

Research topics / Application process, 2020/21

Thank you for your interest in joining our research team at the Centre for Organisational Excellence Research (COER), Massey University.

The following information will help you with the process of applying for a PhD (three to four years of study).

Research Topics

COER encourages research in the topics described below. It is important that the research is of interest to you, aligned to COER's areas of expertise and will be of practical value to businesses or government organisations. You may have other ideas for research topics, if so, we would be pleased to discuss these with you.

Benchmarking Research:

- Identifying the organisational structure and support mechanisms required to embed “benchmarking” within organisations. Therefore, how do organisations develop a benchmarking culture – a willingness to learn from others? What structures, processes and resources are required? What is required for formal and informal benchmarking to flourish?
- Developing assessment tools that assess the maturity of organisations for both informal and formal benchmarking and guide them on how to improve.
- Researching the impact of COER's TRADE Best Practice Benchmarking methodology and how to enhance the methodology. 1,000's of people have been trained in TRADE. TRADE has been at the cornerstone of major improvement initiatives such as the New Zealand Benchmarking Club (2000 to 2004), Singapore's Jumpstart Programme for the public sector (2006 to 2008) and Dubai We Learn (2015 to 2020) for the government sector. This research will review how the methodology, project management system and associated training courses can be improved.
- Investigating and documenting successful benchmarking projects so that other organisations can learn from these examples. There are currently very few documented case studies. Such research would identify the secrets of successful benchmarking.
- Research into the benefits and pitfalls of formal benchmarking projects. How can formal approaches be more effectively utilised?
- Researching the activities of Benchmarking Centres worldwide to help Benchmarking Centre's become more effective in delivering a quality service to organisations.
- Research into the global use of benchmarking, the types of benchmarking and the benefits obtained.

- Research into Informal Benchmarking – therefore researching how organisations learn from each other in an informal way. Informal benchmarking is strongly related to knowledge management but focuses on the acquisition and sharing of best practices. This research will build on previous work conducted by COER on Informal Benchmarking.
- Determining the relevance of benchmarking to SMEs and/or how SMEs can apply benchmarking effectively.
- Researching the role and use of on-line resources designed to assist in knowledge and best practice transfer (such as COER’s Business Performance Improvement Resource (BPIR.com)) and /or developing methods to increase the effectiveness of on-line resources.

Best Practice Research:

- Identifying best practices in business excellence categories such as leadership, strategy, customer and market focus, human resource management, knowledge management, performance measurement and operations.

Innovation:

- To identify how to foster a culture of innovation within an organisation.
- To identify the steps and methods used to support and increase the level of innovation within a country in line with the Global Innovation Index.

Both the projects above may involve research into:

- innovation models and definitions
- the methods used to encourage innovation
- the role of knowledge management, benchmarking, organisational learning in innovation
- innovation standards
- innovation awards
- innovation self-assessments
- innovation training courses/certificates and services provided by institutions to enhance innovation.

Business Excellence Research:

- Why has the popularity of Business Excellence declined in some countries? What is the level of awareness worldwide? Is business excellence still perceived as relevant by organisations? Why in some countries is it popular and others it is not?
- Assessing the impact of business excellence models in improving a nation’s competitiveness. For example, what role has business excellence played in the social and economic success of countries like Singapore and the UAE?
- How important are business excellence self-assessments and award assessments for an organisation’s improvement journey? What are the best practices in conducting self-assessments or award assessments?

- Identifying methods for effective action planning stemming from business excellence self-assessments or evaluations. At present little guidance is given on this critical part of an improvement cycle.
- Determining the relevance of business excellence frameworks and assessment approaches for small organisations (with fewer than 20 employees).

Productivity Research:

- Investigating the role that National Productivity Organisations (NPOs) play in promoting and enhancing productivity within their country. This research would examine the strategies, services, resources and effectiveness of NPOs. The research would be of interest to NPOs and the Asian Productivity Organisation.
- Researching the role of Business Excellence as a driver for productivity improvement. Some countries consider business excellence models as productivity models and key drivers for achieving national productivity improvements. Other countries have not understood this link. This PhD would explore the impact of business excellence from a productivity perspective and how to raise the understanding of business excellence.

Quality Management Research:

- Researching the general area of quality management and continuous improvement. This might encompass theoretical and conceptual developments in quality, or the application of specific tools and techniques such as six sigma, lean, ISO 9000, improvement teams and health and safety.

The Application Process

1. If you would like to undertake your PhD at COER we strongly recommend that you obtain our approval before submitting your formal application to Massey University (step 2 below). For COER to support your application please send to Dr Robin Mann (r.s.mann@massey.ac.nz):
 - a 2 to 10 page Research Proposal (refer to the “Writing a research proposal” guide at <http://www.coer.org.nz/acquire/phd-applicants>),
 - a completed PhD Research Information Form (obtained from <http://www.coer.org.nz/acquire/phd-applicants>)
 - and your CV.

COER may request a discussion or interview prior to giving its support.

2. The next step is to formally apply to Massey University. Information on how to do this is shown at: <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/research/higher-research-degrees/how-to-apply-for-the-phd/how-to-apply-for-the-phd.cfm>. Applications need to be submitted directly to Massey University but **please remember to state that you wish to study at COER and record Dr Robin Mann as your preferred supervisor**. This will ensure that your application reaches COER for review and does not go to the wrong department.
3. International qualifications will be assessed in terms of their broad equivalence to a Massey Honours or Masters’ degrees with Grade Point Equivalency. Typically,

this should be 75% or B+. Admissions with Equivalent Status will be used to assess the quality and ranking of the overseas institution. A qualifying degree, like domestic qualifications must include a supervised research component such as a substantial thesis or dissertation and previous research methods study is recommended.

4. The tuition fees for a PhD are approximately NZ\$ 7,575.40 - NZ\$9,543.50 per year for both domestic and international students (as long as the international student relocates to New Zealand and lives in New Zealand for more than 50% of each year during the time of study). Students must also take “152.781 Advanced Research Methods in Business” (or a similar course) within the first 6 months of their study (there may be an additional charge of approximately NZ\$2,500 dependent on the university’s rules at the time).
5. All PhD students are given NZ\$3,000 per year (for three years) by Massey University for research expenses. This can be used for such items as travel expenditure related to your research, conferences fees and a computer/laptop.
6. COER are based in the College in Sciences as traditionally staff within the Centre provided support to the university’s industrial engineers. However, as COER’s main research is management it also has strong links with the College of Business. There are a small number of university scholarships available for PhD research of approximately NZ\$25,000 per year. Competition for these scholarships is strong – these are awarded based on your academic qualifications. If scholarships are available they will be shown at:
https://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/admission/scholarships-bursaries-awards/doctorate/doctorate_home.cfm
7. A PhD at COER begins with students undertaking the paper “152.781 Advanced Research Methods in Business”. This paper helps students to develop the necessary research skills for a PhD. Students need to pass this paper with at least a B+ to continue their study. Student often begin their PhD a little unsure of their research topic. This paper will assist students to explore the literature and finalise their PhD topic.
8. The 1st year of PhD Registration is called “Provisional Registration”. Students need to submit a research report and give a presentation on his/her research to an academic panel at the end of the 1st year. If the research meets the required standard the student’s registration will proceed to “Full Registration”.

For further information contact:

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