vitae
realising
the potential
of researchers

Discovering innovation and intrapreneurship

At a glance

Most people have some idea of the term entrepreneurship and what entrepreneurs do. Entrepreneurs innovate; they generate creative ideas; they turn ideas into concrete solutions; they take responsibility for the risks, as do intrapreneurs.

The term intrapreneurship is relatively new, having been coined and popularised only in the 1980s. It refers to entrepreneurial behaviour of individuals within a larger organisation. Intrapreneurial behaviour is linked directly to innovation – intrapreneurs are … "those who take hands-on responsibility for creating innovation of any kind within an organisation"[1].

[1] Pinchot, G. (1985) Intrapreneuring: why you don't have to leave the corporation to become an entrepreneur, Harper & Row, New York

The purpose of intrapreneurism is to drive innovation

Most researchers do (or will) find themselves within an organisation for much if not all of their careers. Thus, insofar as researchers are being innovative and creative at all, their behaviour and capabilities are intrapreneurial. The key question is what is the importance of intrapreneurship within the academic environment that researchers currently find themselves? We first need to explore what the term means.

Intrapreneurship

Intrapreneurship is more than just having the initial 'good idea'.

"Remaining innovative is crucial yet this is not always about having a 'eureka' moment that means changing the world"
(Carole McCarthy, Director of Innovation and Commercialisation, Scottish Enterprise)

Intrapreneurs also engage proactively in processes which lead to successful implementation and exploitation of ideas. Delivery requires the successful individual or team to proceed with persistence and determination throughout the process, no matter what obstacles or difficulties are in the path.

Intrapreneurship in academia

Some day-to-day aspects of life in academic communities are clearly intrapreneurial, though perhaps are not necessarily acknowledged as such:

"Intrapreneurship already exists within academic communities although it may not be recognised as such. The role of a principal investigator or research group leader, for example, involves the 'business' of academia (managing teams, gathering resources and so on) as well as the research itself; successful academics are very intrapreneurial."
(Mitchell and Cordy, 2009)[2]

Whilst it is certainly the case that the business of academia requires intrapreneurial behaviour in lots of ways, it by no means gives a full and accurate representation of the extent of intrapreneurship in academia.

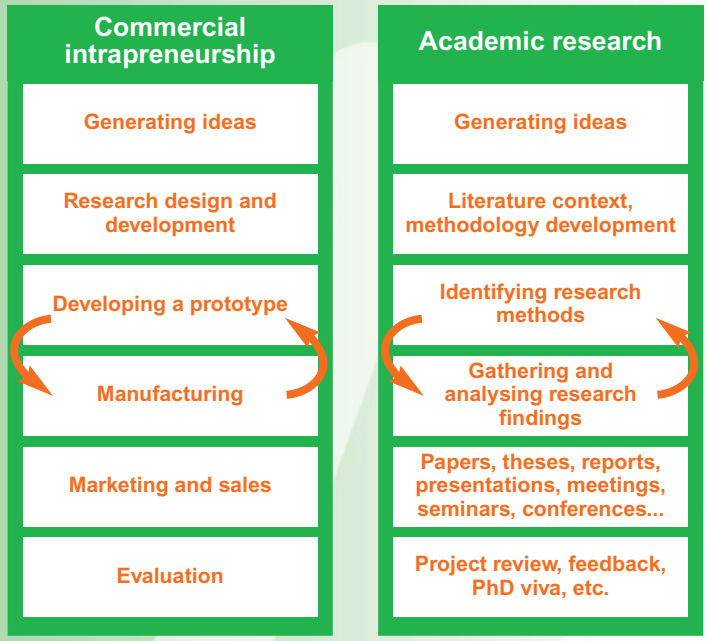
[2] An 'Intrapreneurial lens' on doctoral researchers' views of innovation, www.vitae.ac.uk/intrapreneurship

Research itself is highly inherently intrapreneurial

Whilst postgraduates and early career researchers may be less heavily engaged in the business of academia than PIs or group leaders, they are also conducting research itself – and the essence of original research is strongly parallel to the intrapreneurial process for commercial product development.

Intrapreneurship in research

The process and practice of academic research shows a striking parallel with that of commercial intrapreneurship:



Comparing each stage of the commercial intrapreneurship and academic research processes in turn:

- **Ideas:** the intrapreneur identifies a gap in the commercial marketplace and conceives a product that will fill that gap and hence yield commercial advantage. The researcher identifies a gap in knowledge and conceives a research problem or question, the solution of which will fill that gap and hence yield academic advantage.
- **Design and development:** at this stage, both the intrapreneur and the researcher consider the feasibility of their ideas and contextual factors; they investigate in detail how the idea can be converted into a tangible product.
- **Prototype development and manufacturing:** the intrapreneur and researcher both engage in iterative processes to develop and refine their product. The researcher's product in this sense is their research findings (analysis, conclusions and supporting data).
- **Marketing and sales:** at this stage, both the intrapreneur and the researcher take their products to market. The essence of this stage is that both demonstrate their products aiming to maximise the effect/impact on the marketplace. The researcher's marketplace is the whole community of individuals and organisations that might be interested in their product (the findings of the research). Research outputs such as papers and presentations are ostensibly to inform the community, but in reality perform a marketing / sales function.
- **Evaluation:** at this stage, both the intrapreneur and the researcher engage heavily with their customers at this stage to gauge the success or otherwise of their product. The researcher's customer base mostly consists of their peers – others in the marketplace, including thesis examiners, paper referees, journal editors, colleagues who respond to conference presentations, and so on.

The parallels between the process and practice of commercial intrapreneurship and academic research exist for all types of research. This is clearly evident in the scientific and engineering sectors, which lend themselves more obviously to commercial application. The process and practice of academic research as described above is essentially identical across all disciplines and in all sectors.

ALL forms of academic research are intrapreneurial in nature

Developing intrapreneurial capabilities

There is a recognised economic need for researchers moving into commercial or academic careers to have intrapreneurial skills and the confidence to contribute to organisational innovation, growth and competitive advantage. As such, there are a number of incentives for researchers at all levels to develop their intrapreneurial capabilities.

Crucially, as we have seen, research itself is inherently intrapreneurial. In this sense, researchers developing intrapreneurial capabilities see an immediate return on the investment of their time and effort; intrapreneurial awareness informs and enhances their research as part of an ongoing process.

"I think that successful academics are the ones who are able to know what is feasible in a context; what kinds of ideas are palatable... to be able to know when it's worth taking a risk…to know which strings to pull in order to bring through an innovation." (Research Fellow)

Under the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) funded theme of Enterprise for researcher development, a Vitae-led project with collaborating universities researched and published the intrapreneurial report 'Enterprise at work – exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development'. This report provided a model of intrapreneurial capabilities bringing together research and case studies from companies and universities. The main headings under which researcher intrapreneurial capabilities were described are:

- Personal effectiveness and motivation
- Creating ideas and opportunities
- Working with people
- Influencing change
- Relating to context

Useful resources for intrapreneurial researchers

The Vitae **researcher booklets** offer practical information to researchers about different topics in support of their personal, professional and career development.

- **The creative researcher: tools and techniques to unleash your creativity** (December 2009) offers practical information and advice for researchers on creativity in a research environment
- **The engaging researcher: inspiring people to engage with your research** (July 2010) offers practical tips on how public engagement can benefit you, your research and the public with whom you engage
- **The balanced researcher: strategies for busy researchers** (June 2008) offers information to help tackle and juggle the many demands on your time

What do researchers do? Career stories on film is an online database of career stories of hundreds of people with a doctorate or research background illustrating the range and variety of careers that people with research training go on to do. Share your experience with other researchers by uploading your own story.

What do researchers do? Career profiles of doctoral entrepreneurs (2010) is a collection of 30 career stories from doctoral researchers who have gone on to become entrepreneurs.

PGR Tips is our monthly email, which offers tips and advice to help you through your doctorate.

Researchers' skills and competencies flyer outlines skills researchers can bring to an organisation.

Vitae offers a range of **national and regional courses and events** to enable researchers to further their personal, professional and career development.

Researcher Development Framework (RDF) is a major new approach to researcher development, which aims to enhance our capacity to build the UK workforce, develop world-class researchers and build our research base.

Further information about the Vitae Intrapreneurship Project, including the report 'Enterprise at work – exploring intrapreneurship in researcher development' and details about identifying and developing intrapreneurial capabilities, can be found at:
http://vitae.ac.uk/intrapreneurship

Written by John Baxter and Paul Toombs for the Vitae intrapreneurship project, a collaborative project with eight UK higher education institutions (Durham University, University of Edinburgh, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Strathclyde, University of Surrey, University of Warwick and Queen Mary, University of London)

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