



STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 2009

INTRODUCTION

The following paper has been adopted by the Board of the Australian Business Foundation as the basis for the Foundation's strategic research priorities for 2009.

This paper has resulted from the deliberations and recommendations of the Foundation's expert Research Advisory Committee led by Professor Mary O'Kane. It has also drawn on the contributions to an online panel discussion which tapped into a wider set of perspectives and scanned the environment for critical and emerging future research issues. Finally, it has taken account of an assessment of the evolution and achievements of more than a decade of Australian Business Foundation research to date.

This paper is presented to inform those interested in partnering with the Foundation in potential research proposals over the next year. It shares the thinking and factors which the Australian Business Foundation, through its Research Advisory Committee, will use to judge where it can best allocate its resources for research in 2009.

Further information on the Australian Business Foundation can be found at www.abfoundation.com.au. Any enquires should be directed to Phillip Allen on email phillip.allen@abfoundation.com.au or phone 0 2 9458 7342.

RATIONALE

There are two key starting points that shape the Australian Business Foundation's strategic research priorities.

Firstly, it is important that the Foundation maintains its ability to detect the "soft signals" of likely impactful change on Australia's competitiveness and prosperity earlier than others. This needs to be reflected in the Foundation's research priorities in the form of explicit futures studies and foresighting.

Secondly, the Foundation's strategic research priorities, while allowing for diverse projects and refreshed areas of interest, have proved quite durable. Therefore, research priorities should capitalise on and leverage from the body of existing research, extending the nature and depth of its insights and particularly reflecting major context-changing issues, rather than just abandoning old research topics for new.

Given these two starting points, the rationale for strategic research priorities for 2009 and beyond continues the Foundation's aim of pioneering evidence-based research and thought-provoking rigorous analysis which goes beyond the everyday news and on issues that anticipate the mainstream agenda.

The Australian Business Foundation's strategic research priorities seek to transform Australia's future competitiveness by substantiating ideas, informing policy and fostering the capabilities, skills and culture underpinning enduring innovation-led prosperity.

The challenge is how to ensure Australia recognises and prepares itself for the new patterns of competitiveness and prosperity to be had in a highly interconnected, globalised, knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

The key rationale for the Foundation's strategic research priorities is to frame the game-changing questions and to investigate those issues that set a new agenda for business and the community at large. The more profound the questions, the less timid the research projects should be.

Consequently, there are three overarching questions against which priority research topics can be considered. These are:

- How can Australia turn its big problems (e.g. climate change, health, ageing population, skills and education, carbon-constrained and energy-efficient production, sustainability, social inclusion etc.) into opportunities delivering both social and economic benefits?
- How can responses to these problems be turned into capability-building projects for Australia and its businesses?
- How can Australian businesses thrive in turbulent times and respond with agility and skill to opportunities or threats?

STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Against the backdrop of these three focal questions, priority will be given in 2009 and beyond to the following research topics.

Responding to Globalisation

- What does it mean to 'make things' in globalised, services-dominated modern economies.
- Taking advantage of niche opportunities and linkages for Australian firms to integrate into global value chains and virtual webs of enterprise.
- Fostering new growth industries and capabilities from Australia.
- Capitalising on 'born global' firms and Australian export successes.
- New business models and global reach using transformational and enabling technologies.

New Models of Innovation and Sustainability

- Dynamics, drivers and realities of market-led and customer-driven business innovation, including services innovation and user-centred innovation.
- Management of innovation and innovation skills.
- Innovation in workplaces of the future.
- Understanding the relationships between innovation and productivity.
- Innovation, human capital and business performance.
- Emerging concepts of social innovation.

The Geography of Competitiveness and Economic Development

- Spatial issues of innovation and economic development.
- Clustering, networking and strategic collaboration.
- Local and regional economic development models.
- Cross-overs between urban geography, physical and land use planning and innovation studies.
- Cultural precincts, revitalised regions and global cities.

Learning from the Future

- Foresighting, scenario planning and futures studies.
- 'Wild Card' issues with impact for Australia.

In addition, the Australian Business Foundation in undertaking research projects in 2009 will consider the extent to which proposals demonstrate and/or contribute to the following attributes:

- Highlights critical emerging issues likely to have most impact on the competitiveness and prosperity of Australia and Australian businesses.
- Explores new angles, probes beyond the obvious and provides a reality check on the issues being investigated.
- Places the Foundation 'above the squabble' by framing research issues more cogently, making fresh connections between disparate subjects, and avoiding issues already well-traversed by others.
- Creates or distils fresh insights and intelligence to help shape the debate, not merely to respond to it.
- Allows for a range of different modes of research, e.g. commissioned research; joint ventures; research aggregation; 'meta-research' of synthesis and commentary on the research of others; partnered research sponsorships; landmark projects; multidisciplinary collaborations; action research projects.

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