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## Innovation gets overhaul

By Rebecca Martin (22/11/2006)

**Innovation should be hardwired into the Australian economy, says an Australian business taskforce, and they've come up with ways to do it.**



The *New Pathways to Prosperity: A National Innovation Framework for Australia* was launched this week by the Business Council of Australia (BCA), and outlines how Australia can work "to improve and sustain Australia's innovation performance against global competition."

The proposed blueprint has strong business support.

Around 30 different companies and institutions were involved in the taskforce and advisory committee, co-ordinated by BCA and chaired by Microsoft managing director Steve Vamos.

"[The need for more innovation] has been reinforced by the fact that we're facing more international competition from China and India," said BCA director of policy Patrick Coleman.

"It's brought home the importance of keeping apace with the best in the world.

"There's been a lot of talk about skills lately, but we're looking to broaden that by looking into the future and what the economy is going to need."

Coleman said ABS statistics show that around 35 per cent of Australian companies claim they engage in innovation.

"That's a reasonable base," he said, "and we think we can build on that."

Recommended strategies include a national post-school 'Entrepreneurs and

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Innovators Internship', which would provide something similar to work experience but in the field of innovation.

Small business would benefit from Innovation Resource Centres, where they could go for ideas and resources on best practice and creating innovation.

Even high-school students are covered, with the framework suggesting educators should "think broadly about all courses and ways [to teach] skills that contribute to innovation," said Coleman.

"Verbal and communication skills, teamwork and problem solving skills all contribute to innovation," he said.

Coleman said the BCA and taskforce will lobby to push the blueprint to both State and Federal government and to education sectors.

"We're following up with advocacy. We've built this group of people, now we want to build a larger group to take this momentum forward," he said.

### Innovation all round

Innovation is getting a good airing in the business sector at the moment.

Business leaders and "innovation leaders" have congregated at 'Innovation Summits' in Sydney and Brisbane over the past week to talk about Australia and innovation. A third summit is scheduled for 6 December in Melbourne.

The organiser of the event, University of Queensland Professor Mark Dodgson, said the summits had emphasised that innovation is as much about business practices as about new technology and research and development.

"The top three most innovative industries in the US between 1995 and 2000 were wholesaling, retail and security and commodity broking - important users but not developers of technology," he said.

"Innovation is not just a feature of the high-tech industries."

Dodgson said although much of the talk revolved around innovation in large organisations, a focus on innovation was providing more opportunities for the smaller companies they do business with.

"[Larger firms] are encouraging smaller firms to be innovative," he said. "It's part of their overall innovation strategy. [Big companies] are much more open these days. They can't find all the ideas."

*Image: iStockphoto*

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