



## Corporate Sustainability in SMEs

### **About the Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development (ACSBD)**

The ACSBD is a research centre of the University of Southern Queensland (USQ).

#### ***Mission statement***

The mission of the ACSBD is to accelerate sustainable development by proving the business case for sustainability.

#### ***Overview***

Accelerating the industrial and commercial utilisation of sustainability innovation is the focus of the newly established ACSBD. The centre is based at USQ Springfield on Brisbane's south western outskirts and at USQ's main campus at Toowoomba.

The ACSBD's research is grounded in high quality research projects involving partners from industry, government and other research centres. Platforms for collaborative research and development exist in sectors as diverse as energy and water, agriculture, tourism and urban design and development.

ACSBD works with its partners providing a range of products and services including research, teaching, training, consultancy, public policy debate, and community and industry extension activities.

This capability statement outlines our expertise in the field of Corporate Sustainability in SMEs. Capability statements for other areas we work in are available from our web site.

#### **Our 'Corporate Sustainability in SMEs' Work**

We assist and address SMEs and their stakeholders' current understanding and adoption of environmental, employee management, planning, organisational change, international business and business sustainability with the view to improve their financial bottom-line and achieving positive outcomes for their staff, stakeholders and communities within which they operate.

#### **What we offer**

##### **We have the expertise to help our clients with:**

- planning for sustainability;
- managing change for sustainability;
- specialist training and advice on improving their business performance through sustainability practices;
- advice on how and where to source sustainability advice, know-how, and technologies to improve their business performance through sustainability initiatives/change.
- facilitating stakeholder dialogue;

- developing skills, tools and business strategies to enhance their sustainability initiatives/change and consequently improve their competitiveness.
- applying sustainability knowledge and tools to build their internal capacity which will help them to become more innovative, efficient and competitive and lift their firm's overall performance.
- adopting sustainability management and environmentally responsible practices so they can benefit from:
  - increased profitability;
  - cost savings;
  - competitive advantage;
  - breaking into international markets;
  - creating new business opportunities;
  - branding and marketing;
  - benchmarking and report on sustainability performance.

### **Recent and current projects:**

Some examples of recent or current projects are provided here. Details of other projects can be found on our web site.

#### **Developing a Best Practice Framework for Managing Environmental Sustainability (ES) in Australian Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs)**(Retha Wiesner, Peter Best and Doren Chadee) (Funded by CPA Australia)

The main objectives of this project were to examine: firstly, how the management of practices and capabilities of environmental sustainability are developed, maintained and managed in SME 'environmental sustainability leaders', with the view to develop a conceptual framework for environmental sustainability (ES) change management in Australian SMEs. These 'star' SMEs or 'sustainability leaders' have distinguished themselves as recognised leaders in implementing environmental sustainability initiatives. Secondly this study examined what learning in particular is involved in developing environmental change practices and capabilities; thirdly, how this learning might be fostered by other leaders and professional accountants in SMEs.

#### **This project is currently being expanded into the following areas:**

A national study investigating:

- How do environmental sustainability innovators: set the foundations for ES success; develop the business case for ES; develop a strategic orientation to ES; utilise change capabilities; develop an ES culture; make capital investment decisions for environmental capital project (including the decision-making criteria they use); implement ES change and innovation; identify and overcome barriers; Integrate external support; achieve strategic innovation or leverage market advantages; position themselves to maintain business viability, while providing economic, environmental and social outcomes; become leaders in ES.
- What learning in particular is involved in these issues and how might this learning be fostered by other SME leaders, professional accountants in SMEs and state government departments responsible for environmental resources and affairs.
- What new, as yet unknown, environmental sustainability scenarios within the SME context could be identified?
- What strategies and potential policy options could be employed by policy makers and to achieve enhancement of ES and reductions in energy usage and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from SMEs?

- What are SMEs views on potential policy initiatives that might improve the environmental performance of SMEs?
- What is the current and potential usability of the ES practices/initiatives/innovations in Australian SMEs?
- What are the main antecedents of environmental behaviour and innovation in SMEs? (for example customer and social concern; environmental regulation; management commitment to the environment and expectations of gaining competitive advantage with proactive ES initiatives).
- What combinations of ES practices/initiatives/innovations optimally predict competitive advantage (in other words what is the optimal 'choice' of ES practices/initiatives/innovations for competitiveness)?
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**Employee management, strategic planning and organisational change for competitiveness in SMEs**  
(Retha Wiesner, Banjo Roxas and Graham Young)

The aim of this project is to explore best practice models regarding how SMEs could enhance their financial and market performance through employee management, strategic planning and organisational change initiatives,. This study builds on previous empirical work (1425 Australian SMEs), and re-examines the prospects of SMEs through the lens of employee management, strategic planning and organisational change practices. This project examines the prevalence and configurations of practices used by Australian SMEs and how these configurations link to firm performance. From a practitioner viewpoint, the study provides valuable best practice data regarding what combinations of employee management, planning and change approaches link optimally with firm performance.

**International business and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) including innovation and internationalisation of SMEs** (Banjo Roxas, Doren Chadee and Retha Wiesner)

This project focuses on international business and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with particular focus on social capital and institutional environment and their impact on the strategic configurations including innovation and internationalisation of SMEs.

**Our research team**

**Associate Professor Retha Wiesner** - Associate Professor Retha Wiesner's research activities are focused on the development of organisational capabilities and enhancement of firm performance and economic sustainability through the effective improvement and implementation of people management strategies, organisational change strategies and environmental sustainability strategies. She is the chief investigator of a major national and international study on human resource sustainability, organisational change, strategic planning and competitive advantage in Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs). She was chief investigator of an Australian study on developing a best practice framework for managing environmental sustainability in SMEs. The focus of this project was on analysing how sustainability champions manage environmental sustainability. This project was funded by the CPA. Early 2009 she has successfully completed a major industry project on sustainability of training in the Queensland Construction Industry funded by Construction Skills Queensland. She has successfully supervised 25 honours students, 12 MBus students, four DBA students and 10 PhD's in her career. Retha has published over 70 refereed publications and co-authored 6 books on management, human resource management and organisational behaviour.

**Professor Peter Best** – Professor Best is the Head of the School of Accounting, Economics and Finance at the University of Southern Queensland. Professor Best's research interests lie in the areas of auditing, information systems governance, enterprise systems and forensic accounting. Of particular interest are discovery of fraud, automated methods for monitoring of controls and fraud detection in

enterprise systems. In addition, he initiated and collaborated with other researchers in three successful grant applications: \$50,000 with SAP Australia for the project 'Fraud detection in open and heterogeneous environments', \$106,000 with the Smart Internet Technology CRC for the project 'Automated detection and analysis of entity and account linkages in financial institutions for detecting money laundering', and an ARC Linkage Project grant of \$255,000 (2006-9) plus \$180,000 from SAP Australia for the project 'Integrated financial fraud detection in enterprise applications'. He has supervised one honours student in this area, who graduated with first class honours. He is currently supervising two research students working in fraud-related areas.

**Professor Doren Chadee** - Professor Chadee's research interests are in International business with a particular focus on globalisation interfacing with marketing, management, trade and foreign investment in the Asia Pacific region and managing environmental sustainability. A secondary research interest is in agribusiness management and services export management. He has a strong record of publications in major international refereed journals in all the areas above. He is currently working on several projects including, competitiveness issues facing food exporters to China; the link between globalisation and poverty, competitiveness of offshore service providers in India and export of education to Asia. He has a well developed network of colleagues in North America, Europe and Asia, in particular, with whom he collaborates for his research. He is also active as a reviewer, editor and editorial Board member of several international journals, research mentor to junior staff and supervisor to several Masters and PhD students. He is active in the Academy of International Business and the Australia and New Zealand International Business Association.

**Dr Banjo Roxas** - Banjo recently completed his PhD in International Business from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. For his dissertation, Banjo investigated the impact of institutional environments on the entrepreneurial strategic posture of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in an emerging economy. A research paper based on his dissertation was recognised as "Best Research Paper" in the 2009 Conference of the Small and Medium Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand (SEAANZ), the only professional association of educators, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners in the field of SMEs in Australia and New Zealand. Banjo was a former research assistant and research officer of the New Zealand Centre for SME Research (NZSMERC) based at Massey University in Wellington. He is currently involved with the NZSMERC's current longitudinal research of New Zealand SMEs dubbed as 'BusinessMEasure'. The 2009 survey explored NZ SMEs' performance under recession, management capability, financing, and innovation. He is also involved in another research project under NZSMERC that is funded by the Internal Revenue Department of New Zealand.

**Graham Young** has been a successful small business owner for many years and has successfully provided business and management consulting services to numerous businesses. As part of his current position as lecturer at USQ, he is working on his PhD focusing on strategic planning in SMEs.

## **Benefits of working with ACSBD**

### **Ways we can help**

Working in creative partnerships with business, communities, and government, the centre brings expert knowledge and leading edge research to projects that prove the business case for sustainability.

Apart from delivering on USQ's plan to be a leading contributor to sustainable futures for communities and regions, the centre strives to be an international leader in providing high quality research, education, training and advice on subjects as varied as:

- business strategy and governance for sustainability,
- innovation for sustainable development,
- roles and opportunities for new technology systems, and
- managing, accounting and reporting organisational sustainability performance.

## **Publications**

Our researchers pride themselves on a successful track record of publications of which we share the results via the ACSBD website.

## **Contact us**

If you would like more information about the Australian Centre for Sustainable Business and Development (ACSBD) please contact us:

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