

**Research Assessment Exercise 2020**  
**Impact Overview Statement**

**University: Lingnan University**

**Unit of Assessment (UoA): 22 - Business**

**Total number of eligible staff of the university in the UoA: 17**

**(1) Context**

The unit has three departments: Computer and Decision Sciences (CDS), Management (MGT) and Marketing and International Business (MIB). It is committed to transferring knowledge to companies in the region, particularly Hong Kong and China. Due to the fast development of the Chinese economy, Chinese companies are facing a highly dynamic business environment, featured by fast-changing and diverse customer preferences, a high demand of service quality and agile responses, and an increasing emphasis on innovation and creativity. To survive and thrive, companies have a pressing need to enhance efficiency and effectiveness based on scientific approaches. To meet this need, our unit has sought to collaborate with companies through consulting services and stakeholder-engaged research in a wide range of functional areas.

The unit's main stakeholders are:

- Businesses: a diverse range of companies, from large, listed enterprises to small start-ups that operate in a variety of major industries in Hong Kong and in various regions of China. This includes all levels of management as well as general employees.
- Government bodies, including the Innovation and Technology Bureau in the Nanshan District, an innovation and technology leading district in Shenzhen.
- Local communities, including NGOs/social enterprises and entrepreneurial communities

The unit mainly achieves impact by changing practices through providing consultancy services to stakeholders, and enhancing awareness/understanding of the public and policymakers. Professors also supervise students to provide services to local communities through service-learning courses.

**(2) Approach to impact**

We conduct empirical research in the business setting, which relies on strong connections with the industry. Empirical business research requires us to collect data from companies while our stakeholders need cutting-edge business knowledge from researchers to address their challenges and obtain and sustain competitive advantages. Our approach is characterized by deep engagement with companies for knowledge co-creation and transfer in a bid to make sure that the research is relevant as well as rigorous, thus achieving a high degree of impact.

Starting from an initial research question, we talk with companies and use their inputs to fine-tune our ideas. This helps us to situate our research in the business context. We then share our research findings with the companies, making them aware of their issues and offering diagnoses. We also invite companies' inputs on how to interpret the findings and their implications for theory building. Finally, we offer consultancy service/solutions for addressing the companies' problems. This enables practitioners to develop a better understanding of their companies' problems and the rationale for changing their current business practice. This leads to positive attitudes towards the change initiatives and to generally high acceptance levels, as well as to a better understanding of how to implement the solutions.

**Providing consultancy services to stakeholders**

Since 2014, colleagues from the Department of Marketing and International Business have been involved in offering business consultation to 57 business cases for 28 different companies across 13 industries, such as banking and financing, business services, education, hospitality and tourism,

and insurance, etc. In fact, the consultancy has directly benefited these companies, attracting 39.3% of them to work with our colleagues for another consultation case.

### **Enhancing awareness/understanding of the public and policymakers**

Hongyan Yang from MGT, who examines the institutional factors of technological innovation, conducted a professional project for the Innovation and Technology Bureau in the Nanshan District of Shenzhen. This project provided insight to policy-makers on how to improve the institutional factors to facilitate technology innovation of the companies in this technology-leading district.

### **Service-learning projects**

The unit interacts with the local communities, mainly NGOs and social enterprises, through a variety of service-learning courses. Academic staff supervise students to provide direct and indirect service to the local communities, such as training the beneficiaries of NGOs and providing consultancy service to social enterprises based upon the unit's research. During the assessment period, the unit worked on around 150 service-learning projects.

## **(3) Strategy and plans**

Networking and relationships are key to our impact. Researchers will continue to use their professional and personal networks to build connections, supported by the Faculty and University. This will include developing strong industrial connections through our taught postgraduate programmes, and participating in industrial events to build relationships. Specifically, we will:

1. Increase the number of knowledge transfer projects and strengthen the mutually beneficial relationship between research and knowledge transfer.
2. Enhance the faculty's current research center to provide more support to knowledge transfer projects.
3. Engage more in the University' joint research centers. These centers have a focus on the research topics related to the Great Bay Area. We will leverage the joint research centers to increase the influence of research on practices and build connections with practitioners in the Great Bay Area.
4. Utilize our taught master's programmes to relate research to impact. Enhance students' practices in professional projects with the supervision of academic staff.
5. Recruit professors for practice to take charge of knowledge transfer and recruit research-track professors to collaborate with professors for practices on knowledge transfer projects

## **(4) Relationship to case studies**

Both of our case studies exemplify our approach to achieving impact through close collaboration with companies, developing research questions with their input in order to address their needs, and engaging in knowledge co-creation and knowledge transfer with these companies. In case study 1, our researchers were embedded with dedicated team members from the company throughout the process of research, development and implementation of a smart knowledge management system. We used a highly iterative and rapid prototyping approach to deeply and actively involve the company team members in every stage of the research and development effort. In case study 2, we worked with companies to enhance the leadership competencies among their middle managers in a cycle of co-creation, obtaining input from the companies to contextualise the research questions, developing leadership competency models and training programmes, and iterating this process several times. Both of these case studies were provided with administrative and logistical support from the research centre.