

“Local Government – Tales of Creativity and Innovation”.

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Business
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Certificate of Originality and Authenticity

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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21/10/09

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Preface - A Note on Terminology

Typically, in Australia, local government units are referred to as local '*Councils*'. This terminology can be confusing as the term '*the Council*' is often used to describe both the local government organisation and also the collective body of elected local representatives – "*the Councillors*".

For the purposes of clarity, in this research, the terms '*Council (s)*', '*local Council*' or '*the Council*' will be used to refer to the local government unit or organisation. The elected representatives shall be collectively referred to as '*the Councillors*' or '*the elected Council*".

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Abstract

Local government in Australia (as in many countries) has been urged to be more 'creative and innovative', but with little clear definition of what the two terms mean. In the context of the 'New Public Management' (NPM) reforms of local government in recent years, local Councils have often turned to the private sector models of 'entrepreneurialism' and 'innovation' for guidance, but in a number of cases this has not been satisfactory nor overly successful. There has been little work on a model of public sector innovation that integrates the principles of good local governance and produces real public value and a tangible result in the local community .

This thesis contributes to our knowledge of creativity and innovation at work and how they are understood in local Councils in particular. It also contributes towards a model of 'local governance innovation'. The research uses an 'Expert Panel' to discuss and develop criteria for selecting 'innovative' local Councils. The thesis then examines three case study Councils in NSW, Australia, utilising an 'ethno-narrative' methodology that borrows from the practices of ethnography, autoethnography, and uses narrative as an exploratory tool and a style for describing results. Observations are made, artefacts are examined, key staff are interviewed and their stories of creativity and innovation are collected and analysed. Scott's (2001) Professional Capabilities Framework is used to guide questions about the professional capabilities being used by staff to be creative and generate innovation in the Councils. The research methodology also uses the process of 'story-building' between the researcher and the participants, and this is discussed.

This thesis shows that there are professional staff working in NSW Councils, who are committed to generating innovation for the benefit of their communities. Their understanding of creativity and innovation are shared through their stories and

these shape their meanings. The thesis finds, that whilst precise definitions of the terms 'creativity' and 'innovation' are not evident, there is a generally understood meaning of the concepts – at that it is one that produces community benefit. There is an understanding of 'appropriate risk' and organisational cultures that support "learning from mistakes". The key capabilities used for implementing 'innovation' are those that involve communication', and 'story-building'. Fundamentally, these people understand and pursue innovation not only to promote efficiency and effectiveness but also as part of what they believe is 'good local governance'.