

<b>Institution:</b> University of Northumbria at Newcastle		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 17 (Business and Management Studies)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Embedding responsible practices into business by taking inspiration from the Quakers		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2016 - 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Nicholas Burton	Senior Lecturer	19/11/2012 - present
Mai Vu	Senior Lecturer	03/09/2018 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016 - 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>It is becoming more pressing for businesses to practice responsibly and so contribute to a sustainable future for themselves, society, and the planet. Researchers from Northumbria University's Business School applied an ethical practice framework, 'Quaker discernment', inspired by the business traditions of the Quaker movement, to help companies embed sustainable, ethical approaches into their internal and external practices. Examples from 6 variously-sized companies with divergent organisational contexts, from different sectors, and with local, national and international client bases, illustrate how the research was embedded in the companies' governance structures and decision-making. It resulted in improved project delivery, communications and collaboration with their staff, clients, and communities; and inspired business/community engagement and initiatives which increased social mobility for disadvantaged groups.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Businesses are increasingly realising the benefits, and facing the pressure, of adopting responsible business practices that respect ethical values, communities, employees, and the environment. Northumbria University's Business School explores religious and spiritual traditions and how they can shape ethical and responsible management practice. In particular, this research explores how secular and religious management practices can 'cross-over' and inform each other in a variety of organisational and institutional contexts. These have the potential to address management issues that obstruct the path to responsible business practices.</p> <p>Research led by Dr Nicholas Burton, from the Business School, explores the use of the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) Business Method (QBM) in secular (i.e. non-religious) management contexts. Burton investigated the use of different aspects of QBM in business meetings and its transferability to modern management practices [R1]. QBM is based on the practice of <i>Quaker discernment</i>, a spiritual practice that encourages collaborative and participative group decision-making with the intention to create a better world. Core elements of Quaker discernment (QD) include: the use of reflective silence, seeking group unity when making decisions and agreement of minutes and actions during the meeting rather than after it. Silence allows meetings to stay calm and focused, providing space for all participants to feel listened to. These aspects encourage equality and inclusiveness within meetings, leading to better and fairer decision-making [R1]. By the end of the meeting, these decisions are also collectively owned, which improves the chance of them being implemented afterwards [R1]. Although QD is based on spiritual foundations, Burton concluded that such methods show parallels with the management and organisational practices of secular businesses, e.g. decision-making, leadership and accountability, and that introducing relevant aspects of QD has the potential to create conditions, like trust and co-operation, that foster transformative learning and</p>		

responsible management within secular organisations [R1-R3]. An additional study, conducted with Professor Rachel Muers at Leeds University, established that adopting QD, and its wider principles of equality and inclusion, as a decision-making and governance approach in secular organisations does not require users to share the theological commitment on which discernment is based [R4]. Burton demonstrated for the first time the extent to which corporate law presents obstacles to implementing practices such as QD and the extent to which QD can be implemented within the boundaries of the Companies Act 2006 [R5].

Between 2016 and 2020, Burton conducted research assessing the potential benefit of fusing religious and secular traditions. Using action research, and follow-up qualitative interviews, Burton examined the management practices (e.g. decision-making) of various secular organisations across the UK from different industries and sectors (for-profit and non-profit) and subsequently worked with them to embed core elements of QD for company benefit. In addition, Burton worked with a Quaker company (The Quiet Company), wholly-owned by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), to fuse an understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) with Quaker theology in order to help them interpret which UN SDGs to contribute to, ensure that the aims and objectives could be interpreted in line with Quaker theology and belief, and thereby ensure buy-in from key stakeholders.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

**R1. Nicholas Burton** 'Quaker Business Method: A Contemporary Decision-Making Process' in Angell, S.W., Dandelion, P. and Anderson, P. (eds) *Quakers, Business and Industry: Quakers and the Disciplines Vol 4* (Friends Association in Higher Education, 2017) ISBN: 978-0998337449. Available on request

**R2. Mai Vu and Nicholas Burton (2019)** 'Mindful reflexivity: Unpacking the process of transformative learning in mindfulness and discernment' *Management Learning* 51 (2): 207-226 DOI:10.1177/1350507619888751 and [available here](#)

**R3. Nicholas Burton**, Koning, J.\*, and Muers, R.\* (2018) 'Organisational ethnography and religious organisations: the case of Quaker decision-making' *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 15 (4): 349-367 DOI:10.1080/14766086.2018.1496469 and [available on request](#)

**R4. Muers, R.\* and Nicholas Burton (2018)** 'Can We Take the Religion out of Religious Decision-Making? The Case of Quaker Business Method' *Philosophy of Management* 18: 363-374 DOI:10.1007/s40926-018-0095-0

**R5. Nicholas Burton and Bainbridge. J.\*\* (2019)** 'Spiritual Discernment, the Incorporated Organization, and Corporate Law: The Case of Quaker Business Method' *Religions* 10: 35 DOI:10.3390/rel10010035

\*External collaborators: J. Koning – Oxford Brookes University, R. Muers – Leeds University

\*\*Internal collaborators: J. Bainbridge – School of Law, Northumbria (UoA18)

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Burton's work with a range of secular organisations, introduced them to the concept of QD and that resulted in QD principles being embedded into their governance structures and decision-making. This case study details Burton's work with five of these organisations between 2016-2020, included here for their divergent organisational, sectoral, and institutional contexts:

- The Lang Cat Ltd (management consultancy for UK financial services with 20 client directors working with global financial services clients);
- Origo Ltd (non-profit Financial Technology company, jointly funded by six listed and global financial services companies, with over 50 employees);
- Middleton Hall Retirement Village (employee-owned UK retirement village complex with a 15-strong management team and 180 employees);

- Twenty-Fifty Ltd (international management consultancy based in UK, Germany, Switzerland, and India);
- Norwich Mustard Cooperative (start-up entrepreneurial cooperative food production venture with 140 members).

Further, Burton's work with The Quiet Company (a Quaker hospitality company with 82 employees and GBP4,920,000 annual turnover) resulted in the inclusion of social and environmental issues at the heart of their strategic planning.

For all the above, communications and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders was improved and Norwich Mustard and The Quiet Company went on to change the way they engaged with communities and improve social mobility for disadvantaged groups.

#### **4.1 QBM principles embedded in companies' governance structures and decision-making**

Sharing Burton's research insights with the five secular organisations increased their understanding and awareness of QD. As a result, QD was adopted and used in each organisation to deliver non-hierarchical governance structures and empower multi-strata decision-making. QD has been embedded into the management practice of all five secular organisations [E1-E4, E5] and its decision-making tools and practices into company policies and procedures.

At The Lang Cat Ltd and Origo Ltd, Burton worked alongside project teams to embed QD as a method of decision-making within project delivery groups [E1, E2]. The Lang Cat Ltd's Principal and Founder said that Burton '*...help[ed] us understand and incorporate Quaker-inspired approaches, predominantly group consensual decision-making into our daily practice at board level, as well as team meetings*' [E1]. Managing Director, Origo Ltd said '*Traditionally, our decision-making processes have been rather hierarchal and formal, and therefore adopting the Quaker principles have been a revolutionary step, but [it] has had a very positive effect on both team cohesion and wellbeing, and efficiency of decision-making. Project milestones have been achieved faster and with good grace.*' [E2]. Burton worked with Twenty-Fifty Ltd's international board of directors from UK, Germany, India, and Switzerland '*...to help us embed the Quaker decision-making method in our practice to best effect*' [E4].

At Middleton Hall Retirement Village and The Lang Cat Ltd, the directors, managers and supervisors embedded QD at various decision-making levels within the organisations [E1, E3]. In June 2019, Middleton Hall's Managing Director confirmed '*...we are adopting elements of the method – such as periods of silent reflection, deep listening, circular meeting room layout, writing minutes contemporaneously - through elements of our new meeting and governance structure*' [E3].

Norwich Mustard learned from Burton about Quaker ethics and the history of Quaker support for cooperative and community ownership. Norwich Mustard's Chairman said Burton '*proved integral in helping us to embed Quaker principles in our new venture*' and that they had '*incorporate[d] management principles from the Quaker tradition into our business plan*' [E5].

#### **4.2 QD improved communication and collaboration with internal and external stakeholders**

All five secular companies applied Burton's insights resulting in a range of improvements. They reported that QD fostered collaboration and improved organisational culture by having a positive effect on team relations [E1, E3], encouraging deep listening [E1-E4], encouraging dialogue with respect [E3], wider engagement and participation in decision-making [E2, E4], promoting a culture of equality [E2], reducing conflict [E1], improving decision outcomes [E3] and fostering quicker implementation times [E1-E3] with more engagement and buy-in [E1]. The organisations were confident that these benefits translated into quantitative benefits. For example, Middleton Hall's Managing Director explained:

*'[Embedding QD in the business] has had, and will continue to have, a significant positive affect on team relationships, as it has led to a greater willingness to listen to each other,*

*encourage dialogue, and fostered greater levels of respect for all contributions to meetings. This, I believe, has ultimately, served to ensure our decisions are better, but also that the implementation of decisions is quicker, faster, and done with passion, with due regard to our values, knowing that the decision was reached and agreed by all' [E3].*

In May 2019, CEO, Twenty-Fifty Ltd said that adopting QD '*...served to improve not only the quality of our decision making, but also the engagement and buy-in of those involved. As a direct result, decisions are implemented with more energy, passion, but also with good grace, as we are aware of the inherent integrity of the method used' [E4].* He added:

*'...the participative, collaborative, and open-minded nature of the decision-making approach introduced to us by Dr Burton has improved our practice, enabling us to work with clients to develop stronger projects...At present, two of our senior consultants - one in the UK and one in Germany - are using Dr Burton's method with their [international] clients and early results indicate real value in terms of exploring project requirements and outcomes' [E4].*

The Lang Cat Ltd used QD with its existing external partners and clients and its Principal and Founder stated that '*we have found [Quaker principles] very useful in engaging with new clients as a way to explore the different dimensions of their business problems' [E1].*

Prior to Burton's collaboration with The Quiet Company, its board of directors had limited awareness and appreciation of the UN SDGs. During 2017-19, Burton facilitated the development of a short-list of priority SDGs that had strong resonance with Quaker Faith and Practice [E6-E9]. The Quiet Company's CEO commented that '*The key outcomes from our collaboration are that a Quaker-inspired interpretation of UN SDGs are now located at the heart of what we do...[and it] ...has inspired us to stretch our ambitions to deliver societal and environmental benefits' [E10].* Consequently, The Quiet Company's 2019 Annual Review identified their 5 SDG priorities: 3: Well-being, 8: Decent work, 11: Sustainability, 13: Climate action, 15: Land use, and stated that '*These SDGs will be the backbone of our strategic business plan for 2021-25' [E8].* Burton also worked with the organisation to develop a faith-led interpretation of the aims of the SDGs aligned with Quaker Faith and Practice, which they subsequently used to work towards an ambitious and sustainable business model (SDG 12: sustainable consumption and production). CEO, the Quiet Company, stated that they have:

*'used the Quaker-inspired interpretation of the SDGs to engage with our various stakeholders... [to open up] discussions with our suppliers to understand how we can make our supply chain more sustainable – a particular issue in the hospitality sector. Further, we have used our work to encourage other ethical businesses in our sector to adopt the principles of our approach' [E10].*

#### **4.3 Improved business/community engagement and social mobility for disadvantaged groups through QD principles**

Burton's research and collaborations resulted in improved business/community engagement. For example, his collaboration with Norwich Mustard led the venture to raise capital by extending ownership rights to the local Norwich community. They also decided to build the organisation as a community benefit structure to create community capacity and cohesion. Norwich Mustard's Chairman reported '*Almost 200 people supported our initial crowdfunding campaign, and a further 100 local people have pre-registered for our community share issue' [E5].* Embedding Quaker business principles of equality, inclusion and engaging with the community encouraged Norwich Mustard to base part of their product production in Norwich Prison and offer employment opportunities to ex-offenders. The Chairman stated '*Partnering with Norwich Prison...provides an opportunity for us to equip inmates with valuable pre-release training and work experience, with potentially significant personal and social implications for these individuals' [E5].*

To meet their ambition to create Decent Work (SDG 8), and in line with Quaker Faith and Practice [E6], The Quiet Company teamed up with the London Pathways Programme to launch 'Bake the Difference' a project to employ individuals with a diagnosis of personality disorder and

a history of offending or antisocial behaviour. 10 trainees were enrolled in the first year (2018/2019) [E8, p8]. The CEO explained '*The programme has had a significant impact on the individuals in the programme and has assisted them in finding long-term employment*' [E10]. In the Quiet Company's 2018 Annual Review, the programme's Training and Development Chef stated that '*Bake the Difference has already produced positive results for those on the course. Probation officers working with participants have told us that they have seen a marked improvement during their assessments. In some cases, participants' mediations have been reduced*' [E9, p10]. One participant also reflected '*I'm sure without the help from the Quakers and the Bake the Difference team, I would not be feeling the way I do today. Thank you to everyone involved for giving me another chance*' [E9, p11]. In its second year, the programme had 12 new participants learning an expanded set of hospitality skills. Further, ex-participants were appointed as peer mentors for the new intake. Having completed the previous course, trainees spoke movingly at their certificate ceremony '*about the way they were respected and trusted by the staff and what this meant to them, something they had never before experienced*' - one ex-participant said the course '*has given me purpose...I believe I can get a job now*' [E8, p8].

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref.	External Source of Corroboration	Link to Impact
E1	Testimonial - Principal and Founder, The Lang Cat Ltd	Evidences the benefits of QD within the organisation
E2	Testimonial - Managing Director, Origo Ltd	Evidences the benefits of QD within the organisation
E3	Testimonial - Managing Director, Middleton Hall	Evidences the benefits of QD within the organisation
E4	Testimonial - CEO, Twenty-Fifty Ltd	Evidences the benefits of QD with external clients
E5	Testimonial - Chairman, Norwich Mustard	Evidences the benefits of QD within the organisation and the impact of engaging with Norwich prison
E6	Presentation to the board by the CEO of The Quiet Company on SDGs	Demonstrates the embedding of the UN SDGs within company strategy
E7	Summary of interviews with Board members of The Quiet Company	Confirms the embedding of the UN SDGs within company strategy
E8	The Quiet Company Annual Review 2019	Confirms the impact of the 'Bake the Difference' programme and incorporating of UN SDGs into strategy
E9	The Quiet Company Annual Review 2018 (formerly Friends House Hospitality Ltd)	Demonstrates the impact of the 'Bake the Difference' programme and incorporating of UN SDGs into strategy
E10	Testimonial - CEO, The Quiet Company	Evidences the benefits of QD within the organisation and the impact of the 'Bake the Difference' programme