

New horizons

The *Journal of Global Responsibility* was partly born seven years ago out of discussions at a GRLI annual event in Belo Horizonte in Brazil. The idea of the horizon is appropriate. It is about the limit of a person's knowledge, experience or interest, the very thing which determines how we see the world. A key function of the journal has been to contribute to the broadening of horizons. Do we see the horizon of business as including attention to human rights? Does the horizon of higher education include peace building and conflict resolution? Can we see the future of cities, and if so how is business and civil society part of that? And so on [...].

The years 2016/2017 seem to have radically challenged the Western liberal horizon. Many of us have taken for granted a rather beautiful and broad horizon, foregrounded by space for everyone, expressed in terms of human rights, inclusiveness, shared responsibility and so on. The spectacles through which we see that picture involve values like reason, autonomy and tolerance, and virtues such as wisdom, which precisely enable a balanced perspective. There have always been those who contested this view of the world from a neo-liberal perspective, but in a sense that was quite easy to handle. It was a battle of two major paradigms – neo-liberalism focused in shareholder value, and responsible leadership focused in serving society.

Now things are changing. [Thompson \(2016\)](#) suggests that the public discourse is breaking down. Rationality and wisdom, and with these also traditional “experts”, seem no longer to be prized, and the simple “paradigm” of neo-liberalism has been replaced by a number of complex narratives, which express fear of globalization, seek clearer national identity, and raise challenges about fairness and equality. Many politicians, and the rest of the “the elites”, did not see it coming. There is real irony that the Western liberal horizon, characterized as broad, rational and stable, failed to give attention to the narrow, emotional and non-stable. I do not use these terms pejoratively, partly because these different narratives do raise important issues of justice and security. Politicians of all hues have failed to engage these narratives, and it is fair to say that the result is uncharted waters.

[Wolin \(2010\)](#); [Hedges \(2010\)](#) and others have argued that what has led to this, certainly in the USA, is the “incorporation” of democracy. Business behind the scenes has dominated politics, through intense lobbying, leading to a form of an “inverted totalitarianism”, not based in ideology but rather in materialism. Wolin argues that this is focused precisely on subverting genuine democratic dialogue (whilst at the same time avowing to uphold democracy) and substituting this with populism and propaganda. At the same time, it is the corporate-centred policies, not least de-regulation, which have led to the major financial crises and the growth of a remarkable wealth gap in the USA[1]. Now the face of corporate democracy is less behind the scenes. The president of the USA is a businessman with no experience of public service, voted-in to fix the “mess” that politicians have got the nation into. This is not the place to analyse this thesis in detail. However, it is clear that underlying this dynamic are many myths which contribute towards the breakdown of rational discourse and that these are remarkably resilient, with less clarity about how they can be publicly and rationally challenged.



One key myth is that business leaders are magical, able to solve any problem. Mr Trump is the most remarkable manifestation of this myth, but as I write, a billionaire businessman is being touted for an external review of the intelligence agencies in the USA, and the new president's cabinet is populated mostly by billionaire businessmen. The myth of the fixer replaces the ideal of the wise leader. In turn, this is supported by an academic myth, prevalent in business schools, that there is a science of fixing (Huzzard *et al.*, 2017), we only need to develop the models and then everyone can use them. The fixer does not engage with people so much as use the tool, the magic tools of seven steps, more or less. Sliding in behind this is the myth that the business leader does not have to be an expert in the area concerned. They have the unique capacity to fix anything, health, higher education and so on. And how quickly governments have ingested this myth, from business leaders "fixing" higher education in the United Kingdom (UK) (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010) to a climate change sceptic, with no scientific expertise, endorsed as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-39010374).

It is remarkable how robust these myths have become, and they dominate issues such as the remuneration of the CEO. Whenever the high rewards of CEOs are questioned, we see the same mantras: the limited market of those capable of fulfilling these posts, money as the only motivation of business leaders, the danger of losing such magical figures to foreign fields and the high level of risk and stress which demands bonuses even when the business is failing. Few of these arguments have empirical credibility, or logical or moral coherence (Kolb, 2006), and behind them is the figure of the "great" leader, who is necessary if we are to secure survival and success. Who says so? Nonetheless, the myth stays firmly in place, partly because there is not the time and the space to actually think about it. A good example of finding time and space is the UK Green Paper on corporate governance (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584013/corporate-governance-reform-green-paper.pdf), which has invited contributions about CEO remuneration, amongst others. It remains to be seen if this will lead to an effective engagement with justice in the workplace, without involving the workplace in that dialogue. Wolin's thesis suggests that this kind of debate is the last thing democracy incorporated wants. The fixer does not have time for debate and dialogue, or reflection on purpose, still less for regulation. There are too many objectives and tight deadlines, most of them, of course, put in place by the fixer.

I am not suggesting that testing such myths is easy, not least because there are many other narratives which make effective public debate difficult and which provide flying buttresses to maintain the myths. The rise of Trump has been accompanied by the Christian Right and nationalists, who share the anti-intellectualist stance; the gun lobby and others, who see the elites as robbing them of freedom (even the freedom of mentally ill to own guns); the poor who have been left behind and who have lost faith in politicians; and those who fear the incursion of aliens, i.e. Muslims. None of these narratives are "bad", but there is little effective public dialogue to engage them.

So who is testing them? Academics such as the late Bauman (1989) rail, Cassandra-like, against the consumerization of society and the use of instrumental rationality. But who is listening to that discourse other than the intellectual elite? It is not surprising that this kind of expertise has become marginalized, after all it cannot "fix" anything. Business schools have had little effect on debates such as this, which is largely because they have been focused on producing fixers. Most do not

take seriously the relationship between business and society or business and politics. Psychologists such as [Haidt \(2012\)](#) have argued that it is not really possible to develop coherent debate. He argues that the values of the liberals and conservatives are “set” and these control any “debate”, not rules of discourse. As Private Willis puts it in the act II of *Iolanthe*, every boy or girl born into this world “is either a little Liberal, or else a little Conservative!”. Haidt’s thesis has little merit, ignoring the effects of dynamics, or the possibility of speaking truth to power or what it actually means to use our brains in the debate[2].

[MacIntyre \(1987\)](#), demonstrating that this issue is nothing new, enters the fray with the argument that it is precisely the purpose of universities to contribute to the development of an educated public. There are two key parts to this. First, it involves teaching people to think for themselves. Second, it involves asking the solid question about the purpose of our practice, “For the sake of what is that being done?” ([MacIntyre, 1987](#), p. 17). MacIntyre builds this argument on the example of the eighteenth century university reforms in Scotland, which saw universities contributing to the development of public debate and dialogue[3]. According to MacIntyre, this depends on three conditions being met. First, there needs to be a significant number of individuals who are trained how to ask these questions in practice, and how to discern together the implications of these for their shared social lives. Second, there needs to be shared standards about how arguments are to be judged. Third, there needs to access to the narrative of the community and a shared understanding of how the significance of this history is to be judged. The task of the university then is to embody good rational discourse and the practice of wisdom, showing society how it is done.

As we attempt to chart the course on a sea of propaganda and unchallenged myths, MacIntyre’s argument is important. What does a good argument look like? What would make you change your mind? How can we work together? Sadly, the story of Enlightenment Scotland, according to MacIntyre, ends badly. It was a philosophy that enabled this movement of common sense, but this resulted in the professionalization of philosophy, which became unintelligible to the ordinary educated person. Once more, the expert loses touch. As we race forward to the twenty-first century this is exacerbated by the corporatization of higher education. The stress on the accountability of universities to consumers has resulted in a focus on metrics, which, if anything, widens the gap between higher education and common sense.

I have raised these issues in this editorial not to assert the rightness of any argument, but simply to note that we seem to be in the middle of an era characterized by precisely an absence of common sense. It should not be surprising that at the height of the credit crisis, and other governance crises, many commentators have referred to an absence of sanity; delusional thinking ([Lewis, 2008](#)). Similar words are used today. So where does that leave global responsibility? And, in particular, where does it leave the academic *Journal of Global Responsibility*?

I think it puts us in a really interesting position, and in a sense Grant Jones, Editor in Chief, could not have timed his stepping down from the editor’s chair better. Grant delivered the baby and has seen it superbly through its first six years. Under him, it set down markers, including special editions into the nurturing of sustainability education

and the meaning of responsibility. He took it to the next stage through inclusion in various rankings, including:

- Thomson Reuters Emerging Sources Citation Index;
- Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List;
- JourQUAL (Germany); and
- NSD (Norway).

The journal then is recognized as a new kid on the academic block. My task as the new editor is to oversee the next stages of development, which I guess is through its adolescence, and which I hope will include engaging the issues of the time. The four broad areas that I hope to develop with the board are: a wider practice-centred debate; the academic ranking of the journal; an increased focus on critical issues that will bring together different disciplines, professions and sectors; and reflective practice on the kind of learning that will facilitate the development of globally responsible leadership.

First, academia has got to put its hand up. For the most part, we see ourselves as the intellectual elite, without whom there can be no models of practice and no project can be launched. We are seen by many as arrogant and dismissive of different groups, unaware of different emotional and intellectual narratives. So, we need to listen more attentively to different narratives (MacNamara, 2015), from the practitioners who are out there leading the practice of global responsibility from the front, to the people who find the idea of global responsibility threatening or difficult to imagine, to the people who see the globe in a very different way. One of the ways to address this issue will be to give practice its due place, to have major practitioners setting out their worldview and how it pans out in practice, and to have the makings of response and debate through brief commentaries. Practitioners have a clear and direct way of challenging our horizons, engaging the imagination and showing pathways of hope. I hope then that each edition will then see a “thought-piece” from a major leader and some response. We also want to encourage examples of good practice of globally responsible leadership, from organizations such as the UN Global Compact or the GRLI.

In this edition, by chance, we received an interview with Paul O'Neill, former CEO of Alcoa and Secretary of the US Treasury. What characterises so much of O'Neill's thinking is common sense. The common sense that can speak truth to power, and which precisely invites the questions which MacIntyre extols; the common sense which looks to accepted guidelines for discourse, such as careful examination of empirical data; and the common sense which listens to the different narratives before making a decision. None of what he says can be rolled up into a textbook, though leadership theories of different kinds begin to emerge. He also shows clearly that leadership is based on key moral virtues, including courage.

The second aim is to develop further academic recognition. The more the journal gets into the academic mainstream, the more the key debates can be developed. Ironically, one way of doing that will be the development of practice-centred dialogue. The impact which academic overseers crave is not really possible without such dialogue. At the same time, however, that means providing a home for excellent and challenging research and scholarship in:

- the key areas of global responsibility practice, such as leadership, governance, communication and the social and political relationships of business;
- the key concepts, values and world views which inform global responsibility. This includes cognate concepts such as sustainability, corporate responsibility, business ethics, social ethics, but also different cultural and religious perspectives which underpin these ideas; and
- the key sectors including education, civil society (and the work of NGOs), politics, business and healthcare. As noted above all these areas are in practice interrelated.

The journal is embedded in the management and strategy section of Emerald's output, and this would inevitably lead to discussions with organizations such as the Association of Business Schools (ABS) around inclusion in their rankings. However, what will make this distinctive in the ABS section on business and society and business ethics will be how the focus on global responsibility can challenge closed views of the disciplines and of practice. Take a few examples. Business ethicists have a strong concern around the development of virtues, and traditionally these have been focused on communities/institutions and associated narratives. A global responsibility perspective can challenge narrow interpretations of this, and offer new perspectives on virtues precisely looking beyond local narratives. Another example is human rights. The year 2015 saw Unilever produce the first human rights report from a major business. Business studies, however, tends to see human rights as secondary, with little appreciation of how these can be part of risk management or planning. What lessons do academia and practice have to offer on how these might be addressed? Another example is peace building and conflict resolution. A global perspective (and a whole person/local one for that matter) recognizes conflict as endemic and demands research into how organizations might effectively support conflict resolution in civil and political contexts. More than that, it acknowledges business as a key player in peace building and not simply as a generator of economic stability. As the [Portland Trust \(2013\)](#) has noted, developing the economy itself involves peace building, through the practice of justice and the development of trust. An area such as governance in this light inevitably moves into trans-agency and inter-agency governance and different ways of seeing the nature of business, education and so on. Other sectors, such as sports management, struggle to practice global responsibility, partly because at various points, they have not understood how global reach relates to national identity, and how the meaning and value of sport relates to the institutions empowered with its governance. And what about culture and global responsibility? How do different cultures affect theory and practice of leadership? Most of the work on leadership is focused in the far West.

Connected to such questions is the third aim, to provide a regular focus for interdisciplinary and interprofessional dialogue. This means systematically developing annual special editions in addition to the regular editions. Over the next few years the topics of global leadership, challenges to the Western views of governance, global responsibility and higher education, global responsibility and the between workplace, and communication and responsibility are emerging as possible special editions. The first would look to examples of global leadership, and

how the idea of global responsibility affects leadership theory. The second might look at how the developments in governance thinking in Africa can inform the debate. The third would examine the global responsibility of higher education. How might that interrogate MacIntyre's view? The fourth would look at the ethos of the workplace. The fifth would look at responsible communication inside and outside the organization (MacNamara, 2015).

However, we are keen to hear about any possible special editions that can be the focus for academic contributions and practice input as described above. In addition to any call for papers then these special editions will invite contributions from eminent academics and practitioners. In pursuing these, we aim to link up with related organizations, e.g. those concerned with global leadership, or human rights, and with any conferences focused in this area, to both widen the readership and increase the contribution.

The fourth aim is a regular focus on teaching and learning. How do you teach and learn global responsibility? The work of the GRLI, for instance, has focused on whole person learning (Taylor and Tweddle, 2007); not learning *about* global responsibility but learning to practise it. This essentially does not see responsibility or ethics as separate from practice but as part of ongoing reflection and decision-making. Related to this is the critical debate about what this involves in terms such as skills and virtues, and how they relate to the practice of business, education or the professions (hence the debate about employability). The academic debate is about giving and testing an intellectual account of that, i.e. one that is both intellectually coherent and congruent with practice. This would give an account of how intellectual, psychological, social, ethical and practical skills and virtues are related and can be most effectively developed. The practitioner debate is about how we empower learners to own theory, value and practice, recognizing the interconnection of the cognitive, affective, and somatic (essentially lived practice). This all connects to the skills often identified as key to professional practice, communication skills and teamwork skills. As MacNamara (2015) notes, these are too often seen as one-way tools rather than the means of giving an account of thoughts, focused on dialogue. Teaching which practices such critical dialogue is one way to achieve MacIntyre's vision, and a way to engage the choppy waters of political, civic and organizational discourse, enabling a critical challenge of poor rhetoric. How for instance can we effectively handle the *ad hominem* dynamic, which is exemplified in Mr Trump's relationship with the media? This requires positive rhetorical skills. All this contributes to the work of important groups such as Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) (www.unprme.org/). It also ties back into the integrity of higher education in a global context and the integrity of business schools in particular. What is the philosophy of higher education? "For the sake of what is that being done?"

The suggestion then is that an academic journal should always be aiming to develop rigorous intellectual debate further, but that it also should contribute to the public debate. Some might argue that the role of a journal with our title is also to change paradigms. That is worth real debate, but for the time being, perhaps, the greatest effect of academic journals might be simply to challenge thinking, theoretical and practical. The danger of challenging "paradigms" is twofold. First, we tend to assume there is simply one meta-narrative that has to be challenged. In

fact, as I suggest above there are many different narratives which might reinforce but do not fit neatly into, for instance, a “neo-liberal” paradigm. Better to bring them all into the debate, so that differences can emerge and be appreciated and challenged. Second, and connected, changing paradigms often leads to defensive response and common sense can then soon depart into *ad hominem* dynamics, often in the name of all things, freedom. The most effective engagement is to stay in dialogue with the different perspectives through decision-making and into practice.

And with those thoughts we return to the problems of today, the so-called post-truth era. Of course, post-truth is nothing new. Throughout the globe, societies have struggled with the authoritarian dynamics of power and attempts to subvert critical dialogue, most often related to corruption (not simply defined as the misuse of public funds or position for private ends, but as a subversion of meaning and value). Journals such as the *JGR* should be contributing not just to the academic and practical debate about this, but also to the maintenance of debate itself, and thus of democracy at all levels, and to the development of the skills and virtues of challenge (the future of responsibility).

The editorial board welcomes all ideas for how the *JGR* can be developed, simply write to me at s.j.robinson@leedsbeckett.ac.uk. In the meantime, the board itself will be looking developments in detail, and final ideas will emerge for the next edition.

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Notes

1. In the USA in 2016, the top 10 per cent of families holding 76 per cent of total wealth (<http://money.cnn.com/2016/08/18/pf/wealth-inequality/>).
2. Private Willis once more:
“When in that House M.P.’s divide,
If they’ve a brain and cerebellum, too,
They’ve got to leave that brain outside,
And vote just as their leaders tell ’em to”.
3. This is same kind of local debate which Tawney (1930) argued for through the Worker’s Education Association.

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