

UCT Graduate School of Business brings African context to global sustainability conversation

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An international sustainability project that is co-hosted by the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) and the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University, Canada has won a significant global award - recognising its impact in the world of business.

The Embedding Project, a global public-benefit research project that helps companies embed social and environmental factors across their operations and decision-making, was presented with the International Impactful Collaboration Award by the Academy of Management at its Annual General Meeting in August. The prestigious award recognises and celebrates international collaborations between academics and external stakeholders that have achieved demonstrable, external impact.

“The Embedding Project has developed a unique and effective model for linking scholarship and practice,” says Professor Ralph Hamann, Director of Research at the UCT GSB and head of the GSB-hosted peer-to-peer network – one of two key resources of the project.

Hamann says The Embedding Project makes an important contribution to helping companies embed sustainability into their strategies and practices.

“This is becoming more important given the increasingly serious interlinked challenges of climate change and poverty, especially in Africa,” says Hamann.

The Embedding Project functions as a source of sustainability knowledge co-created by scholars and professionals grounded in high quality research. The project uses its Peer-to-Peer Networks, where companies assess and compare their efforts and engage in structured peer coaching, and its Global Communities of Practice, where leading companies share and develop best practices and co-create tools and resources.

“A few leading companies have begun to integrate social and environmental factors into their core decision-making and their growing knowledge and experience is ripe for broader application,” says Dr Stephanie Bertels, founder of The Embedding Project. “We looked for ways to effectively harness and adapt this knowledge for wide-spread use.”

“We’ve built enduring relationships over the last five years with leading sustainability researchers, two dozen of the world’s largest companies, educators, and other partners,” says Bertels.

“We thought a collaborative approach to sustainability issues that actually generated resources senior executives could easily access would go a long way to helping companies improve on their positive impact.”

Bertels says the project also aims to develop an innovative set of teaching materials for educators, seeking to provide leading edge knowledge on embedding sustainability to the next generation of business leaders.

“The UCT Graduate School of Business, among other things, brings with it into the global conversation the Africa context,” she says.

Hamann says that the relationship between the UCT GSB and The Embedding Project is a two-way street. Facilitating the peer-to-peer networks helps identify research priorities for the business school. As one of only two hosts of the project’s pivotal resources, the peer-to-peer networks, the UCT GSB facilitates regular, ongoing, and impactful collaborations

between people in business and scholars.

“The network interactions give us insights into what is going on in and around the companies and helps develop scholarly publications, too,” he says. “The project also brings important levels of trust into discussions that are shaping business in this country.”

The Academy of Management is a professional association for management and organisation scholars with almost 20,000 members spanning more than 120 countries. And the award is sponsored by two all-academy committees: The Practice Theme Committee and the International Theme Committee.

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