

Dutch researcher calls for more support for scientists with a focus on society

July 11 2016, by Jochem Vreeman



Credit: University of Twente

Existing views on commercial knowledge transfer are based on a misconception. As a result the commercial benefits of research are too small, argue Dr Paul Benneworth from the University of Twente and two of his colleagues in research in in the leading *Science and Public Policy* journal. They have developed a model that can increase the added value of scientific knowledge for society. The model was tested using a large

scientific database in Spain.

According to the three researchers, research into commercial [knowledge transfer](#) usually focuses on the final step in the scientific chain: the number of patents, spinoffs and licences. As a result, scientists who add value early on in the chain are undervalued. These scientists make a fundamental contribution to commercial knowledge transfer, but do not receive the recognition they deserve. "Scientific transfer is the only benchmark for academic excellence, and not the part a scientist plays in the spread of knowledge in [society](#) further down the line", explains senior researcher Paul Benneworth of the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente. "The existing valuation system with grants and other monetary awards provides a kind of perverted stimulus, as it only encourages scientists to publish as many articles in as many scientific magazines as possible."

Commercial knowledge transfer model

Benneworth and fellow researchers Julia Olmos-Peñuela from the University of Valencia and Elena Castro-Martinez from knowledge institute INGENIO-UPV in Valencia, looked at the concept of commercial knowledge transfer from a wider angle. They have determined that if a scientist uses available knowledge from society at every stage in their research, this will boost the transfer or knowledge to a social user. The three researchers developed a [model](#) that maps to what degree a scientist boosts the commercial knowledge transfer that follows research.

The five-step model first helps determine whether the scientist has a new line of research, called reframing, and if the research question is solid. The scientist's work plan and the manner in which he or she conducts research are then reviewed in cooperation with a partner in society. Finally, the spread of knowledge via conferences or HR projects in

cooperation with the business community for example, are important assessment criteria for commercial knowledge transfer.

1,500 Spanish scientists

The model was tested on the Impacto database, which contains data from 1,500 Spanish scientists. Their answers to a series of questions offer insight into their willingness to cooperate with partners in society. The researchers believe that the model is a useful instrument that can map scientific contribution to the commercial transfer of knowledge, based on personal and professional characteristics.

Ivory tower

Based on their research, Dr Benneworth, Dr Olmos-Peñuela and Dr Castro-Martinez say that commercial knowledge transfer needs to be encouraged in a different way. "Scientists do not receive enough validation for their willingness to embrace social issues", says Benneworth. "The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science should take a closer look at the knowledge that is shared with society, the business community and government organizations. When you are able to encourage willingness at a policy level, scientists will be less inclined to stay in their ivory towers. This greatly increases the commercial benefits of their knowledge and expertise."

More information: Julia Olmos-Peñuela et al. Does it take two to tango? Factors related to the ease of societal uptake of scientific knowledge, *Science and Public Policy* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/scipol/scw016](https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scw016)

Provided by University of Twente

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