

**The EFMD-SSRR meeting, August 10, Monday, Vancouver 8:30 – 11:30 am  
Simon Fraser University, Beedie School of Business**

Present project team members:

**Scholars:** Mary Jo Bitner (marketing, ASU, US), Jerry Davis (management, Michigan, US), Thomas Dyllick (management, University of St. Gallen), Anne Tsui (management, Notre Dame, US and China)

**Deans:** Ingmar Bjorkman (Aalto, Finland), Gerry George (SMU, Singapore), Katrin Muff (BSL, Switzerland), Xiaobo Wu (Zhejiang U., China)

**EFMD:** Howard Thomas (EFMD and SMU); Matthew Wood (EFMD, Belgium)

**Special guests:** Paul Adler (President, AOM), Dan LeClair and Patrick Cullen (AACSB)

Absent project team members:

**Scholars:** Franklin Allen (finance, Imperial College, UK), Mats Alvesson (management, U of Lund, Sweden), Marshall Fisher (supply chain, Wharton, US), Peter McKiernan (strategy, Strathclyde, Scotland and Australia), Serguei Netessine (operations, INSEAD, Singapore), Maureen O'Hara (finance, Cornell, U.S.), Dave Reibstein (marketing, Wharton, US), Chris Tang (operations, UCLA)

**EFMD:** Ulrich Hommel (research and surveys, Germany, EFMD), Rajani Naidoo (education management, U of Bath, and EFMD R&D Steering Committee)

**The vision**

“Business school research in service of science and society”

**Outcomes of the Meeting**

The agenda has four main action items for discussion. Below are the outcomes with suggested action steps. The minutes of the meeting follow and they provide the major points of discussion that led to the outcomes reached during the meeting.

- a) Board of Governors comprising the accreditation agencies and associations of the core disciplines of the business school. Decision: hold off on this and follow a grass-root, bottom up social movement approach led by a group of thought leaders in each of the major disciplines of the business schools.
- b) Grand Challenges special issues in leading journals across the core disciplines. Decision: pursue this action. The goal is to engage the top journals of the disciplines (other journals are welcome) to have a common Call for Papers ready for announcement before launching conference with the special issues published at about the same time. Mary Jo will work with team members in the disciplines to organize the special issues.
- c) Position paper outlining possible actions/solutions by each stakeholder. Decision: pursue this action with Gerry George and Jerry Davis taking the lead in writing the paper in partnership with team members in other disciplines such as Finance, Marketing, and Operations. We need to set a target date for the final version for dissemination and comments on a dedicated website with blogging and

endorsement by individuals and organizations. We should allow a few months for wide consultation on the paper before finalization. Ideally, the final version should be ready by the launching conference.

- d) Launching conference and award programs: Instead of a big conference, we agreed that we might reach more scholars by holding mini conferences or workshops at each of the discipline's annual meeting, at the general meetings of the accreditation agencies, and other conferences interested in this project.

## Minutes

### 1. Introduction

- a. Matthew Wood introduced the project history and objective.
- b. Meeting participants gave a self-introduction and explained what attracted them to the meeting. There was a broad consensus that the current state of research is not meeting the needs or expectations of society with wide support for the principles and ideas shared around the group.

### 2. Background/Context

- a. Anne provided a few additional points on the background information, a document sent to the meeting participants before the meeting.
  - i. The problem has two dimensions: scientific rigor and societal relevance. The current working title for the project is "scientifically and socially responsible research (SSRR)" or in short "Responsible Science". However, we should consider a most appropriate name for the project to avoid confusion with research on social responsibility topics. The nature of science (good science with relevance for society) is the major focus.
  - ii. The boundary of this project is research, not teaching. However, good research on problems relevant to society will spill over positively into teaching.
  - iii. This is a difficult problem with tremendous inertia if not resistance from many stakeholders, including researchers. Most of the scholars have learned to do well under the current system, lowering the motivation to change.
  - iv. The problem involves many inter-connected groups including accreditation agencies, ranking publishers, journals, professional associations, and senior scholars. If all groups agree that business schools should engage in good science that contributes to solving society's business and organizational problems, then there is hope for change.
  - v. Lastly, Anne suggested an annual review to assess progress. If the review suggests great obstacles and low probability of success, we should be willing to stop the project. This is to avoid the "escalation of commitment" problem. However, with the group of high quality scholars on the project team, Anne expressed optimism on the project.

- b. The group engaged in a discussion about the nature of the problem. Ingmar recognized the enormity of the problem but we must do something about it. Gerry reminded us that

the problem might not be the same in different locations. In some societies, the social distance between the business school and society is not as large as in some other societies. Some might be doing what we have expressed in our vision already (suggesting the possibility of identifying pioneers and innovators for awards). He suggested that we might want to take a broader view of our impact on the community, beyond businesses. Jerry Davis reinforced the need to take a systems approach (the inter-connectedness among various groups), and also to recognize that there is resistance from within. We also have to address the PhD training problem. Mary Jo agreed that doctoral students want to do meaningful research. There are many human issues and business schools should engage in transformative research. Patrick added that the current system incentivizes scholars to be selfish. We should encourage faculty to be public servants and reevaluate the doctoral training focus. Jerry would love for young scholars to ask the question “Can I get tenure doing this kind of work” rather than “Can I get tenure” (without consideration of the kind of research). Thomas Dyllick said that business can be a force for good and big business is changing. Xiaobo Wu said that Chinese business schools have two kinds of faculty – those trained in overseas universities, and those trained locally. Overseas scholars lack local knowledge. Local scholars’ work on local problems has difficulty being published in top tier journals. He said that change along the line of this project is desperately needed. Ingmar said that we might also want to consider the role of the government, e.g., UK’s research assessment exercise now includes social impact of research into the assessment criteria of university research for funding decisions. This could potentially bring about big changes when converting research to impact. Paul Adler wondered if we should get the support of PRME, or even under the umbrella of Global Compact. Anne said that the research community should define the standards of research.

In summary, there is broad agreement about the need to create a movement to refine how we focus research in business schools and the need to start solving problems of society. How do we transform institutional research policy and celebrate social impact of research? Can we create a social movement among the community of scholars?

Coffee Break and group picture: Please see the last page of this report for the group picture.

### 3. Discussion on the four action items.

- a. Board of Governors: Jerry Davis led the discussion. The Board of Governors may comprise the two major accreditation agencies and the five to seven professional associations. Jerry asked whether this group would serve in an advisory or in a control capacity, or whether it is for endorsement or legitimacy. Paul Adler suggested that it could be a “commission” by the disciplines’ professional associations for this group to study this problem and identify solutions. It became clear that getting seven large organizations to formally endorse the initiative (and thus to sign off on any proposed actions) could slow things down far too much. The team agreed that it would be better to approach it as a grassroots social movement, led by a team of thought leaders in the major business disciplines, without creating a higher-level governance structure at the start. (This might be re-visited at a later date.) Howard cautioned about “US-centricism”. What about the associations of

other countries? Dan LeClair saw the merit in the idea of inviting senior scholars to commit to change. Groups like EFMD and AACSB could help by watering the seed and nurturing its growth. The alternative idea of treating it as a grass-root, bottom-up social movement by a group of thought leaders of each of the major disciplines within the business school, seems more attractive. After much discussion, there was consensus that we will not pursue the idea of a Board of Governors.

- b. Grand Challenges special issues. Mary Jo Bitner led the discussion on the idea of a special issue on the “grand challenges in business and management” by the leading journals of the disciplines. Gerry George shared the experience with AMJ’s grand challenge special issue. There is a good response suggesting interest among scholars on studying real problems. Jerry said that if all the journals from all the disciplines were to publish a special issue on grand challenges at about the same time, it would be a very powerful signal. There can be some common topics and some unique to each discipline. Katrin wondered if the issues might even address one single issue. After a short discussion, a consensus seemed apparent that this is a do-able idea. Mary Jo will take the lead to pursue this idea.
- c. Position Paper. Gerry George led the discussion. We agreed that this is a paper on Call for Action. It should clearly define the “problem” and the “vision”, and to focus on possible actions by each of the stakeholders that either directly or indirectly connect to the research activities of the business school. Dan LeClair mentioned that AACSB has developed a website ([aacsb.edu/vision](http://aacsb.edu/vision)) on the education vision of the future of business schools. It might provide some ideas on how to write this position paper. It was suggested that Gerry and Jerry take the lead on this paper, involving additional scholars from other disciplines (e.g., in finance, marketing, operations).
- d. Launching conference and awards. Katrin Muff led this discussion. Instead of a big conference, another possibility is to hold small conferences or workshops at each of the professional associations during their annual meetings. We can also tag on a day at the EFMD and AACSB meetings. Once we have a website, we can have each of the associations to open a page for this project and link to the project’s main website. The website also should have sections for comments, a blog, and signatures to support the movement by individual scholars and institutions (e.g., business schools, ranking publishers, etc.) We did not discuss the awards program but it can be considered as part of the preparation of the launching activities. We will need to form a task group to design this event, working with team members in each discipline. Katrin is willing to be part of this task group.

#### 4. Conclusion

- a. Ingmar Bjorkman said the project is in line with society’s expectations of the business school, and in line with what we SHOULD do.
- b. Xiaobo Wu reiterated the problems in Chinese business schools, tension between internationalization and local relevance. Chinese business schools need guidance.

Meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

**Participants of the Inaugural Meeting of the SSRR Project Team on August 10, 2015,  
Vancouver, Canada**



Last row: Howard Thomas, Patrick Cullen, Dan LeClair, Paul Adler, Xiaobo Wu  
Middle row: Mary Jo Bitner, Katrin Muff, Jerry Davis, Thomas Dyllick  
Front row: Ingmar Bjorkman, Matthew Wood, Anne Tsui, Gerry George