to provide a common language and structure to build a shared understanding between business and business schools. It helps them to determine the level, depth and degree of engagement possible. The framework reflects four ways in which engagement can be understood. Firstly, engagement as activity is probably the most understood, since activities are tangible. Yet activities can be disconnected and transactional in nature, and of themselves provide a limited view of engagement. Secondly, engagement as relationship is less understood but pervasive for effective engagement. Relationships provide a context for business need to be better understood and to connect activity to that need. Thirdly, engagement as vocation gives energy and motivation to the activities and relationship. Fourthly, engagement as mission stresses the significance and meaning of the activities and relationships, giving direction and focus to the energy of vocation. Not all engagements are created equal, and many do not work very well. The framework provides a way to assess the nature of engagement, helping businesses and business schools to make sense of their relationship and put in place building blocks towards an effective engagement.

However, there are long-standing tensions associated with business schools and their engagement with business. These tensions provide a difficult context to navigate and need to be explored before a model of engagement can be proposed. Two areas dominate. Firstly the relevance versus rigour debates and secondly, the contrasting views about the legitimacy and identity of business schools. Not surprisingly, addressing these tensions is central to understanding how business schools engage with business. Given that these tensions tend to be deep-rooted, an approach is advocated to re-frame the tensions and to seek different thinking and fresh perspectives. This approach of re-framing tensions then emerges as an important means to address tensions more generally in the discussion of an engaged business school. Consequently, understanding how tensions can be analysed is a necessary step before progressing to explore the model of engagement.

Tensions highlight important areas to consider within the engagement model. The model weaves the factors of successful engagement together. It brings engagement to life capturing the connections between important themes and concepts. The model attempts to represent how the inter-relationship of the themes that reinforce effective engagement are reflected in a dynamic rather than a static model. That said it is acknowledged that all models are simplifications and in that sense, as the British statistician George Box famously said 'all models are wrong' (Box, 1976). But they can be what Box went on to describe as useful approximations of the real world. The hope is that the model simplifies to aid clarity, without erring towards being simplistic. To that end the model, in contrast

to static one-dimensional linear approaches, recognises the more nuanced inter-connections which underpin engagement and emphasises circular, cyclical and iterative relationships crucial to the development of an effective relationship. The model helps business and business school alike to chart a path towards effective engagement.

The third tool is a process indicating the steps and stages which will need to be considered for businesses and business schools to engage. Engaging in a single project or intervention is often hard enough to do well. The process indicates the steps that are needed for a single engagement, but whilst these steps are necessary they are not sufficient for an on-going engagement. The hallmark of effective engagement should be a long-term mutually beneficial relationship, and that needs commitment. The engagement process crucially highlights the steps and stages that need to be considered to build for the longer term.

Having explored the three practical tools for engagement the focus moves from ideas into action to illustrate the engaged business school in practice. The engagement framework is used to demonstrate three valuable applications. Firstly, the framework is used to develop a mission for an engaged business school. Secondly, it is used to better understand stakeholders and their differing expectations. Thirdly, it is used to map activity and connections in the business school providing a rich picture of engagement across the four levels of the framework.

The discussion then continues to consider how engaged business schools might differentiate themselves. To do this the engaged business school is considered from the different perspectives of a business, a manager, a student, an academic and their host university, to think about how each group can make the most of their connection. Finally, the argument progresses to explore how business schools can seek to play an important role in supporting recovery from crisis. Two broad strategies are proposed, the first is to use grand challenges to shift the focus towards areas of significance and the second utilises the concept of tensions to identify opportunities for different thinking. Together they show how the engaged business school can, through significance and different thinking, achieve impact.

The conclusion ends with a challenge to answer the call made in the opening chapter. Despite compelling arguments for change from many different perspectives over a prolonged period of time, little impact has been made. This chapter seeks to understand why change seems to be so difficult. Yet there is a real opportunity with the two worlds of business and academia having distinctive things to offer each other. So the potential for change is emphasised by two final challenges which provocatively question our willingness and whether we care enough to make it happen.

It would be remiss for a monograph not to end with an explanation of the research upon which the book is based. Chapter 10 is therefore a short explanation of the study behind the engagement story. Given the focus of the engaged business school, the discussion highlight three areas. Firstly, to explain how the engagement stories, which feature in the development of the engagement model, themselves emerged in the study. Then secondly, to recognise that the central role tensions play in shaping the discussion, is also reflected in the approach to analysis

of the research. Finally, and interestingly a perspective is outlined of researchers being story tellers. In that respect, I hope that I have been faithful in telling the stories of those engaged in business and business school relationships, and that in some part this book helps us all to develop our own stories of engagement.

## A First Approximation

With that in mind, the intent of this book is not to prescribe but to describe. It is hoped that business schools will utilise the ideas to make their own assessment of their engagement and develop strategies which bring together their strengths and aspirations to chart their own way forward. Similarly for businesses, they too can assess their needs and learn how to connect more effectively to maximise the potential of the relationship.

From the discussion so far it may appear that the problems all reside with business schools. Whilst there clearly are problems, this is not to suggest that business schools do not engage with businesses. On the contrary, with all the competing priorities at play, admirable and important work is being done, often more than is formally recognised. Rather, the idea of an engaged business school is an attempt not to prescribe but to ‘describe with insights’, to use Mintzberg’s turn of phrase (Mintzberg, 2004). It is also written in the spirit indicated by futurist Alvin Toffler in the introduction to his seminal book, *Future Shock*. He argued that when considering the future, imagination and insight are more important than precision and certainty. At the same time, he provocatively suggested that in this context theories do not ‘need to be “right” to be enormously useful, not as a final word but as a first approximation’. (Toffler, 1970). I have tried to put forward a positive argument for an Engaged Business School in the spirit of description, insight and approximation which I hope will be useful.

The book is written for those who care about the relationship between business and business schools; they have more than a passing interest. It is for managers, academics and students alike, with the hope of bringing business and academia closer together. It is an audience with some involvement, interest, knowledge and indeed experience of the issues. With that in mind, I hope to explore the issues and themes of an engaged business school, asking readers to make their own connections and consider the extent to which the perspectives argued resonate with their own experience. Readers are therefore encouraged to engage in their own sensemaking and to make up their own minds (Elliot, 2005) as they reflect on their experience. This represents an approach which Tsoukas (2009) suggests is particularly relevant for a practitioner audience, those who are involved, knowledgeable and hopefully engaged.

The book is grounded in my experience of the potential and frustration inherent in business to business school relationships, experience which I suspect many from business and academia share. This book captures the lessons from practice, listening to the voices of those directly involved in making the relationship work. Too often I have spoken to businesses, who don’t see the need, or aren’t able to connect effectively with a business school. Similarly, I have worked

in business schools, who have not realised how they could be so much better connected if only they knew how, or were willing to do so, or perhaps would do so if it mattered more?

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## Chapter 1

# A Call to Action\*

The engaged business school is a call to action, both for business schools and for businesses to engage and reap the mutual benefits from their relationship. At the heart of the call to action is a question: why does something that seems to be so obviously advantageous appear so difficult to do?

The frustration implicit in the question is captured in two interesting conversations with business leaders. Their stories serve to set the scene, but they do more; they provide an indication of where to begin to look for answers to the question. The first story is a provocative challenge; the second is a troubling reality check. Both stories should be wake up calls for business and for business schools, but they also offer hope and opportunity.

## Untapped Strengths and Well-Kept Secrets

An executive once asked me a rhetorical two part question: ‘what is a business schools greatest strength?’ and secondly, ‘what is a business’s greatest need?’. There are, of course, many possible answers to the two questions. The view of this senior leader in relation to business school to business relationships was instructive. For this executive, a business school’s greatest strength was latest thinking, something the leader provocatively argued was too often not evident in the programmes and courses offered. It was an uncomfortable answer, with more than a ring of truth about it. I was expecting to have to provide a response, when fortunately, the leader turned to answering the second question. What about business? Interestingly, the executives’ answer to this question was the same, a business’s greatest need was also latest thinking. The executive then argued that managers and leaders in business were too busy ‘doing their job’ to find out what the latest thinking might be, never mind to apply that to their businesses.

This first story raises concerns about the relevance and quality of what business schools do, but as concerning is what emerged from a conversation with another business leader. The second conversation was with a non-executive director

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\*This book was developed from the thesis submitted to The University of Manchester, Sturgess, M. A. (2016). ‘Developing a Theory of Employer and Higher Education Provider Engagement’.

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(NED) of a potential client. The NED made an interesting observation after listening to a presentation of the range of possibilities that the business school could offer. The talk had highlighted the kind of relationship and insight that is possible when a business school works together with a business. Following the presentation, the business leader commented that the business school was a 'well-kept secret'. The NED had been unaware of what the business school could do to support business. The complement, which expressed the pleasant surprise of the NED, betrays a significant concern, that businesses are often unaware of how business schools can help them.

The first story questions not just the relevance of what is taught in business schools but also the extent to which thought leadership and research-informed teaching are shared. However, the story also suggests that there should be a real opportunity for a business school to connect (what should be) a core strength with an important need (and apparent weakness) of business, and there should be a significant benefit for businesses to do this.

The second story suggests a more fundamental issue: that many businesses simply do not know the potential that exists within business schools. Without doubt, business schools are more engaged than they might appear, yet not as engaged as they could or should be, too often appearing as a well-kept secret to businesses. Therefore, surfacing and connecting the strengths of business schools to the business communities they serve begins with making visible what is already there. And it is not just businesses that have this problem. Business schools themselves can often be 'unaware' of some of their connections with business, typically when carried out at an individual level. This, of course, is not a new challenge; many organisations struggle with how knowledge is shared, as a former CEO of Hewlett Packard (HP) lamented, 'If only HP knew what HP knows' (Nonaka & Teece, 2001). As a result, it may be that some of the building blocks for engagement are already there, but are hidden in plain view.

The two stories express concerns, but they also hold out hope that the strengths of a business school can meet the needs of a business, and that this rich potential is something that is worth finding and should be made visible. The two conversations provide a helpful introduction to some of the challenges with engagement highlighting the importance of relevance and visibility or more provocatively the risk of being irrelevant and invisible to business.

Though anecdotal, the stories resonate with a broader evidence base. There are problems with connectivity and visibility, with how knowledge is produced, exchanged and disseminated and with what is taught and how it is taught. There is, of course, a considerable amount of good work that is done by business schools with business. But there is much that can be improved, and that is where this discussion will begin, starting with considering the situation from a business point of view. Businesses find business schools difficult to do business with, they often are not aware of what is available, find them problematic to access and navigate, and relationships hard to establish (Thomas, Lee, Thomas, & Wilson, 2014; Thorpe & Rawlinson, 2013). What is taught too often is not what is needed, more focused on the interest of academics than on the needs of business (Thorpe & Rawlinson, 2013). The way staff teach is also not appropriate for an audience of managers and business people, with academics applying the same approaches they

use with students who have no or little practical experience (Mintzberg, 2004). Too few academics have the skill or the inclination to engage in this kind of executive/practitioner teaching (Kewin et al., 2011). Consequently, there are calls for staff who are able to integrate ‘intellectual rigour with practice relevance’ (Peter, Smith, & Howard, 2018, p. 145). This position was summarised poignantly by Pfeffer and Fong’s now well-known conclusion that business schools are teaching ‘the wrong things in the wrong ways’ (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, p. 80).

Not only are there issues with teaching but the notion of integrating rigour with practice applies just as persuasively to research as it does to teaching. Here too there has been a long-standing debate, with concerns about the relevance and helpfulness to practice of the research that business schools can provide to businesses. Narratives about gaps, the need to bridge between two sides or issues of translation all point towards tensions about relevance, helpfulness and visibility. The issues with research were helpfully characterised by Shapiro, Kirkman and Courtney (2007) as two kinds of translation problems. The first is a knowledge transfer problem, which demands better presentation of research in terms that practitioners understand with, for example, frameworks and tools that managers can use. The second is a knowledge production problem and is associated with researchers not collaborating with business to identify the relevant areas/topics within which to conduct research. The former problem is described as ‘lost in translation’, whereas the latter is seen as a gap due to lack of relevance and therefore ‘lost before translation’ (Shapiro et al., 2007).

The issues though are not all with business schools. Karl Weick suggests that the issue, rather than being on the supply side of knowledge, may be more to do with the nature of the demand. He argues that the relevance problem is not just about academics being wedded to their ways, it is also ‘that practitioners will not set aside their fads and begin to work with fundamentals’ (Weick, 2001, p. S72). In addition, there are issues that are the responsibility of both business and business schools. A recent report on university and business engagement revealed that businesses often didn’t have the capacity to find out what would help from universities, and similarly universities did not provide the relevant information about how they can support business. The authors argued that business schools should play an important part in making this happen (Hughes, Kitson, Salter, Angenendt, & Hughes, 2022).

The problems introduced so far illustrate some of the difficulties that need to be overcome for engagement to work. Teaching and research are two fundamental pillars of a business school and clearly are also problematic. Therefore, in Chapter 4, the inherent tensions behind teaching and research will be explored since the level of engagement possible is always likely to be limited whilst fundamental issues remain in these two areas. There is, of course, a wide range of contrasting evidence associated with engagement and relevance, with many examples of good practice. Nevertheless, there is a deeper sense that potential is not being realised and a recognition that more could be and should be done. In the midst of these wide ranging concerns and frustrations, it is worth being reminded of why it might be important to get this right for those who could gain most from an engaged business school.

## **A Call to Action for Managers, Students and Academics**

The engaged business school is a call to action both for business schools and for businesses to engage and reap the mutual benefits from their relationship. There is obvious potential to be found when they work together, yet there is a frustration that so much of that promise seems unfulfilled. On the one hand, business schools with competing demands of teaching and research and stretched resources understandably can be reluctant partners, often lukewarm in their efforts and struggling to engage effectively with business. On the other hand, businesses seem unaware of the support available, unable to connect meaningfully with business schools and unconvinced of the merits of doing so. Business schools can benefit from better understanding how to engage with business, and businesses need to know how to unlock that unfilled potential. But it is more than just a call to businesses and to business schools; other relationships matter too. Knowing how to make the most of a business school, what to look out for and how to tap into the possibilities is crucial for business, managers, students and academics alike.

It matters for today's managers and leaders, whether they are currently unaware of the possibilities, or hoping to make the most of their experience whilst studying an MBA or an executive education programme, so too for alumni wishing to unlock the continued benefit of their relationship. A connection with the business school should not be just for the duration of a programme. A longer term relationship that is mutually beneficial is needed. An MBA/executive education student, and subsequently a member of the alumni, should gain from a life time relationship with the business school, and be able to continually develop and engage in learning. In so doing they develop themselves, their organisation, and crucially can contribute to shaping and building the business school. A long-term relationship with managers and leaders such as this starts to change the emphasis from the conventional focus on individual programmes towards a continuing engagement in different ways over time. From this perspective, managers and leaders don't join a programme they join a learning community.

Similarly for current undergraduates, these students are tomorrow's managers and leaders, and for them experiencing an engaged business school is invaluable for their early development and career prospects. It is an environment where their education and experience is integrated with supporting the business community, where they can engage with academic staff who are pursuing research which impacts on the communities they serve and points to a future which these students will be shaping. Engagement creates conditions where learning and practice come together, where the workplace becomes more like a learning place and learning spaces in business schools become more like the emerging ideas about a new work place/space. Engagement results in a 'low walled' business school where young people make an early contribution to organisations whilst they study.

And it also matters for the academic community, providing a rich context within which to teach, research and consult. For academics, the opportunity is to pursue an engaged scholarship, and challenge the tendency to separate relevant applied research from more dispassionate and fundamental research. There is also the potential to re-invigorate the nature of scholarly teaching and engaged

learning, working closely with organisations and with those who work in them. Engagement should provide the opportunities for career development and academic fulfilment.

Such aspirations are not without their difficulties. The massification of higher education has skewed the focus within universities with so much attention placed on undergraduate recruitment and the subsequent delivery of mass-education. In the context of finite resources, delivering to multiple stakeholders with a wide range of programmes and services becomes problematic. It is worth noting that business schools are actually relatively small businesses with staff numbers typically in the hundreds. It, therefore, becomes difficult to offer a breadth of provision often resulting in being ‘under resourced and under-scaled’ (Peter, Smith, & Howard, 2018, p. 9). The issues associated with multiple stakeholders and their competing demands on limited resource is a clear tension that will be explored when the meaning of engagement and its interpretation by different stakeholders is discussed in Chapter 3.

Issues about being able to personalise mass-education hold an inherent tension, the one seemingly making the other impossible. It prompts the question as to whether the business school’s relationships with businesses can help. Is it possible to re-dress this tension and provide ways for mass-education to harness the business capability in a region to support the learning and development of undergraduate students? The sentiment of the African proverb that suggests it takes a village to bring up a child could perhaps be adapted here, to recognise that it takes a business school and the business/workplace communities to educate and develop the next generation of leaders and managers. There is of course a long tradition of placements, and of apprenticeships, with the latter being revived more recently. Could these areas be further developed to provide a much stronger two way relationship for business students? Can the relationships a business school has with businesses significantly help to develop undergraduate students? To do this, implies that aspects of work based learning will need to be developed, resulting in the blurring of workplaces and learning places into a more comprehensive integrated learning process.

Bringing working and learning closer together extends the boundaries of a business school. Similarly, the idea of students joining a learning community rather than simply a programme expands the relationships with students and alumni. The continuity of learning implied introduces interesting possibilities. Such a view of a lifelong relationship can lead to different thinking about appropriate business models. For example, Schlegelmilch (2020) provocatively proposed changing from a single purchase of a qualification (currently the norm) to an access model. What is particularly interesting in relation to the discussion of an engaged business school is his argument that the intention of doing this should be to create ‘deeper and more long term relationships’ (Schlegelmilch, 2020, p. 101). Much of the current education system is front-loaded both in terms of time and payment (AACSB, 2022). Education predominantly happens before or at the beginning of careers and similarly payment is typically up front and for specific programmes. There is comparatively little in place to update, extend, refresh and

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renew learning. Is it time to consider how business schools can more purposefully extend the relationship with their students for the long term?

There is a sense in which all interested parties have a stake in the future of business schools. The engaged business school is an opportunity for all those who are engaged to be a part of shaping that future. Stewardship and legacy should be priorities for which all those invested in business schools have some responsibility.

### **A Success Story**

The initial discussion has emphasised the problems and difficulties with business schools and their engagement with business. It gives a somewhat frustrating impression of business schools. The intent was to highlight where things need to improve, but it is only part of the story. Business schools have been one of the success stories in higher education over the last few decades (Thomas, Lorange, & Sheth, 2013). The flagship MBA has achieved a remarkable status. The undergraduate programmes are some of the most popular amongst students with one in six undergraduates studying a business and management subject in 2019/2021 (British Academy, 2021). Hand in hand with this success, business schools make significant financial contributions to the university (British Academy, 2021; Thorpe & Rawlinson, 2014). More widely, they are seen as important in the development of national economies (Lorange, 2019). In times of crisis and recession, they also have demonstrated resilience. This was apparent post the financial crisis of 2007/2008, as the Guardian newspaper reported in 2010, following the financial crisis, demand for MBA courses was soaring (Hoare, 2010). There are signs of a similar response emerging from the pandemic crisis. The Graduate Management Admission Council in their 2020 application survey illustrated this counter-intuitive phenomenon. During recessions business school graduate recruitment tends to be counter-cyclical, and numbers were up (AACSB, 2020; Globenewswire, 2020). The reasons given are that a recession is often a good time to upskill, to improve career prospects. That is not to ignore difficulties with the unpredictable nature of a crisis such as the pandemic, with, for example, international student recruitment being an obvious area of concern.

Despite this success, and perhaps in part because of it, business schools are facing challenges. The achievements of a business school make it difficult to excel in all areas. The high volume of undergraduate students creates significant resource pressure which impacts both on research and on the ability to engage more with businesses.

More broadly, for many institutions, there are mounting funding pressures, for example, in England there is an effective freeze on undergraduate fees. In this climate of diminishing returns other sources of income streams become attractive. Ironically, business schools would be well placed to explore different income stream possibilities if they weren't so resource constrained with the volume of undergraduate teaching. For example, business schools could lead on areas that expand on their expertise developed with executive education and continuing professional development (CPD). The increasing need for keeping current and up

to date is creating interest in upskilling, reskilling and lifelong learning. These are all areas that resonate with executive education and are more closely linked to business. However, for business schools to explore such possibilities will need both strategic support at a university level, alongside creative solutions at an operational level. Whilst this context is challenging, business schools often start from a position of advantage.

Business schools and universities are in a privileged position; they already have widespread acceptance within the communities they serve. They are trusted and seen as authoritative (AACSB, 2022). As a result, with many businesses the door is already open for conversations to be had, a position which private sector training providers and consultancies could only dream about. There are often alumni from the respective university employed in businesses in the region who have a positive disposition to the university. The conditions and ingredients for building strong relationships are often already in place, yet frequently not realised, or worse they lie dormant. Informally there may be many links and connections, and formally too, but the sum of the parts most definitely does not equal what could be the sum of the whole, if only they were galvanised and brought together in a purposeful manner. The central ideas behind the engaged business school emerge from the tensions highlighted earlier which suggest business schools have a difficulty with engagement. Yet the potential benefit from effective engagement is evident for business schools, businesses, students and academics. Time then to outline the core themes of what is needed to build an engaged business school.

## **The Central Ideas of an Engaged Business School**

The idea behind the engaged business school is to unlock the potential between businesses and business schools; an intent borne out of a frustration with what passes for engagement, and optimism about what could be, indeed should be possible. Importantly, it is aimed at the dual audience of business schools and businesses, arguing that there is a need for the academic and business communities to come together and build an engaged business school. Too much of the debate about business school relevance has taken place in academia, so the starting point will be with business needs and only then will the two perspectives be brought together. From this perspective business schools are largely an untapped resource for business with the potential to be an influential source of competitive advantage. What then are businesses looking for when deciding whether to work with a business school? When discussing with businesses the possibilities of working with a business school, two questions repeatedly surface. The first is about why a business and business school should engage and the second explores how they should engage. In short, they want to know: ‘why should we work with you?’, and ‘how will you work with us?’.

The central idea of the engaged business school provides a response to the ‘why’ question. The challenge and the opportunity for business schools is to develop as both ‘demand-led’, responsive to the needs of business and ‘leading

demand' by providing research-led latest thinking. It is also apparent that business schools which are unclear about either view-point risk being neither responsive to the needs of business, nor the source of insightful, fresh thinking to lead and help shape demand in the future. Such a position results in a 'middle of the road' compromise, a lukewarm response that is neither one of the other. The ability to hold the tension between being responsive and needs-led and a source of insight and latest thinking is what will be referred to as distinctive engagement. It is distinctive, as will become clear for a number of reasons, but not least because it is either not done well or not done at all.

Business are not just looking for a distinctive provision, they also want to know how a business school will work with them. To that question there is a very clear answer, businesses are looking for business schools that can partner with them and build a strong relationship. They place considerable value on relational rather than transactional engagement. Yet they are often frustrated and find such relationships difficult to build with business schools. What is needed is a relational model to address this issue.

Consequently, the engaged business school builds on the twin business needs for distinctive and relational engagement. Two further themes will be developed shortly to complement these initial imperatives, but for now the overriding motivation to improve engagement begins with responding to these business needs. This motivation to address the tension between what businesses want and what they too often experience should signal the need for change. But there are wider indicators for change, which not only reinforce the need but also create an urgency, suggesting that developing an engaged business school is timely.

### **Why Engagement Matters and Why It Matters Now**

A call to action suggests an urgency or timeliness about the circumstances, and often emerges from competing tensions. This is evident in the context of three imperatives, each in themselves could be considered a call to action: crises, policy shifts and rising expectations. Indeed, the need to engage more effectively with businesses becomes more compelling when combined with a sense of urgency, and a financial crisis followed by a global pandemic certainly provide that.

The recovery from and reaction to a global pandemic understandably takes shape over time. Searching and far-reaching questions about the nature of business are being asked in parallel with questions about how to help businesses and the wider economy to recover. All of which in turn prompt questions about the role business schools might play to help the recovery. However, business schools are not facing a response to a single crisis. In many ways business and society are still making sense of the global financial crisis. Two global crises clearly place an urgency upon the call for action. Firstly, the financial crisis of 2007 brought serious questions about ethics in business to the fore, and not for the first time. There had already been significant concerns expressed following collapses of businesses like Enron in the United States. Such concerns echoed warnings about extolling the virtues of 'charismatic' and 'inspirational' leadership at the expense