



# The Challenge of Research Impact

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# Rationale

- Outlier crises suggest we are entering a strategic inflection zone.
  - David Sweeney (2020, YT) characterised prevailing research culture as deeply conservative in maintaining traditional industrial practices resisting the call to adopt “translation” of research into measurable, beneficial outcomes.
- Legacy cultures “eat [new] strategy for breakfast”.
  - Culture is the aggregation of effective habits that may no longer be useful in a dynamic market.
- Innovation is a social and political act
  - Adaption will involve innovation in the design & adoption of new habits and organisations around different outcomes.
- We need a research impact cultural revolution.
- We cannot wait for government & traditional HEI leadership to move.
  - We need to enable emergent, local research impact innovation *skunkworks* practice at a tactical, social & experimental level to prototype research impact methods involving co-production in the deliberate design of potential, measurable value.

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# The universities crisis is the moment to end a decade of marketisation

We must reimagine higher education not as a private benefit but as a public good.

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The Covid-19 crisis and its economic fallout is pushing our heavily marketised and increasingly financialised universities – many of them already vulnerable – closer and closer to the edge. The sector desperately needs a bailout, but **without intervention to transform and democratise universities, institutions risk maintaining the worst aspects of their current approach.**

## WORK &amp; CAREERS

## Business education

# Why are few management research ideas taken up?

There is a growing debate among academics as to whether research ought to be more practical for industry. By *Andrew Jack*

In the past half century, the number of business schools, faculty and academic publications has mushroomed. One estimate, from the business school accreditation body AACSB, suggests their total research activities cost almost \$4bn a year.

Yet these research findings often don't penetrate far from academic journals into what might be considered their target market: senior leaders in business, government and other organisations



The Financial Times has its own FT50 list of influential business school academic journals, a component of its annual global MBA ranking. Its ranking team is exploring ways to broaden the research assessment to track not only academic rigour, but also resonance with a broader audience and relevance to societal needs.

Usha Haley at Wichita State University, a specialist on the impact of research, says: "We are not rewarded within the systems in which we operate for having external impact through research. We are rewarded for contributing incrementally to the knowledge pool. Yet very little of what we do actually captures policymakers' or managers' attention."

For some academics, the drive for increased relevance and application is

# CHANGE READINESS

**.. To understand the extent to which the sector would be willing to change the way R quality is traditionally measured – from Journal Impact Factors & citations to RI beyond academia**

## How much do you support the idea of changing the way research quality is measured?

A key aim of our survey was to understand the extent to which the sector would be willing to change the way research quality is traditionally measured – from Journal Impact Factors (JIFs) and citations to research impact beyond academia. This is what we found:

## Most of the research sector support the idea of changing the way research quality is measured.

Over 90% said they want some form of change to happen in the evaluation of research impact. A total of 68% described themselves as very open to change in the way research is measured and 68% said they want to introduce metrics beyond JIFs. According to participants, however, their organisations are yet to catch up with their progressive view – only 35% reported their institution as very open to change and 30% as fairly open.

## Individuals leading the way: institutions need to catch up.

Over a third (39%) of participants have already driven change in the way they approach their research in relation to measuring impact and a further 30% are very open to change but are yet to drive change in their approach to measuring research impact. When it comes to their institution leading change, only 15% said their institution is very open and has already driven change. While another 10% said their institution was fairly against change, with a further 5% against change all together.

## Regional differences:

- In Africa, the proportion of people who are very open to change but have yet to change is significantly higher than in other regions – 39% compared to 32% in the Americas, 30% in Asia, 28% in Europe and 28% in Oceania.
- In Asia, the proportion of very open (regardless of change) is 7% greater than the average of 35%. The Americas are the largest proportion of those 'on the fence' (neither open to change nor against it) when compared to other regions.
- In Oceania, 'the very open but no change' category is much lower than the global average and in Asia, there is a significant proportion of institutions that are open to change but have not yet driven change.
- More people from the UK (53%) compared to Europe (38%) reported to be very open to change and have driven change. This is offset by a greater proportion in Europe that are fairly open to change – 25% compared to 12% of UK respondents.

over  
**90%**

**Have said they wanted some form of change to happen in the way research is measured...**

**39%**

**have already driven some kind of change in their institution**

# The Systemic Vacuum

- Whose impact is it anyway?
  - Research “Impact” is in the eye of the beholder, the producer rather than the consumer or even the funder.
  - RI is a “good thing”: but what does goodness involve?
  - The absence of an accepted, objective, universally-applied RI model with operational criteria that can be locally translated (by the researcher & funder) instead of by the RI manager retrospectively for ICS submission.
  - How will I know if I am doing RI correctly?
  - *If I ignore it, will it just go away?*

# Closed & Open Research Models (complementary)

## Closed RM

- Producer-led
- Circular, closed academic knowledge economy: high-status publication/ dissemination focus
- Low/ post-research translation intent
- Traditional, conservative academic view largely detached from context of application

## Open RM

- End-user/ customer context value focus
- Front-end focus on designing impact into the research method
- High translation design
- Leads to measurable change within work context via application.

Designing measurable value outcomes into your research process methodology

# “Forget about goals, focus on systems instead”

“Goals are about the results you want to achieve. *Systems are about the processes that lead to those results*”

“problems arise when you spend too much time thinking about your goals and not enough time *thinking about your systems*”

Clear, J., 2018. Atomic habits: An easy & proven way to build good habits & break bad ones. Penguin.

## **RI problems are systemic**

### Producer-led tradition

- Closed, circular knowledge economy
- Medieval functional, siloed, hierarchical, craft knowledge structures

### Rewards & careers

### Methods

- Invisible entrepreneurial start-up methods outside traditional academic research methodology

### Processes

### Culture

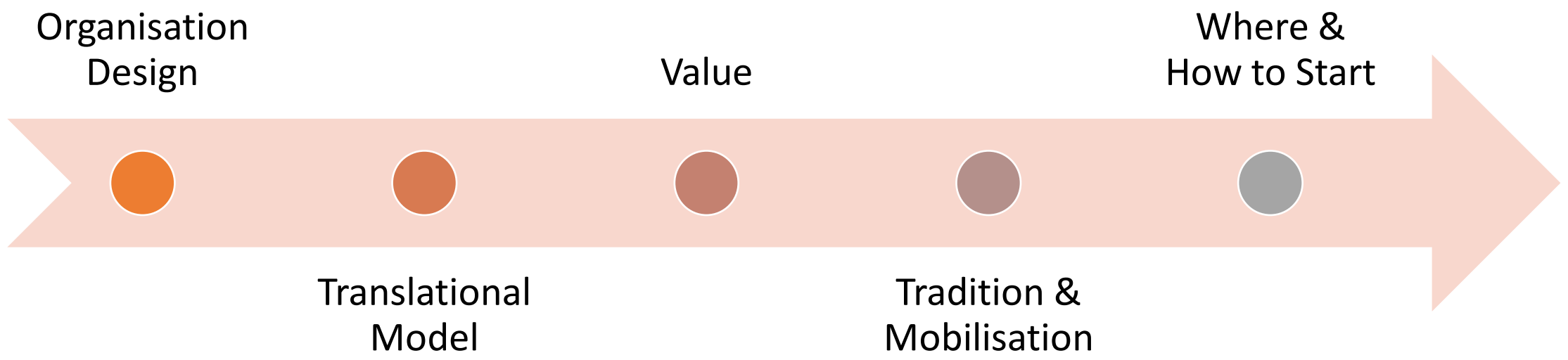
- Identity, values, beliefs





# The Challenges of moving from a closed to open research model to realise measurable impact

Knowledge and capability gaps





HEIs aren't **designed to** support & promote impactful research



We don't have an explicit **generic, translational impact research model** to benchmark current research against.



We don't **understand value** in terms of end-users.



We don't have an **open research model tradition** that can liberate researchers to operate within a dynamic collaborative innovation space.

We don't know how to **collaborate** with knowledge users or how to find them and set up a productive win-win relationship.



We don't know how to start **solving the problems** involved in making the transition: HEIs don't have the strategic tools, structures or practices to make it happen.



# How to start a research impact revolution

Act locally-share globally:  
prototype practice and  
build capacity: create  
collaborative spaces



Nike's founder  
Steve Knight

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- **Introduce a new game**
- **Build a community of local practitioners**
- **Influence new incentives**
- **Change the rules**
- **Encourage organisational design around RI**





## In the absence of a strategy...

- If we haven't got a global, unifying strategy: we'll have just to go tactical, at a local level.
- Influence the R managers to include RI Design Principles in project specification criteria
- Publicise our success.
- Build a movement.
- Tell our leaders it was their idea

# Building Authentic Local Capability



**Skunkworks:** “small, empowered teams, streamlined processes and culture that values attempting to do things that haven’t been done before.”



**Hackathons:** “a *usually* competitive event in which people work in groups on software or hardware projects, with the goal of creating a functioning product by the end of the event”



**Consulting Gyms:**  
online & F2F: 3 hr to full day

- Problem-focused
- Dramatic, (competitive) social, ambitious
- Fast-prototyping
- Use of innovation thinking processes
- Working MVP
- Cross-functional teams working on real problems
- End-user in the room



# Research Impact involves Customer Strategy-*Pull* & Tactical-*Push*

Individual researcher-level RI begins with *tactical-push*

- Identifying consumers/ end-users able to apply the research, in order to build a meaningful collaboration around exploitation within *their* context from the start.
- Investing in startup thinking (customer context development, open innovation, outcome-driven innovation, J2BD, VPs).

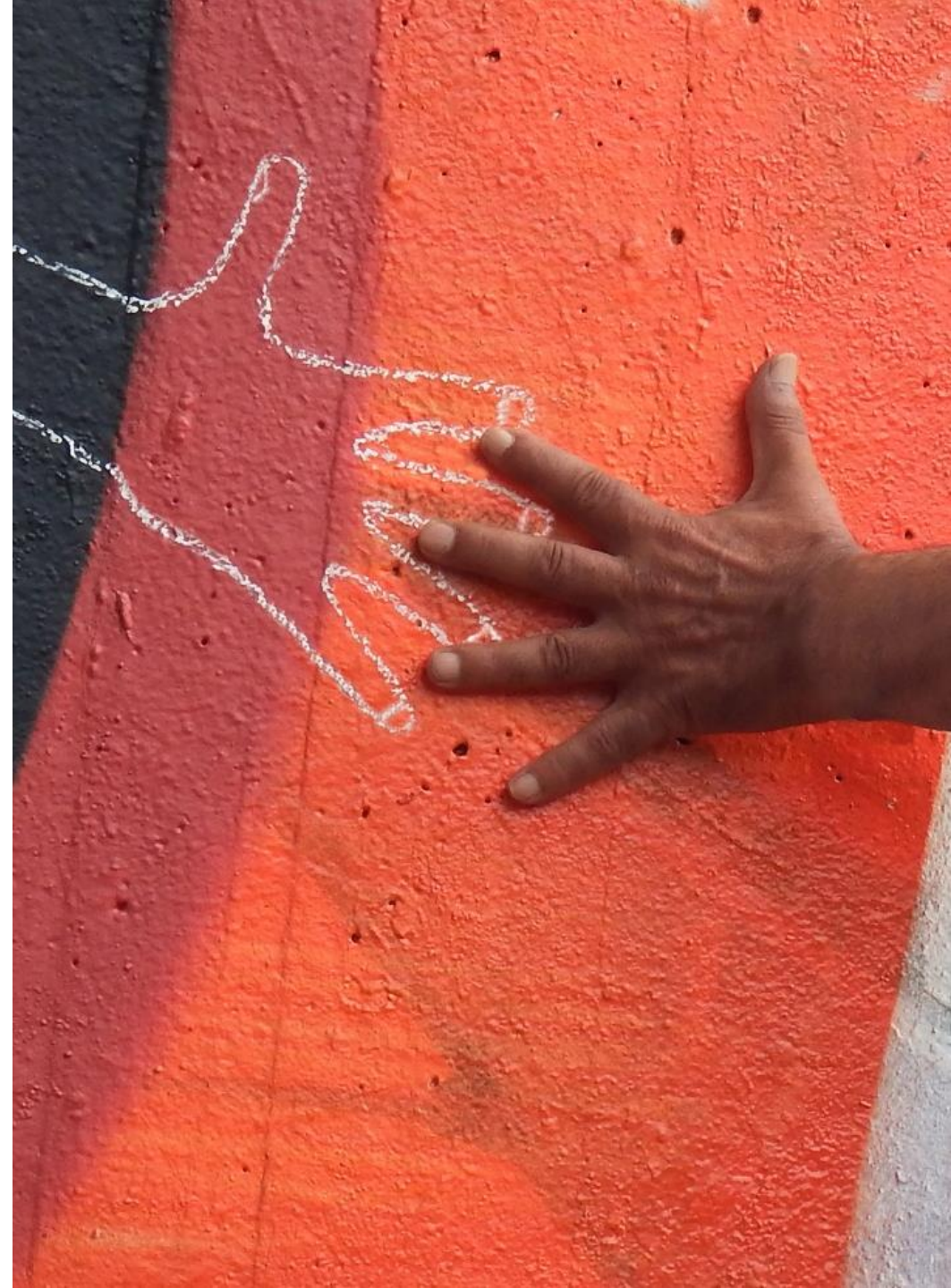
For the HEI-level RI is about *strategic-pull*

- Identifying *complementary* partners with meaningful, knowledge strategies.
- Invest in knowledge hub strategies (T)
- Break down the CRM barriers (ask yourself why organisations aren't knocking on your door with invitations to collaborate?)

Start investing in building RI capability & infrastructure

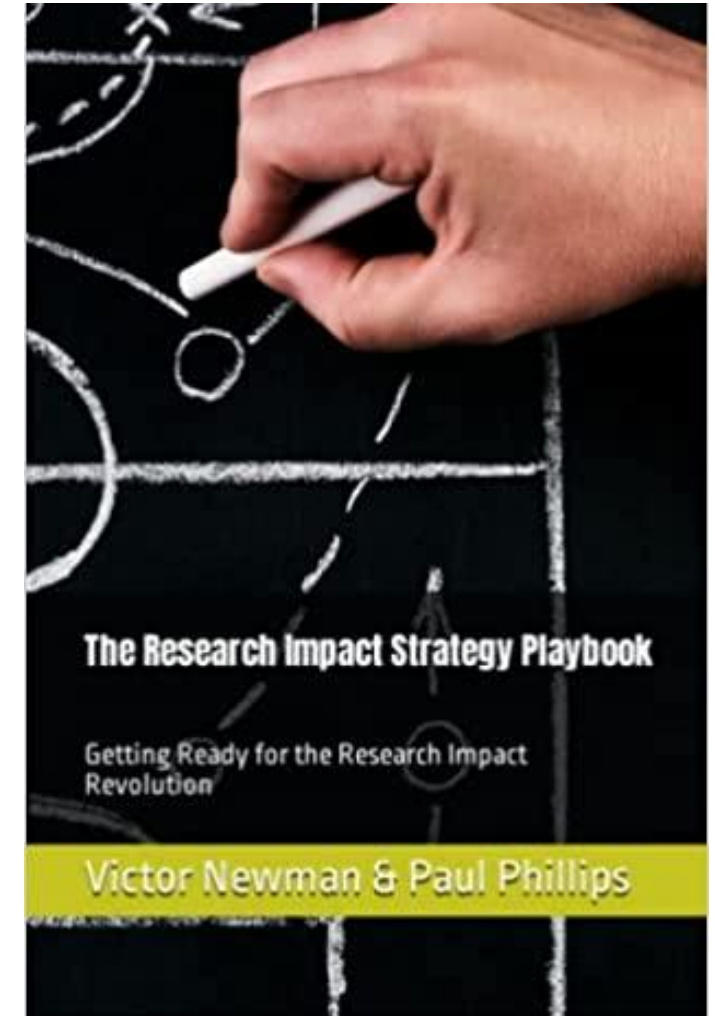
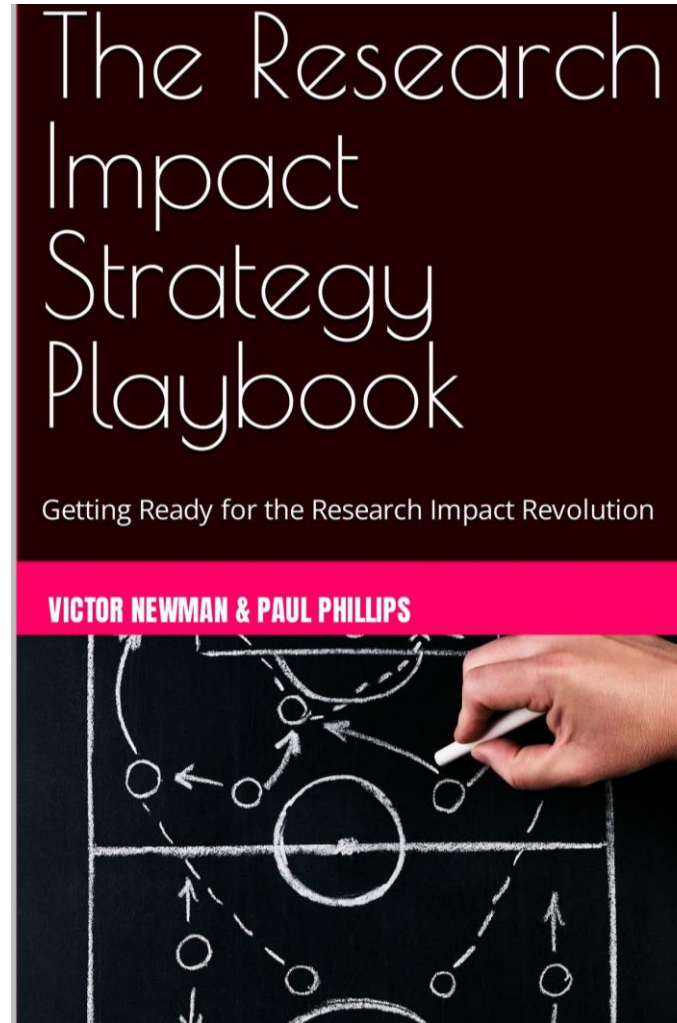
# Towards a Cultural Academic Revolution!

- Use Impact Research Profile (IRP) to awaken hunger in developing HIR practice.
- Use RI-VP & RI Design Principles to re-think the potential value hidden in legacy research projects (to see the gaps & opportunity).
- Start investing in RI capability through prototyping (encourage skunkwork projects across faculties and disciplines).
- Bring selected customers onto the campus to talk about their challenges and run half to 1-day innovation hackathons for quick-wins and binary enculturation
  - Teach process leadership and innovation techniques to enable rapid approach.
  - Follow-up with RI methodology hackathons (for re-use).
- Build shadow, alternative, cross-functional RI organisation to re-design organisation structures, rewards and practices to encourage HIR behaviours (both tactically & strategically) and redesign work models to build capacity. Encourage RI strategy.



# Apply the Thinking

- Join the Research Impact Strategy Group
- Encourage others to read the Playbook
- Influence local practice
- Ask leaders to think about optimising their legacy RI architecture: what is it designed to do?
- Run functional and cross-functional RI hackathon/ skunkworks sessions
- Share ideas and prototype practices with [impactofimpact.com](http://impactofimpact.com)



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