

SNAPSHOT



David Hobbs

A biomedical engineer from Adelaide, David Hobbs is the 2004 Young Professional Engineer of the Year

What was one of the most exciting projects you have worked on?

I discovered a program from Canada called 'Movement-to-Music' therapy while conducting my Churchill research last year. This program allows children with a disability to play music through simple movements. I'm leading trials of the system at Novita.

What project would you like to be involved with?

I'm looking forward to be involved with a collaborative project starting next year that is investigating wheelchair use patterns.

What was one of the best decisions you've made?

To travel overseas – in 1995 to be a Camp Counsellor at an American Summer Camp, and in 1999 to conduct my five-month work experience placement in Toronto, Canada.

What was one of the worst decisions you've made?

To date, I can't recall a particularly bad experience, so my decision-making seems to have been positive to date.

What has been one of your biggest challenges?

Achieving a good work-life balance.

What makes you laugh?

Funny jokes, witty cartoons, and my two-year old nephew.

What annoys you?

People who are rude, disrespectful, or don't show compassion towards others.

What inspires you?

People who step up to make a difference in society, and who live their dreams.

What cheers you up when you are down?

Thoughts of my fiancée, family, or close friends and the relationships I have with them, and great memories and experiences from my travels.

What is one of your strengths?

My ability to relate to others and understand their circumstances.

What is one of your weaknesses?

Being caught up in the big picture and not taking the time to pay attention to the finer details.

What do you do to keep fit?

Play touch footy, go jogging, or ride my bike.

What do you do to relax?

Read, go for walks along the beach, go for a jog, or laze in front of the TV watching sport.

What is the first thing you do when you get home after work?

Change out of my work clothes and grab a quick snack or a cup of tea.

What do you do on Sunday mornings?

Sleep in, relax and read the paper.

What do you like most about the city/town you live in?

Adelaide's size, easy access to the beach, the hills or wineries, and the weather.

What is your favourite animal?

Tigers – I've always found them fascinating.

This column is designed to offer a brief portrait of some of Australia's engineers, thus showing the human faces behind what is too often perceived as an anonymous profession.

Construction innovators

A recent survey of the construction industry has identified 82 highly innovative businesses, including 26 that have developed world-first innovations. The survey polled more than 1300 businesses in the commercial building and road/bridge construction sectors in NSW, Victoria and Queensland.

The survey, conducted by researchers from the BRITE research project of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Construction Innovation examined the characteristics common to innovative companies. The acronym BRITE stands for building research, innovation, technology and environment.

"The examination of innovators is expected to be a valuable resource for the industry. It will help promote more widespread adoption of best practice," said project leader Dr Karen Manley.

For property and construction firms wishing to improve their innovation performance, the survey report recommended:

- enhancing inhouse skills by providing training programs and employing new graduates, rather than relying on recruiting experienced employees
- using more innovations to reduce clients' costs
- monitoring international developments in related industries
- having formal systems to embrace lessons from previous projects in work processes and encouraging staff to share ideas
- formally evaluating the effectiveness of advanced technologies and practices
- investing in R&D, possibly using the R&D tax concession and/or Australian Research Council Linkage Grants to subsidise costs
- increasing links with universities and other research institutions
- implementing a broad range of the technology, knowledge and human resources strategies listed in the report
- consulting more of the sources of ideas on innovation listed in the report
- implementing a broader range of the advanced practices listed in the report.

The report also proposes a range of initiatives that governments could introduce to improve the innovation environment for the construction industry. ■