

# Are you a company of **BRITE**



Atrium entry to National Gallery of Victoria- Australian Art Building, at night – an example of Performance-Based Building Codes and Fire Engineering Yielding an Innovative Design Solution

The 2004 BRITE Innovation Survey of the building and construction industry was launched by Linda Lavarch, Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for State development and Innovation, Tony McGrady on 17 November 2004.

The survey identified 82 highly innovative businesses including 26 that have developed world first innovations.

BRITE is a research project of the Cooperative Research Centre for construction innovation, based at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. The project's aim is to increase the rate and quality of innovation in the industry. The research team is doing this by widely publishing information on successful innovations, drawn from the BRITE innovation survey and from more detailed case studies.

Innovation is widely seen as the key to better productivity and profitability in the building and construction industry. Increasing the rate and quality of innovation in the industry, which employs more than 730,000 people in Australia, will contribute to economic growth.

Researchers from the BRITE Research Project have examined the characteristics common to high innovators – drawing out the things they do differently.

"This examination of successful 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**.

The survey polled more than 1,300 businesses in the commercial building and road/bridge sectors in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

The survey report makes 10 recommendations for property and construction businesses willing to improve their innovation performance, namely:

- Enhance in-house skills by providing training programs and employing new graduates, rather than relying on recruiting experienced employees
- Use more innovations to reduce clients' costs
- Actively monitor developments internationally, and in related industries
- Have formal systems to (i) include lessons from previous projects in work processes and (ii) encourage staff to share ideas
- Formally evaluate the effectiveness of advanced technologies and practices
- Invest in Research & Development, possibly using the R&D Tax Concession and/or Australian Research Council Linkage Grants to subsidise costs
- Increase links with universities and other research institutions
- Implement a broader range of the technology, knowledge and human resources strategies listed in the survey report
- Consult more of the sources of ideas on innovation listed in the survey report
- Implement a broader range of the advanced practices listed in the survey report

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

- Implement programs to assist skill development in industry associations, given the central role the associations play in providing ideas to low innovators
- Review the value and accessibility of the R&D Tax Concession Scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises within the construction industry, as the industry has a low access rate
- Review the effectiveness of programs aimed at promoting industry awareness of international competition, given that a quarter of the industry is unsure of Australia's ability to cope with it
- More strongly resource education and training programs, as the construction industry relies more on organisational (people and processes) innovation than the manufacturing industry, and therefore is less able to gain value from the R&D Tax Concession
- Improve the regulation of the construction industry, to reduce its negative impact on innovation. This can be done in part by improving national consistency and moving more rapidly from prescriptive to performance-based regulation

These recommendations reflect the overarching vision of the Australian construction industry, as reported in a recent national study, Construction 2020, from the CRC for Construction Innovation. That vision stresses the need for an improved business environment, particularly in regulation, education, training and profitability. "The information from the BRITE Project is an excellent example of what industry, government and research partners, working together through the CRC for Construction Innovation, can provide to help improve the Australian property and construction industry," said **Dr Keith Hampson**, CEO of the CRC for Construction Innovation.

While the survey uses the behaviours of high innovators to make general recommendations for improving performance, case studies with more detail about particular innovations are also useful. They can show the practical and economic benefits of innovations, how organisations seek innovations and make decisions to adopt them and the steps to follow to successfully implement innovations.

An innovation can be a new product or a new process that is of economic value. It can be new or significantly improved:

- Technological innovation (services, materials, products, plant, equipment etc.)

# sparks?

- Organisational innovation (advanced business practices including marketing, human resources, financial systems, strategic planning, collaboration, relationship management, health, safety, environment, etc.)

An innovation can be new to the organisation, new to the nation or new to the world. It can be something already operating in other industries, but not before applied to the building and construction sector.

Dr Keith Hampson strongly encourages participation in the BRITE case study program, saying, "The project is already proving to be a successful way of promoting innovation in the building and construction industry, and we expect it to continue to achieve broad exposure."

Arup Australia, one of the BRITE Project's industry partners, has already contributed to several case studies.

"Arup is focused on innovation. Case study research is a useful way to learn about the process," said **Richard Hough**, Principal of Building Structures at Arup.

"Phase One of this project has contributed significantly to academic and industry knowledge bases and created an extensive network of industry relationships and an associated industry-wide reputation for stimulating performance enhancement," said **Linda Lavarch**.

"Phase Two of the project will then allow team members to build on these assets".

The Department of State Development and Innovation (DSDI), which sends a representative to BRITE meetings as an observer, has funded BRITE Research Project industry functions over the past three years. If funding is approved for Phase Two, DSDI will continue to fund these events", said Ms Lavarch.

The team is now seeking nominations from organisations who would like their innovations to be profiled for industry dissemination. To be eligible, the innovation should have been used on a completed commercial building or construction project. There should be measured benefits from the innovation such as reduced energy costs, building costs, whole-of-life costs or time. The team is particularly interested in the activities of small to medium sized businesses, especially in regional areas.

To register your interest, you can send an email to [k.manley@qut.edu.au](mailto:k.manley@qut.edu.au) or phone Dr Karen

Manley on 3864 1762. ■