

Clients help drive construction innovation: report
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A MAJOR study from the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation has found leading-edge clients are one of the key drivers behind innovation in Australia's property and construction industry.



The Building Research Innovation Technology and Environment (BRITE) Project team – a research wing of the CRC for Construction Innovation – spent three years researching innovation in the Australian property and construction industry to produce the Innovate Now! report to be launched this month.

BRITE project team leader Dr Karen Manley said the report concluded clients with high levels of technical competence, challenging needs and extensive experience provide one of the most significant opportunities for innovation in the industry.

"The more demanding, technically competent and experienced the client, the more likely it is to stimulate innovation in projects, by demanding outcomes that exceed business as usual," Manley said. "Businesses that are slow to innovate may need to find the courage to expose themselves to this kind of pressure if they want to improve business performance."

Manley said the report also showed a cooperative team approach in the face of a crisis can also lead to innovative solutions.

"Normally, crises are seen as a disaster on a project, but our research indicates that old adage about finding the positive in any situation certainly rings true," Manley said.

Manley said a series of BRITE case studies demonstrated the value of innovation with significant benefits such as cost, time and energy savings, resulting from the innovations in each study.

"Public-sector clients are seen as major drivers of innovation in the industry," Manley said. "They have the highest rate of investment in research and development, the highest rate of adoption of advanced practices and technologies and the best return on innovation."

Manley said the findings led the BRITE Project team to conclude that an effective innovation program should focus, where possible, on cultivating deeper and broader relationships with repeat public-sector clients.

The full Innovate Now! report will be launched on September 28 at the Australian Institute of Building's Construct 2006 Conference. It details the findings of the industry-wide survey and 12 best-practice case studies involving 400 businesses, 14 government organisations, eight industry associations and four universities. It also provides detailed steps for businesses wanting to improve their innovation performance, and checklists to help develop an innovation program.