From Research to Impact: Institutional Support for Research-based Innovation

Webinar Summary

Community for Educational Innovation - CEI

22/10/2025

From Research to Impact: Institutional Support for Research-based Innovation

Thematic Strand 2 - From Research to Impact: Bridging the innovation gap in higher education

The webinar 'From Research to Impact: Institutional Support for Research-based Innovation' discussed challenges researchers encounter in knowledge exploitation, strategies for fostering research-based innovation, and consolidating an ecosystem of services that supports knowledge exploitation and maximises the societal and economic value of research outcomes.

Presentation 1: Harnessing research and innovation for societal, economic, and ecological impact: An exploratory analysis of barriers to knowledge valorisation among applied researchers

By Dr. Verena Régent, Scientific Associate at WPZ Research GmbH, Austria.

Dr. Verena Régent focused on the barriers that applied researchers face in the knowledge valorisation process, based on the book chapter *Harnessing Research and Innovation for Societal, Economic, and Ecological Impact* [1] she authored. This study provides an exploratory analysis of researchers' needs and good practices supporting knowledge exploitation. The methodology of this study is based on two focus groups with two sub-groups each (25 participants in total), five semi-structured interviews with (mostly female) Austrian researchers interested in support for exploitation, desk research, and the analysis of good practices

The presentation is framed in the increasing importance of ensuring that research outcomes are transformed into tangible societal, economic, and ecological impacts, maximising the return on public investment in research and innovation. Following the 1980s, there has been a focus on the "entrepreneurial university," marked by the establishment of Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) and the view of innovation as a linear, one-way flow from the lab to the market. After the late 2000s, this perspective broadened to prioritise social contribution and a broader scope of innovation, expanding the Third Mission of higher education institutions to include societal engagement and knowledge transfer, thus redefining innovation as a multi-actor, non-linear process. Most recently, as of 2020, the emphasis is on co-creation and valorisation, which requires partnerships with non-academic

---

[1] Régent, V., & Ecker, B. (2025). *Chapter 6 Harnessing Research and Innovation for Societal, Economic, and Ecological Impact: An Exploratory Analysis of Barriers to Knowledge Valorisation among Applied Researchers*. In Transcending Boundaries. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004740990_007

partners and transforming innovation into a broad, transformative, and inclusive process that addresses diverse societal challenges.[2]

The presentation provided an exploratory analysis that addressed the key needs of researchers concerning knowledge valorisation. The following challenges were identified:

— **Unclear exploitation pathways**: Researchers struggle with unclear pathways to exploit their findings, a lack of necessary competences, and the difficulty to identify exploitable outcomes after the project ends. Additionally, the exploitation phase is still insufficiently supported by existing funding systems.

— **Multifaceted expectations, activities and outcomes**: Researchers are expected to communicate their work to both academic and non-academic audiences, engage with industry and policymakers, and translate research into tangible products, policies, or societal solutions.

— **Skills and interest gaps**: Many researchers lack the skills needed for exploitation, particularly in business, legal aspects, such as patents, and communication. Furthermore, not all researchers are interested in pursuing the commercialisation of their work, which limits exploitation potential.

— **Issues in project-based research**: There is often a gap between the "impact" promised in research proposals and the actual impact achieved. Post-project issues arise when consortium members lose interest, and exploitation is not considered early enough in the project.

— **Insufficient Support in Critical Phases**: The transition from research findings to dissemination and exploitation is often overlooked. Researchers aiming to apply their research outside academia lack financial resources, consultancy, and career counselling.

— **Cultural barriers**: Researchers are often bound by their disciplines' work practices and culture, sometimes leading to a reluctance to engage with non-academic stakeholders. Fear of unacceptance within their academic community further hinders their willingness to explore new avenues for valorisation.

The presentation concluded by introducing good practices addressing challenges in knowledge valorisation. Good practices include the *Horizon Results Booster*, an initiative by the European Commission offering free services to projects funded by FP7, Horizon 2020, and Horizon Europe. It provides support for researchers from

---

[2] Sources: Ekowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Berghäuser & Hölschel, 2020; Carayannis & Campbell, 2009; Radauer & Dudenbostel, 2024; Henke et al., 2016.

dissemination to market entry. Similarly, the NCP-IP supports researchers with concrete exploitation ideas, offering guidance on business and legal aspects, including patents and licensing. Additionally, the INNOVATORINNEN Lab, a pilot programme by the Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG) run in 2024, focused on systemic design methods to support early-stage innovation and societal impact.

Presentation 2: It's All About People: Empowering Research-based Innovation through Institutional Support

By Bernhard Weber, Managing Director at Unicorn Start-up & Innovation Hub, Austria.

Bernhard Weber focused on the human aspect of innovation, arguing that innovation starts with people, not projects. He explored how institutional support structures can foster an environment where researchers, entrepreneurs, and industry actors can collaborate to bring research-based innovations to life. While incubators, funding opportunities, and technology transfer offices are crucial, it is the mindset of the people involved that ultimately determines the success of innovation. Hence, curiosity plus courage are the true seeds of innovation.

The academic innovation gap presents a significant barrier to translating research into impactful innovations. A risk-averse culture and a focus on perfectionism within academic institutions slow down the translation of research into practical applications. Innovation is often viewed as outside the traditional academic merit system, leading to a lack of institutional support and recognition. Additionally, fragmented support structures result in lost momentum, preventing discoveries from reaching their full potential. As a result, only a small fraction of research outcomes make it from the lab to society, limiting their broader societal impact.

Higher education institutions need to move away from compliance-driven models to the empowerment of the stakeholders involved in innovation. This implies moving from managing IP to developing innovators, from valorisation offices to innovation partners, and from programmes to researcher journeys. Hence, the focus must be on human potential rather than on administrative processes.

While higher education institutions often have strong support structures in place, such as funding offices or incubation hubs, these structures are frequently fragmented and fail to provide researchers with a comprehensive, tailored journey from idea to impact. This results in a current system that can be a 'labyrinth' of administrative procedures and needs to be redesigned to support human potential. This involves nurturing innovation across the entire institutional ecosystem, not just in isolated pockets. It also involves recognising that not all

researchers aspire to become entrepreneurs and that alternative career pathways should be supported. Institutions need to facilitate these alternative pathways through spin-offs, joint ventures, or simply by fostering a culture that celebrates entrepreneurial and academic achievement.

The intervention concluded by underlining that institutional support must focus on creating a culture of innovation, where failure is seen as part of the process and individuals are empowered to take risks. By doing so, institutions can cultivate an environment where research is not just an academic pursuit but a catalyst for societal and economic progress. Innovation is a human endeavour before it becomes institutional, hence it is essential to invest in people with ideas, rather than focusing solely on infrastructure. When researchers are empowered, impact naturally follows as they are given the freedom and resources to explore their ideas. The essence of innovation lies not in institutions themselves but in how they enable individuals to bring their ideas to life, showing that innovation happens through institutions, not within them.

Presentation 3: From Research to Impact – A Practical Tool for Valorising Your Research Idea

By Charlotte Norrma, Senior Associate Professor, Linköping University, Sweden.

Professor Charlotte Norrman brought a practical perspective to the discussion by presenting the 'valorisation canvas,' a tool designed to help researchers valorise their ideas effectively. The valorisation canvas is a structured approach that helps researchers assess the potential impact of their work.

The valorisation canvas is designed to move beyond the idea of entrepreneurship as the only avenue for valorisation and to help researchers consider a variety of ways in which their research can lead to tangible societal impact. The impact of research can be achieved in several ways:

— Startup venture;

— Joint venture with established business partner;

— Licensing the idea to an established actor, if a patent exists;

— Implementation in the private and public sector – methods and models;

— Create arenas and concepts to make knowledge easily available in society;

— Policy and societal impact – new guidelines and recommendations;

— Open access and dissemination through publication;

— Education and skills enhancement by integrating research;

— Civic engagement and culture.

A crucial aspect of valorising research ideas is identifying the value of research early in the process and not waiting until the end of a project to consider its impact. This implies addressing the challenge of thinking about research beyond academic aspects and envisioning how it can be applied in practice. By integrating valorisation planning into the early stages of research, researchers can more effectively align their work with societal needs and increase the chances of creating meaningful impact. This approach also requires institutional support in the form of training, mentoring, and resources that help researchers refine their ideas and connect with the right stakeholders.

The valorisation canvas supports researchers in systematically evaluating their work and deciding on the most suitable path for their research to have an impact. The canvas is composed of the following 10 elements:

1. **Idea, approach, result, solution, to be utilised**: What in your research can be offered to a target audience? A new product, service, concept, process, input material, or something else?
2. **Target group, users & needs**: Who do you target? What are the present needs related to your work/research?
3. **Goals & vision**: Your ambition and where you aim in short- and long term with your idea.
4. **External environment**: Who else works on similar ideas/projects? How is your idea different? What makes your idea unique?
5. **Internal team & competence**: Identify the key competences, e.g. research team and future commercial constellation.
6. **External resources**: What external network and resources, such as financiers, co-funding, partners, and environments, do you need?
7. **IPR and regulatory**: Can the idea be protected and how (patent, design, trademark, copyright, trade secret)? What regulations to follow and what certificates are needed?
8. **Responsible research & innovation**: Investigate aspects related to ethics, social and environmental sustainability and gender.
9. **Risk & risk management**: What risks can be identified, their impacts and remedies for research, performance, team, time, funding, law and regulations.
10. **Action plan**: What do you need to do in the short and long term to achieve your goals and vision?

The presentation wrapped up by stressing that institutions should support and empower researchers to think about the broader societal implications of their work and provide them with the tools to act on those implications. The valorisation canvas is a tool that can help researchers evaluate the societal, environmental,

and economic value of their ideas and guide them through the process of creating impact.

Key takeaways

The webinar chat, questions, and answers allowed participants to reflect on the ideas shared by the speakers. Key questions raised during the discussion included the challenge of engaging researchers who are reluctant to move beyond their academic roles and the importance of fostering diversity in research-based innovation. Participants also discussed the need to create inclusive environments where all researchers—regardless of gender, discipline, or background—feel empowered to explore the potential of their work. The speakers agreed that while the culture of innovation is improving, there is still a significant gap in how institutions support researchers, particularly those who do not see themselves as entrepreneurs. Participants also highlighted the need for suitable role models and mentorship to encourage more diverse participation in innovation.

— **Impact beyond publications**: Higher education institutions must recognise the broader societal value of research, encourage and support researchers to think about how their work can make a difference beyond academia.

— **Human-centric support**: Institutional support for knowledge valorisation should focus on empowering individuals rather than just managing administrative processes.

— **Diversity in innovation**: More efforts are needed to ensure that all researchers, particularly women, underrepresented groups, and researchers in diverse fields of study, have the support and opportunities to contribute to innovation.

— **Tailored support systems**: The one-size-fits-all approach does not work for valorisation. Institutions should offer tailored support to help researchers navigate the diverse paths to impact.

Upcoming Activities

Looking ahead, CEI is committed to continuing its support for innovation in higher education through the following activities:

- **Webinar 'Capacity-building for Researchers: Fostering Knowledge-based Innovation'**: This session will explore strategies for fostering researchers' skills, mindsets, and leadership on knowledge valorisation. It will be held on November 18, 2025, at 15.30 CET.

- **Good Practices Call**: CEI invites community members to share initiatives (individual or institutional), projects, programmes, or policies that bridge the

innovation gap in higher education. These practices will enrich the upcoming Bridging the Innovation Gap in Higher Education report.

- **CEI Poll**: We invite CEI Members to contribute to our poll for Thematic Strand 2: Bridging the Innovation Gap in Higher Education. Your input is vital for understanding the current challenges and identifying key areas for improvement in knowledge valorisation.