

Position Description

1. General Information

Name of the position	Building resilient and future proof business models in technology SMEs
Foreseen enrolment date	September 2025
Position is funded by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COFUND, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), Horizon Europe, European Union • LUT University • RMIT University
Research Host	LUT University
PhD awarding institutions	LUT University & RMIT University
Locations	Primary: Lappeenranta, Finland Secondary: Melbourne, Australia
Salary	32,600 EUR annual gross salary (2,716 EUR monthly gross salary)
Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mikko Pynnönen, Associate professor, LUT University • Anna Vuorio, Post Doctoral Researcher, LUT University • Afreen Huq, Professor, RMIT University • Carol Tan, Senior Lecturer, RMIT University
Group of discipline	Business & Management, Entrepreneurship

2. Research topics (only one of these projects will be funded)

Project 1: Sustainable business model innovation as a growth enabler in tech SMEs

This topic delves into the mechanisms and conditions necessary for developing sustainable business model innovations that enable technology SMEs to achieve long-term sustainability. The research examines how these innovations can serve as growth enablers, helping SMEs navigate competitive and volatile environments while leveraging limited resources effectively. The conceptual background in this topic is based on the concept of Sustainable Business Model Archetypes that explores integrating sustainability into business models, balancing economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Growth strategies here focuses on expanding businesses sustainably, emphasizing long-term viability and responsible practices, whereas sustainable business model innovation involves redesigning business models to incorporate sustainability, such as developing eco-friendly products or adopting circular economy principles. Together, these concepts form a framework to approach the mechanisms of how businesses achieve economic success while contributing positively to the planet and society. The research question could focus for example to: Which sustainable business model innovations enable companies to grow? What organizational, contextual (ecosystem) and personal factors shape SBMI and growth and survival in companies? This topic applies quantitative methods



and especially regression-based models, such as linear regression or structural equation modelling. Furthermore, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and machine learning approaches could be applied to study the research questions. This study contributes to the academic literature of Sustainable Business Model Innovation and helps SMEs achieve economic success while positively impacting society and the environment. For SMEs, adopting sustainable business model innovations can enhance competitiveness and resource efficiency, ensuring long-term viability and opening up new growth opportunities.

Supervisors: Mikko Pynnönen (LUT), Anna Vuorio (LUT), Afreen Huq (RMIT), Carol Tan (RMIT)

Research Fields: Sustainability, Sustainable Business Model Innovation

Project 2: *Staying ahead: Resilient business models in technology SMEs*

This topic focuses to the mechanisms of developing resilient business models that enable the technology SMEs to maintain sustainable over time. Resilience is especially important in Technology SMEs as the operating environment is highly competitive and volatile and the resources often are more limited than in larger companies. This requires new sophisticated management capabilities and processes from the entrepreneurs and managers. This project leans on the concepts of resilient business models and Sustainable business model innovation. The sustainable growth strategies and strategic capabilities of an SME and stakeholder approach are also in the focus. The research question focuses for example to: How companies develop sustainable business models over time? What are the mechanisms through which sustainable business models are developed? or What implications do sustainable business model development have for growth and company survival? One specific focus might be the role of digitalization in building resilience capabilities. This project Applies qualitative methodology. Especially longitudinal case study methodologies, where observing and analysing business model development over time would be utilized. The research aims to enhance understanding and develop the conceptual understanding of how technology SMEs can develop and maintain resilient and sustainable business. The findings will offer insights into the mechanisms of sustainable business model development and their implications for growth and long-term survival of the technology SMEs.

Supervisors: Mikko Pynnönen (LUT), Anna Vuorio (LUT), Afreen Huq (RMIT), Carol Tan (RMIT)

Research Fields: Resilient Business Models, Sustainability

Project 3: *Tensions in adopting resilient business models in tech SMEs*

This topic focuses to tensions rising from developing resilient business models in the technology SMEs. The tensions can form e.g. in resource allocation, balancing innovation with resilience, and adapting to rapid technological changes. Also, long-term investments in resilience might put SMEs at a competitive disadvantage compared to those prioritizing short-term gains. The conceptual background here is in 3BL sustainable business model and Sustainable value creation. The main contribution lies in tension management literature in SMEs. Also, investor perspective – entrepreneurial funding would be one potential direction. The research question could focus for example to: Which types of contradictions within resilient business models effect companies' strategical approach? How resilient business models are perceived when value creation aspects are in line or contradictory? Which resilient business models are more likely to get funding from private (business angels, VCs) and public (NGOs) funding sources? This project would apply experimental methods and especially conjoint analysis or problem- and decision-making scenarios. The research aims to enhance understanding and develop the conceptual understanding of how technology SMEs perceive and deal with tensions rising from adopting resilient business models. The findings will offer new insights on the different tensions that an SME has when building and managing a resilient business and contribute to understanding on the strategic decision-making processes in dealing with these tensions.



Supervisors: Mikko Pynnönen (LUT), Anna Vuorio (LUT), Afreen Huq (RMIT), Carol Tan (RMIT)

Research Fields: Resilient Business Models, Sustainability, Strategic Decision Making

3. Employment Benefits and Conditions

LUT University offers a 48-month full time work contract (12-month term, extended for 36 months provided that the studies progress satisfactorily). There is a probation period of 6 months and the annual workload for researchers is 1,612 hours / year.

The remuneration, in line with the European Commission rules for Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant holders, and in line with the General collective agreement for Finnish universities, will consist of a **gross annual salary** of est. 32 600 EUR (excl. holiday bonus) with salary increases up to 44 700 EUR as the studies proceed. Of this amount, the estimated first year **net salary*** to be perceived by the researcher is 2,080 EUR per month. However, the definite amount to be received is subject to national tax legislation.

For more information on Finnish taxation visit here https://www.vero.fi/en/individuals/tax-cards-and-tax-returns/tax_card/tax-percentage-calculator/.

**Net salaries can fluctuate in accordance with an individual's personal circumstances (marital status, age, disability, family and dependents, etc. The above indicative net salaries offer an approximation of what a single person in their early 20s could expect to receive in their bank account after taxes.)*

Benefits include

- Becoming a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow and be invited to join the Marie Curie Alumni Association
- Access to all the necessary facilities at LUT University and RMIT University
- Tuition fees exemption at both PhD awarding institutions
- Travel allowance to cover flights and accommodation for participating in DREAM+PLAN events
- Up to 12 months in Australia
- Occupational health care
- Paid sick leave for a limited period
- Holiday bonus
- 6 weeks paid holiday + Finnish public holidays (all together about 8 weeks).
- Social security coverage

4. PhD enrolment



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement N° 101179842

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Successful candidates for this position will be enrolled by the following institutions and must comply with their specific entry requirements, in addition to DREAM+PLAN's conditions.

LUT University

To enrol in a Doctorate program you must meet the general conditions, namely:

- a relevant Master's degree awarded by a university
- a relevant Master's degree awarded by a university of applied sciences; or
- a relevant applicable study programme abroad which in the awarding country gives eligibility for the corresponding level of higher education.

International degrees:

- The degree has to be an official or recognised degree in its country of origin.
- As a rule, at least four-year education is required including a Master's thesis or corresponding final thesis.
- In all cases the doctoral programme in question considers case by case whether degrees earned abroad provide a sufficient foundation for postgraduate studies at LUT University.
- The precondition for the recognition of European degrees is that the degree is a university degree combination earned in accordance with the Bologna Process principles (3+2 years). The applicant is required to submit information in English (for example a Diploma Supplement) on the scope and the level of the degree/s obtained abroad when applying to LUT.
- If you apply for the right to study for a doctoral degree with an international degree please contact LUT Doctoral School for additional instructions before submitting study right application documents.
- **Economics and Business Administration:** One-year (60 ECTS credits) MBA-degrees do not generally qualify for doctoral studies. Candidates with an MBA-degree and their eligibility to apply will be considered case-by-case.

More information: <https://www.lut.fi/en/research/doctoral-school>

RMIT University

Visit the website: <https://www.rmit.edu.au/research/research-degrees/how-to-apply>

