



Future Leader winner to research resilience

DAVINA ROONEY WINS
FUNDING TO INVESTIGATE
HOW RESILIENCE AND
DIVERSITY INTERSECT
IN THE WORKPLACE.

Davina Rooney of Stockland was named Future Leader of the Year at the 2014 Property Council of Australia/Rider Levett Bucknall Innovation & Excellence Awards. The senior manager for operations and sustainability, commercial property, was commended for representing "a new generation of leader" at the awards night held in Sydney in May.

As Future Leader winner, Rooney is provided with a scholarship to fund a research area—in this case, how resilience and diversity intersect in the workplace.

"A couple of years ago I attended a talk on diversity where a leading figure in the finance industry was speaking about the tendency for their senior female executives to complete an extraordinary job [often better than their predecessors] and then suddenly resign," Rooney explains.

"Further investigation into this showed they were putting too much pressure on themselves to quickly resolve long-ignored problems, and the discussion of the day was how to help people cope better. I was fascinated and started pondering, 'How does resilience intersect with diversity?' and my topic was born."

However, Rooney says she is also interested in a far broader definition of diversity—one that covers age, gender, socio-economics, ethnicity and working style.

"The best definition I've seen was from some PricewaterhouseCoopers recruitment literature that announced: 'Diversity includes you ... You're welcome for your unique contribution'," says Rooney.

Rooney's aim is to gather the best findings from around the globe and share those insights with the industry. She will focus on resilience by reviewing and providing take-away messages from research into positive psychology and examining a broader definition of diversity.

There will also be a focus on inclusivity, "where we aim to make everyone's interests included in the diversity agenda and not only those with caring responsibilities", says Rooney. She will also review industry approaches to diversity, such as new mentoring programs.

"It's worth recognising that all business, including property, is becoming even more challenging. The term VUCA [volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous] has military origins, but increasingly it is being used to describe business conditions. And what kind of leader can thrive in such conditions? A resilient one can," Rooney says.

Rooney's research will include a mix of meetings, conferences and courses in Australia and overseas. She will present her findings in a comprehensive research paper and develop a series of short articles that examine practical learnings.