



BUSINESS FIRST NEW ZEALAND

ADVANCING ENGAGEMENT
AMONG INDUSTRY AND
ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES
FOR BUSINESS PROSPERITY
IN NEW ZEALAND

A report on two and a half years of engagement involving business leaders and business school academics, plus findings from a survey of 260 industry professionals, to recommend actions for outcomes-focused engagement within the wider New Zealand business community.

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1. Executive Summary

This report highlights the outcome of two and a half years of engagement among academic faculty within the Massey Business School and industry leaders from the surrounding, local business community – an initiative called *BusinessFirstNZ*. It also includes findings from a survey of industry professionals across New Zealand. The intent is to understand and make recommendations for the future needs of New Zealand's business community – to advance outcomes focused engagement among members of industry and academia.

Specifically, we report on the focus and outcome of ten half-day, face-to-face workshops held at Massey University Manawatū Campus from September 2019 – March 2022, as well as the outcome of a 2021 survey of 260 industry professionals in New Zealand. We include an industry-focused review of relevant literature to support our discussion in pursuit of answering the question: **How can the industry and academic communities advance engagement that meets the needs of both contexts?**

We suggest that responding to this question will support prosperity in New Zealand through helping (1) ensure knowledge, skills, and experiences are enriched through reciprocal exchange and development, so that (2) local business communities prosper, and (3) university teaching, research, and civic engagement remain relevant.

Our discussion highlights the modifications we have made throughout this ongoing series of workshops, as well as key findings from the survey in terms of future development to advance university-industry engagement.

Key recommendations for future engagement include:

- Hands-on and discussion forum type engagement is led by both university academics and industry professionals
- Various industry sectors are represented, with a mix of industry and academic attendees to understand 'real-world' challenges and current academic research
- Areas of focus and session topics are proposed by attendees and include practical, tangible solutions organisations can implement
- Sufficient time and means are provided for the development of collaborative relationships
- Clear, parallel agendas are collaboratively defined and undertaken to focus on varying desired outcomes (e.g., one for industry and one for academia)

A series of *BusinessFirstNZ* events is planned to continue advancing industry-academic engagement, leveraging the key topics survey and workshop participants have highlighted will be held from 1:00pm – 6:00pm on Massey University's Manawatū campus as follows:

- 14 June 2022 – Business & Sustainability Part 2: A Focus on Social Responsibility
- 30 August 2022 – The Future of Work: Employers and Employee
- 1 November 2022 – Research and Internship Engagement



2. Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to highlight the outcomes of a two and a half year initiative called *BusinessFirstNZ* and combine that discussion with findings from a survey of 260 industry professionals to investigate advancing engagement among the industry organisations and business schools in New Zealand. The objective is to consolidate our experiential findings with the data collected on the needs of various business communities across New Zealand in order to advance outcomes-focused engagement among industry professionals and academic staff.

A brief background of the *BusinessFirstNZ* initiative is provided, followed by an industry-focused review of the literature before discussion combines our experiences engaging with local industry across 2019 – 2022 and the results of the survey. The report concludes by highlighting key findings and making recommendations for future directions to enhance engagement among industry and academic parties for the advancement of business prosperity in New Zealand.



3. Background

In mid-2019, responding to calls for engagement with the business community (by both the University and the local business community), a group of Massey Business School academic staff members commenced a series of workshops with leaders of local New Zealand small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The initiative was called *BusinessFirstNZ*, with early intentions focused on assisting these leaders to highlight business problems and seek practical solutions in their pursuit of business excellence and sustainable competitiveness.

“ We saw an opportunity to engage with local businesses to develop a research agenda focused on common problem or anticipated challenges. ”

Originally, as a group of academic staff, we were motivated to engage with local businesses to develop a research agenda, through which we would help articulate business problems and seek practical solutions to support business leaders. We saw an opportunity to engage with local businesses to develop a research agenda focused on common problem or anticipated challenges. We drew on prior, similar research conducted by our university colleagues, who undertook the development of a similar research agenda in the agricultural space. The intention was to develop an agenda of work based at the University which would address the goals and circumstances of local businesses by developing and evaluating strategies appropriate to the industry.

“ The success the workshops is underpinned by drawing on subject matter, research, and teaching expertise across the university, ensuring tangible takeaways were provided for attendees to tailor and implement for their business. ”

This approach intended to bring the academic and industry communities together and attempt what may be referred to as “bridging the gap” between industry and academia.

However, as the series of workshops progressed, the focus of the overall engagement shifted away from a research agenda to meeting the immediate needs of those in attendance, by selecting key topics and bringing in experts to lead development workshops. Over time, the emphasis shifted away from bridging a perceived *gap* between research and practice or academia and industry, to fostering a place and space for the benefit of all stakeholders. Instead of continuing to pursue a formal research agenda, we instead began developing and delivering half-day workshops that focused on development needs of industry professionals based on the continued articulation of industry challenges and desired skills and knowledge required by attendees. The success of the workshops is underpinned by drawing on subject matter, research, and teaching expertise across the university, ensuring tangible takeaways were provided for attendees to tailor and implement for their business.

Despite the changes to the focus of engagement, or perhaps because of the continued response to the needs of the business community, since the commencement of *BusinessFirstNZ* we have delivered ten half-day, face-to-face workshops on Massey University’s Manawātū Campus in Palmerston North. Although the intent of the series shifted from the original focus, an overarching goal remains: we seek to advance engagement among the industry and academic communities to support business prosperity in New Zealand.

The two exploratory workshops in 2019, three dedicated workshops in 2020, one exploratory and three dedicated workshops in 2021, and one dedicated workshop in 2022 were attended by professionals from industries shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Industries represented at BusinessFirstNZ series of workshops 2019 - 2022

> Agricultural Services	> Horticulture – Fruit Orchard
> Aviation Engineering	> IT Support
> Business Development	> Leather Products
> Confectionery Manufacturing	> Machinery & Equipment
> Economic Development	> Packaging
> Education & Training	> Plastic Moulding
> Export	> Poultry Products
> Food Preparation	> Powersports Products
> Fuel Dispensing Systems	> Real Estate
> Garden Supplies	> Sports Protection
> Gas Delivery	> Structural Metal Fabrication
> Honey Production	> Winery
> Horticulture – Flowers	> Workwear

To aid our pursuit of this goal, and to ensure our approach meets the needs of the business community beyond those with whom we have been directly involved, at the end of 2021 we conducted a nationwide survey of industry professionals to better understand how to advance this engagement and refine our future focus. The results of this survey, with 260 valid responses, provided key insights into the structure of future engagement as well as the desired topics for discussion. These are included in the discussion below and inform the key recommendations at the conclusion of this report. They support the design and development of engagement as we continue the *BusinessFirstNZ* initiative, where university academics will continue engagement with industry professionals to highlight current and anticipated challenges and seek practical solutions for business excellence, sustainable competitiveness, and prosperity in New Zealand.

A common approach to “bridging the gap” between universities and industry often involves applying theory to practice, or an academic-led translation of information to practitioners

Business schools are able to provide global awareness of best practices to work with local businesses to adapt and implement in response to the complex societal challenges.



4. Literature Review

There exists an academic idea of a *gap* between theory and practice in many sectors (Susman & Evered, 1978; Rynes et al., 2001). Business and management research scholars have “discussed, argued, and debated for more than 50 years” (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014 p. 1182) the concept of an academic-practitioner gap or a divide – a phenomenon generally considered in terms of dichotomous sides or groups of individuals with competing priorities between research and practice. This phenomenon is often expressed through different definitions and approaches for engaging academic institutions and research with business communities (e.g., Amabile et al., 2001; Rynes et al., 2001; Rynes et al., 2007).

Academic researchers have spent much effort to overcoming or bridging this perceived negative space. A common approach to “bridging the gap” between universities and industry often involves applying theory to practice, or an academic-led translation of information to practitioners (Aram & Salinpantré, 2003; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). However, it is notable that these ideas and approaches have been driven and discussed by academics as opposed to within the practitioner narrative. Further, as researchers have highlighted, the term “practitioner” might primarily be used by academics (as opposed to industry professionals, who may not *need* to have a term indicating their sense of belonging) (Austin in Bartunek & Rynes, 2014).

Researchers have considered this gap as one that can occur between universities and industry, theory and practice, academics and practitioners among a variety of phrases to highlight differing motivations, outcomes, communication, and implementation of findings and in response to real-world problems. Many approaches have been proffered to bridging the gap or offering solutions to overcome or reduce this space between two groups (e.g., Saifan et al., 2021; Schaffer et al., 2015; Rolfe, 1996; Zaky & El-Faham, 1998).

Solutions range from increasing collaboration, collective efforts, and relationship building among parties has been highlighted as a means to help close this divide (e.g., Barret & Oborn, 2018; Beckman et al., 1997; Beniot et al., 2019) to embedding opportunities in higher education curriculum for students to apply their learning in experiential situations (e.g., Allsopp et al., 2006; Hatlevik, 2012; Immerstein et al., 2019; Lee, 2006; Weller, 2004; Yang, 2021).

Others have focused on research agendas and priorities of the two groups and considered improvements to knowledge and resource transfer and sharing (e.g., Gera, 2021; King et al., 2011; Price, 2015; Wallin et al., 2014; Wei et al., 2021).

Within the business sector, researchers have often considered the application of business and management research (sometimes referred to as a “relevance gap”) to industry scenarios (e.g., Baldridge et al., 2004; Bansal et al., 2012; Birkinshaw et al., 2016; Hadidi, 2014; Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009; Kieser & Leiner, 2009; Kieser et al., 2015; Perea & Brady, 2017; Rynes & Bartunek, 2001; Starkey & Madan, 2001; Turel & Koopr, 2016; Wickert et al., 2021). When the sector understands and responds to this gap – or bridges the knowledge and resources among education institutions and industry organisations – there becomes a means to advance business prosperity. Ensuring alignment between the teaching and research of New Zealand’s business schools and their applicability within the New Zealand business sector, then, is critical to advancing business prosperity.

As noted in Business NZ’s report *Business – The Beating Heart of NZ*, business success within New Zealand has a wide implication for advancing the economy through “raising prosperity and growth, and the overall standard of living in New Zealand” (2014, p. 1). Notably, within that report, the contributions of businesses to the wellbeing of society include elements such as upskilling individuals, translating great ideas into businesses, harnessing innovation to deliver unique tools and services, and identifying and exploiting new markets.

These are all actions that business schools could be helping industry with; research-led business schools ensure currency with the latest developments and focus on the provision of knowledge that is cutting edge and contemporary. That is, Business schools are able to provide global awareness of best practices to work with local businesses to adapt and implement in response to the complex societal challenges. Organisations are currently facing (e.g., Araç & Madran, 2014; Caporaello & Manzoni, 2020; Diaz & Halkias, 2021; Halkias et al., 2020; Millar et al., 2018).

In the following sections, based on our experiences engaging as business school academics with industry professionals, we discuss how New Zealand business schools might leverage engagement with their surrounding business communities to help drive prosperity in a globally competitive environment.



5. Activating Engagement – Planning a Series of Workshops

In seeking to bridge the perceived academic-practitioner or university-industry gap, while prioritising the needs of industry partners, we drew on prior research in both business and the agricultural sector, noting the latter was conducted in the same region of New Zealand in which we were operating.

We sought to deliver a series of workshops that would bring academics and industry professionals together to try and bridge the gap between each group's context to develop a single research agenda in which industry priorities were set and implemented through academic research. At the time, our intentions were not unlike many other business school academics, in that we wanted to apply our theoretical understanding and frameworks to practical problems (refer Amabile et al., 2001; Banks et al., 2016; Bansal et al., 2012; Daft & Lewin, 1990, 2008; Lilien, 2011; Lockhart & Stablein, 2002; Luna & Velasco, 2003; Ranjan & Gera, 2012).

We initially called this series of workshops "New Zealand Business First: Collaboratively identifying business dilemmas through engagement with business, for business" with an intention of learning from businesses about their problems and dilemmas, to develop a more effective response through a research agenda within the university.

Notably, this design leveraged findings from colleagues at our university who had previously undertaken an agenda of work "based at [the] University to complement the contribution research makes to the NZ agricultural industry ... to establish formally [the industry's] goals and circumstances ... [to] design and evaluate strategies that are appropriate to the goals and circumstance of farmers" (Reid et al., 1993, p. 13). However, as the authors highlighted in their critical review of the research programme, the "limited number of individuals engaged, [in the programme and a] lack of quality interactions between actors and across broad networks" (Reid & Brazendale, 2014, p. 216) restricted their ability to progress this academic-industry research innovation system.

“Our a-ha moment: less formal research-driven agenda, less focus on “levelling the playing field,” and more focus on responding to short term development needs of participants was going to keep the engagement going.”

Further, we sought to leverage the collaboration, collective efforts, and relationship building approaches that other management research scholars have suggested. Our intent was to offer workshops that facilitated the collaborative voice of local business leaders in a space where business school academics could consolidate common problems to develop a research agenda. The idea was to foster collaboration through a jointly developed research agenda; specifically we planned to take the role of facilitator, bringing together respective businesses, industry associations, and agencies to develop a collaborative project that would identify, disseminate, and support implementing innovative solutions to address business dilemmas.

However, what we realised midway through the second workshop was there was our a-ha moment: less formal research-driven agenda, less focus on "levelling the playing field," and more focus on responding to short term development needs of participants was going to keep the engagement going. At this point we revised the approach of our engagement sessions and amended the title of the series, to keep business at the forefront, but remove the alignment with the prior research agenda development. We were now focused on *BusinessFirst*—that is, driving prosperity of business in New Zealand, with the support and action of business academics and industry professionals. The following section highlights the refined structure of engagement, the focus of key workshops, facilitators, and tangible takeaways for attendees.



6. Refining Engagement – Revising Structure and Content

Following reflection on the first two workshops, we adjusted our approach. We sought advice from attendees in terms of structure and content and allowed industry professionals to offer “rules of engagement.”

Key points to highlight, and “rules” to follow as we revised our engagement included:

- Continuous discovery of challenges (risks and opportunities) impacting businesses – common themes of concern or interest would inform future workshops in a “just-in-time” manner
- Contextualized problem identification and solving to provide business leaders with tangible outputs to implement at their respective organisation, post-workshop
- Massey-led workshop development and delivery to provide facilitated discussion for actions and supplementary resources, which individual businesses can tailor as required
- Limit academic graphs and US-based case studies, but leverage academic expertise to provide insights into current research and approaches to thinking, but in a manner that suits the audience
- Strike a balance between offering information and hands-on workshop or small group discussion to unpack concepts within individual organisations
- Half-day workshops to enable sufficient time for learning new concepts, applying ideas to various contexts, working in small groups, debriefing in large groups, and informal networking
- Workshop sizes of 10 – 20 participants, with a combination of academic and industry attendees, offer good sizes for small and large group discussions – when small groups are used, facilitate each with different academic staff

The focus of each workshop prior to the 2021 survey is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. BusinessFirstNZ workshops 2019 through 2021

Workshop, Guest Expert, Date	Key Objectives, Activities, and Tangible Takeaways
<p>Collaboratively identifying business dilemmas through engagement with business, for business</p> <p>Led by Dr James Lockhart</p> <p>Sept 2019</p>	<p>Attendees were polled prior to the workshop to gather an understanding of common challenges, drivers for decision-making, strategies for decision-making, and anticipated big issues in business.</p> <p>These were discussed in more depth during the facilitated session, with recognition of the following common themes among businesses in attendance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance/regulatory framework and in particular, increasing and changing compliance requirements, a lack of modelling or understanding by Governmental policy makers • Margin retention and the classic cost/price squeeze, where marginal value is eroded from multiple sources • Staff/people, especially the importance of getting the right people for the right job. NZ suffers staffing shortages, irrespective of transience, surge labour, seasonal effects, or skilled labour
<p>Collaboratively identifying business dilemmas through engagement with business, for business</p> <p>Led by Professor Dirk Boehe</p> <p>Nov 2019</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The intent of this workshop was to work with those in attendance to generate potential collaborative solutions in response to the identified themes earlier agreed. • However, as the workshop progressed, it became evident that collaborative solutions or common solutions to the agreed issues was not ideal for those in attendance. Instead, discussing common challenges and identifying potential tools or techniques for individual businesses to tailor to their specific needs would be more appropriate. • The discussion then proceeded to understand key business and management concepts that would support such solutions, along with tangible outputs that could be tailored as required. The following were identified: • Delegation, governance, and decision-making models to allow the right people time to spend time appropriately in or on a business, including self-awareness/reflection • Understanding current supply or value chain constraints, including products and income stream dependencies and buyer invoked resistance/perception • Managing organisational change, including resistance to change and effects on management and employees • Developing, refining, and understanding business models, business plans, and strategies, including planning and risk management • The need for market research and the ability to test, examine, and validate assumptions • Understanding internal and external processes and their impact on real, meaningful change

Workshop, Guest Expert, Date	Key Objectives, Activities, and Tangible Takeaways
<p>Business models: Developing tailored business models and plans to work for you</p> <p>Led by Professor Stephen Kelly</p> <p>Feb 2020</p>	<p>The first of the topic-specific workshops focused on supporting senior managers, and owners to develop and review business strategy, including articulating mission, vision, objectives, and goals. Attendees were guided through the <i>how</i> and <i>why</i> of developing a plan for their businesses. The session introduced attendees to strategic and operations planning and associated barriers. They considered, through general discussion, the temptation to focus on short term objectives, not identifying enterprise competence, not delegating tasks, misunderstanding of what it is that management should do, and in some cases, not having the right interpersonal skills necessary to turn a vision into reality.</p> <p>Participants were then supported to apply the concepts to their individual contexts through a step-by-step process in which they responded to questions that required them to contemplate and discuss the ideas considering their own businesses.</p>
<p>Letting go: Effective delegation for enhanced decision making</p> <p>Led by Mrs Beth Tootell</p> <p>July 2020</p>	<p>Following a similar structure to the first topic-specific workshop, participants were introduced to varying perspectives and concepts relating to effective delegation before applying concepts to their individual business. Participants completed this workshop with an understand of the following, including how to apply the ideas to practice within their own organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective delegation can enable business owners/managers the time and focus to work on their business rather than in their business (and can be more cost effective in the long run). • Delegation can happen for differing levels of authority and responsibility, though the person delegating still has overall accountability. Understanding and choosing the right level is what will make delegation effective. • Selecting the 'right' person for the job, explaining why you are delegating, providing appropriate resources and training, checking in and providing feedback (without micro-managing) are practical actions that will support effective delegation. • Creating an environment/culture where people can speak up and approach you without hesitation and recognising that mistakes will happen no matter how hard you try to avoid them are elements of delegation to value and acknowledge.
<p>Fail fast: How to fail your way to success in a crazy world</p> <p>Led by Associate Professor David Tweed</p> <p>Oct 2020</p>	<p>In this workshop, participants were supported to explore their specific businesses, the strategic decisions that are being made and enacted, and then to consider how to remain successful in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world.</p> <p>Noting this workshop took place following the first New Zealand-wide 'lockdown' as a response to COVID-19, participants were encouraged to look beyond the near-future and supported to develop a number of practical business responses to real world scenarios to approach decision-making in uncertain times. Attendees were helped to assess the current state of their business in terms of the VUCA elements, and then worked to consider future strategic pathways for products, services, and markets. m small "experiments" and "fail their way to success."</p>

Workshop, Guest Expert, Date

Key Objectives, Activities, and Tangible Takeaways

Reflections for excellence: Review, refine, and next steps

Led by Dr Wayne Macpherson & Dr Jennifer Scott

Nov 2020 – Feb 2021

In place of a single workshop, one-on-one and small group discussions were held to review the first five workshops and plan for future engagement among local businesspeople and Massey academic staff. Key themes that arose during these conversations included:

- Continue hosting at the University campus
- Maintain the back-and-forth rhythm of large group information delivery and small group discussion
- Bring in experts from across the University
- Focus on topics that continue to support identification and articulation of business problems and then use theory to help consideration of potential solutions, but that can be applied at individual businesses
- Embrace the various roles in the room – academic staff should not try to 'be' or 'be like' industry professionals
- Less informal networking and more learning from university experts
- More engagement with students (e.g., in class projects, guest speakers, internship opportunities)

Notably here, the desire from industry professionals was to learn from the different perspectives and current research that university academics could bring to the engagement; they highlighted that if they wanted to hear from more industry experts, they could get that elsewhere. This solidified the structure of facilitating half-day, on-campus workshops, with a mix of content delivery and small group discussions, led by an academic expert in the topic of focus.

Understanding your market

Led by Dr Pam Feetham & Mr Mark Inman

March 2021

This workshop provided participants with several tools and techniques that would allow them to understand who their external stakeholders are, and how to effectively respond to their market. Attendees considered strategic positioning of their products or services, leading to group discussions about how and where they are competing, and how they are perceived in the minds of their customers. They were introduced to market segmentation as a means for them to identify their customers and what, where and why they buy the products and services they do.

Attendees were supported to explore who they saw as customers, the means to categorise them, their attractiveness for being pursued, and the means to target these segments with effective messaging (marketing and engagement).

Workshop, Guest Expert, Date

Key Objectives, Activities, and Tangible Takeaways

Supply chain management: Part 1 – Market risks, mega trends, and negotiation

Led by Dr Carel Bezuidenhout

June 2021

This workshop introduced attendees to the different competencies of supply chain management, a broad umbrella approach to considering mega trends and risk reports, and the means to apply these concepts to grassroots, local business environments. Attendees contributed to a local business 'Landscape Scan' to produce a summary of current risks they are facing, from the perspective of local businesses, followed by a discussion of risk reports and global trends that might impact their operations.

This enabled attendees to consider and discuss the impact of global risks and mega risk trends on their business, and the local business context. Finally, attendees participated in a simulated experience, wherein they acted as 'Lifestyle Farmers' responding to market price fluctuations. Throughout this simulation, concepts associated with negotiation, cooperation, and trading were introduced and expanded on.

Supply chain management: Part 2 – Applying SCM concepts to your business

Led by Professor Paul Childerhouse

Oct 2021

Building on the first supply chain management workshop, in this session, attendees participated in two simulated supply chains, with the following highlighted:

- Information distortion increases when all actors are focused on their own agendas and own problems (e.g., internal processes, internal goals, internal bottom line).
- Uncertainties arise in supply and demand as well as internal processes. The more complications that arise, the more uncertainties you have to deal with. Focus on optimising internal operations and reducing internal issues first, these first as they are the easiest uncertainties to control.
- The systems in a supply chain foster a delay of decisions if they are not well integrated but can support co-creation of value when leveraged effectively.
- Inventory is not the answer; connectivity is. People create new connections and pathways, and these connections provide resilience.



7. Continuing Engagement – Informed Design for the Future

Noting the refinements we have made, the continued success of the workshops, and the ongoing feedback we receive from attendees, we also sought to extend input for future development to ensure engagement among industry professionals and university academic staff was fit for purpose to deliver value to all involved. To this end, we circulated a survey at the end of 2021 to businesspeople across New Zealand.

Receiving 260 responses has allowed us to further understand the factors that will help support and advance future engagement among business leaders and business school academics, and ensure this engagement is enhanced in a manner that supports the goals of all stakeholders. This includes understanding the relationship between the two groups and how that can be supported and fostered for genuine and sustainable economic and social advancement.

The breakdown of respondents in terms of the roles held within their organisation, the sector of their organisation, and the size of the organisation they work for, are shown in Tables 3 to 5 and Figures 1 to 3.

Table 3. Roles of respondents within their organisations

Respondent's role in organisation	Number of respondents
Company owners or directors	59
Executive managers	21
Senior managers	44
Middle managers	91
Senior team members	23
Junior team members	14
Other	8

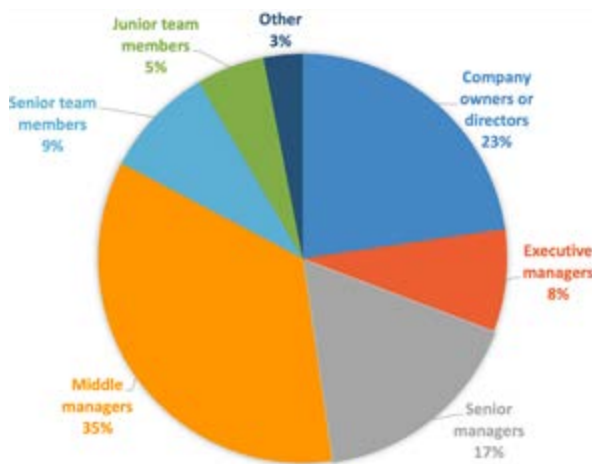


Figure 1. Roles represented by respondents

Table 4. Sector of respondent's organisation

Respondent's sector	Number of respondents
Primary	15
Secondary	44
Tertiary	201

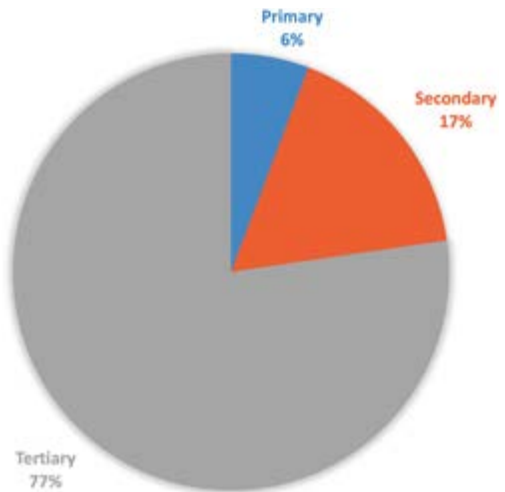


Figure 2. Sectors represented by respondents

Table 5. Size of respondent's organisation (number of employees)

Number of employees at respondent's organisation	Number of respondents
1 - 9	69
10 - 19	21
20 - 49	44
50 - 99	43
100+	83

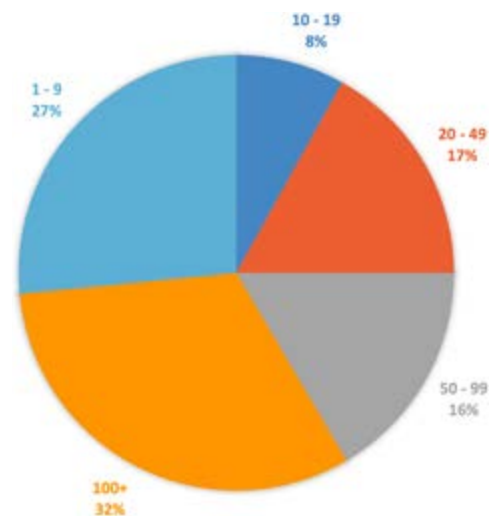


Figure 3. Organisational size (by employee numbers) represented by respondents

Survey respondents were asked about the content and structure of engagement among universities and local businesses, noting the overarching intent was to advance engagement for business prosperity in New Zealand.

For the questions shown in Tables 6 and 7, respondents were asked to rate benefit and importance to them and/or their organisation. The responses included in the tables below had an overall positive average response. That is, these are the elements of engagement that respondents, overall, consider beneficial or important to future engagement among universities and local businesses.

Table 6. Beneficial activities

When considering engagement with business schools, the types of activities I and/or my organisation would benefit from are:
Hands-on or discussion-forum type workshops led by topic experts
Reading material and worksheets or workbooks provided at the event, to take away
Support in articulating business challenges
Hearing what current academic research says about the future of business
Support in developing tangible solutions to business problems
Brainstorming possible solutions to common problems with other industry

Table 7. Important elements of engagement

When considering engagement with business schools, from an industry perspective, it is important that:
Attendees receive formal recognition for engagement
Different industry sectors are represented at events
Industry representatives receive tangible solutions to problems
The university is able to share resources
Academic research is undertaken to respond to industry problems
There is a clear, ongoing research agenda the group is committed to in order to solve big problems
There is a focus on practical, tangible, solutions I/my organisation can easily implement
There is a natural evolution of collaborative relationships (e.g., they develop organically)
Sufficient time is spent establishing mutual trust among attendees
General industry business problems are discussed and addressed

Respondents were asked to indicate their preference in terms of the structure of engagement among university academics and industry professionals.

Based on the responses, a future structure would include consideration and planning underpinned by the concepts shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Suggestions for future industry-academia engagement

Structure of engagement
A planned series of events
Held in the afternoons
Approximately quarterly engagements
Somewhat formal seminar/lecture style events
Both clear topic vs open discussion for top-of-mind matters
Held at different industry partner locations
Large group mixing individuals from both university and industry
Strong practical industry focus
Topics voted on by attendees

Finally, respondents were asked to identify key topics they would be interested in, or key topics they consider critical for the academic and industry communities to work on together and discuss when engaging to advance business prosperity in New Zealand. Table 9 includes overarching themes that were identified.

Table 9. Suggested topics for future engagement

Themes for future topics
Navigating uncertain external environments
Identifying and responding to future scenarios
Engagement with internship programmes and students
Economics and finance in practical terms
Business ethics
Sustainability and grand challenges
Wellbeing
New business models
The future of the workforce – employees and employers

Following review of the 2019 - 2021 workshops (as shown in Table 2) and the survey responses, we revised our plan for the 2022 series of workshops. Table 10 provides an overview of the first of four workshops. Notably, to maintain currency and respond to the immediate needs of the business community, we requested feedback at the conclusion of the first workshop about the topic for the subsequent engagement. Rather than moving to the next discreet topic, attendees suggested continuing to explore Business and Sustainability would be more useful, and so we have amended the original 2022 schedule to incorporate a Part 2.

Table 10. BusinessFirstNZ workshops commencing 2022 – post survey

March 2022	Business & Sustainability: Part 1 – An Environmental Focus
Workshop topic generation	Input from past attendees and suggestions obtained from the 2021 survey.
Invited facilitator	<p>Dr Anna Berka, School of Management.</p> <p>Areas of expertise: management, environmental economics, environmental and biological sciences.</p>
Key objectives/ Practical focus	To support attendees in thinking about how they can orient themselves and their business regarding social and environmental problems and determining which issues to tackle as they advance their sustainability leadership.
Format of engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half-day workshop, with a mix of large group discussions, new information delivered by the facilitator, and small, table-based discussions and completion of worksheets. • Mix of businesspeople to academic staff in a ratio of approximately 4:1 Brainstorming common challenges and possible solutions at sector-level. • Worksheets to support individual business considerations – facilitated time to work on during small group sessions. • Three ‘lead-in’ sessions of approximately 20-minute each for the introduction of new information were each followed by small group discussions and work on applying concepts to individual organisations.
Key takeaways	<p>The workshop was broken into three smaller sessions, with Dr Berka providing overviews before small group discussions allowed for exploration among attendees on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability challenges and opportunities. • The road to sustainability leadership. • Tools and resources: From understanding your impacts to a sustainability strategy. <p>By the end of the workshop, attendees had delved into several material issues for their sectors and considered initiatives that their individual organisations could engage with to respond to sustainability challenges and opportunities. Specifically, attendees had:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed an understanding relevant environmental impacts of various businesses and sectors. • Considered the sustainability challenges and opportunities within New Zealand. • Identified relevant material sustainability issues for businesses and sectors. • Recognised and acknowledged barriers in the SME context for sustainability leadership. • Considered examples of tools and resources for sustainability assessment that they could apply within their own organisations. <p>At the conclusions of the workshop, attendees requested a follow-up session that provided them an opportunity to continue exploring sustainability in relation to their business and sector. This request is being addressed in the series of planned events.</p>



8. Conclusions

Business and management research scholars have discussed and debated a perceived gap between theory and practice – a concept or phenomenon generally considered in terms of dichotomous sides or groups of individuals with competing priorities. What we had recognized, however, is that research has been and, generally continues to be, conducted to inform or improve *practice* (doing business) or to refine and progress *theory* (researching business). Research is rarely designed to do both, and those interpreting outcomes are not necessarily tuned into both theory and practice.

To help explore this dilemma and see if we could maintain an outcomes focus that would benefit business in New Zealand more broadly, our research question was: How can the industry and academic communities advance engagement that meets the needs of both contexts?

While our original plan has meandered, and the structure and format of the workshops changed, along with the key focus, what we have found through two and a half years of engagement along with a survey of 260 businesspeople across New Zealand gives a good indication of where to from here. Our engagements have focused on development needs of industry professionals and desired skills and knowledge required by attendees. Using an action research approach, we have evaluated and refined our processes and the topics of engagement. The New Zealand-wide survey provided additional qualitative and quantitative data about the structure and content needs to advance meaningful engagement.

While our findings provide specific recommendations for the structure and content of future engagement activities, they also suggest the construction of agendas, questions, and focused solutions be done collaboratively while maintaining distinct purposes. Rather than continuing to focus on research translation or developing hybrid research agendas to bridge a gap, the differences among the groups should be embraced. If all parties embrace articulating problems from varying perspectives, co-creating parallel plans or programmes, and seeking outcomes or outputs that provide value for all parties, the engagement will be meaningful and fit for multiple purposes.

“ *How can the industry and academic communities advance engagement that meets the needs of both contexts?* ”



“ Effective engagement can support the articulation of business problems, brainstorming possible solutions to common challenges, and developing tangible solutions that can be applied within individual organisations. ”

“ Advancing business school and industry engagement will allow collaboration for new ways of thinking about and solving problems using contemporary, cutting-edge theoretical perspectives for current and future dilemmas ”

“ Maintaining and supporting both groups for their respective agendas will result in enhanced outcomes for both. ”



9. Recommendations

We suggest that advancing engagement among the academic and industry communities can and will continue to drive business prosperity in New Zealand. However, we suggest this is done through clearly defined parallel agendas that are developed and maintained collaboratively, rather than trying to force a hybrid model to do so.

Different agendas can and should be developed. These different – yet semi-parallel – plans or agendas can be put in place, and outcomes for each community will then be recognised. Effective engagement can support the articulation of business problems, brainstorming possible solutions to common challenges, and developing tangible solutions that can be applied within individual organisations. Once these parallel agendas are well-articulated, they can be executed to result in relevant outputs for each group.

Business Schools (and the academics within them):

- will not be providing textbook answers to problems, but supporting industry professionals to consider challenges from a contemporary, cutting-edge theoretical perspective
- can continue to explore, research, and teach theory, while helping future graduates (who can become future employees and employers) to develop new ways of thinking about and solving problems and dilemmas

Organisations (and the industry professionals within them):

- will not simply be bringing problems to ‘fit’ within a research agenda, but bring practical, complex examples, and challenge the academics to support practical solutions
- can continue driving employment and productivity

Doing this in a way that is collaborative elevates the different agendas. Maintaining and supporting both groups for their respective agendas will result in enhanced outcomes for both. When these two groups can come together though, and share their knowledge, expertise, examples, and collaborate for future agendas and the means by which they can support one another, that is where the growth and advancement will happen.



10. References

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