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**IMPROVING END-USER
ENGAGEMENT TO DELIVER
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE:
INSIGHTS INTO THE CSIRO'S
ON PROGRAM**





Researchers are increasingly being challenged to demonstrate the real-world impact of their science and technology. The biggest enabler of this impact is the mindset of researchers themselves – their ability to think, act and communicate about their science in a way that their end user can understand and adopt.

David Burt, co-founder of the CSIRO's 'ON Program' has spent the last three years helping researchers all over Australia discover how to adopt the entrepreneurial mindset necessary to discover their pathway to impact. This method is the core of the ON Program - Australia's only deep-technology accelerator designed to help researchers take their value from the lab into the world.

Ahead of the **3rd Annual Research Innovation Summit 2018**, David explores how the ON Program method is relevant for both researchers as well as people supporting commercialisation and technology transfer.



BACKGROUND FACTORS INFLUENCING CHANGE IN THE AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH SECTOR

Developing a commercial mindset to ensure the success of research projects has long been a focus for the Australian Higher Education sector.

This was further reinforced in 2015 when the Australian Government launched its National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA). NISA has led to the introduction of an Impact and Engagement Assessment measure that examines how universities are translating their research into economic, social and other benefits and encourage greater collaboration between universities, industries and other end-users of research.

One of the key components of NISA was the Commonwealth Government signalling a desire for publically funded Australian researchers to increase the translation of their research into social, economic and environmental outcomes through greater collaboration with industry.

In 2017, The Australian Research Council (ARC) released the Engagement and Impact Pilot Report, which David says, outlines the areas Universities need to focus on in order to demonstrate their collaboration when it comes to research innovation.

“The results of the ARC’s Pilot report made for interesting reading, it measured engagement between researchers and the end-users of research primarily through the flow of money, like research income and revenue from IP commercialisation. While the first hurdle for Universities is their ability to efficiently and reliably produce the requested data, the bigger challenge is how each University is going to improve their results on these measures. I don’t see enough focus on how they are going to support and reward the change in researcher mindset necessary to improve their performance on these end-user engagement measures,” David says.



So why should research institutions and universities want to perform well on these measures?

According to David, results measuring end-user engagement are going to increasingly determine the block funding grants they receive.

“I believe that the University sector in Australia will increasingly be required to transition from a world in which the untied Government funding they receive is determined solely by their scientific excellence, towards a world where research funding is based on both scientific excellence, as well as objective measures of engagement between researchers and the end user,” he says.

GAINING RESEARCH FUNDING: DEMONSTRATING COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND THE END USER

One of the biggest challenges universities grappled with when it came to the ARC Engagement and Assessment Pilot was having the systems and processes to forensically collect data for this new type of assessment.

But according to David, while many universities are focusing on improving data collection in this area, the actual measurements of what is important when it comes to research engagement are still not looking promising.

“If universities want to meaningfully shift those underlying numbers they are going to need the cooperation and cultural change of the research community. While there are outliers, most Universities are not meaningfully confronting that challenge yet,” says David.

Part of the way that the ON program is addressing this challenge is to help researchers adopt a new mindset that engagement between them and the people who they hope will use their technology, is a critical part of the research process.

“The ON Program is a technology agnostic program that works with project-level research teams to help them understand why the value they are creating is important, who that value is important to, and how their end user will ultimately adopt their science and technology,” says David.

But the ON Program is not just about commercialisation. According to David, its main goal is to empower researchers to have impact.

“Commercialisation is just one way research can have impact. Another way might be that research influences the creation of government policy or how it changes societal opinions that then lead to behavioural change,” he explains.



David and the ON Program coaching team work with up to 150 research teams a year as part of the ON Program, with 70 per cent of these teams coming from Universities.

While the ON Program has achieved some excellence results, David says the program is not without challenges.

“The first barrier we face is helping researchers understand where they sit in the value chain of innovation. The notion of a researcher being involved in the translation of their work into impact is something that is currently not well measured or rewarded well in the academic community.

We are trying to change this mindset in the ON Program, helping researchers recognise that if they don't participate in the entire value chain of translation then the likelihood that their research will have meaningful impact is low,” says David.

Another challenge David and his team face when it comes to engaging researchers is up-skilling researchers to be able to go out and investigate how to translate their knowledge to the end-user.

“While researchers have a lot of skills around communicating with people that are subject matter experts or participants in their research, it can be difficult for them to investigate how to best transfer that knowledge and research to end users.

The ON Program helps researchers to use tools like Business Model Canvas and customer discovery tools to actually go out and directly interact with communities of people that they hope to use in their research,” he says.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: ENGAGING RESEARCHERS IN A NEW WAY OF THINKING



BALANCING AN END- USER MINDSET WITH ROI

“Developing this new mindset and way of measurement whilst still remaining competitive in the research landscape is important,” says David.

So how can universities ensure they have a good pipeline of great science whilst also having researchers engaged in the transfer of knowledge they have created?

The answer, according to David, is that as long as institutions take a portfolio view, then it is achievable.

“In the ON Program we have worked with research teams that are yet to start any research and are at an ideation stage. We have also worked with researchers whose research has been patented and the patent has expired, but they are interested in understanding why it hasn’t been taken up. The level of investment that a research team invests in customer discovery and translation will vary based on the stage that their research is at.”





INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Join David at the **3rd Annual Research Innovation Summit 2018** where he will be running a post-conference workshop exploring how to:

- Help researchers adopt an entrepreneurial mindset and more effectively communicate with industry and community stakeholders
- Analyse how to help researchers get their commercialisation deals across the line with a case study from CSIRO's ON Program

For more information visit <https://researchinnovation.iqpc.com.au> or call **+61 2 9229 1000** or email enquire@iqpc.com.au



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