

An aerial photograph of a large, open plaza with a grid of white lines. Numerous people are scattered across the plaza, some standing in small groups, others walking. The overall scene is busy and public. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark blue filter.

Report brief

Fostering engaged and entrepreneurial culture at universities

UIN

An executive summary of the findings from research on the factors that drive culture change towards entrepreneurship and engagement at universities. This research was conducted as part of the "Time4UNIchange" project.

Context

Internationally and within the EU, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a vital role in addressing societal challenges. To do so, HEIs must collaborate with external partners (industry, community organizations, alumni, citizens, etc.) to make their research and education more relevant and impactful.

However, implementing this cultural change within HEIs is challenging due to bureaucratic nature, siloed structures, and restrictive contracts. Additionally, the international academic community tends to prioritize research and education over these activities.

Research Methodology

To gain a better understanding of the factors driving cultural change, we conducted an investigation. Our research methodology involved multiple steps to gather information and insights regarding external engagement and entrepreneurial activities in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) during the implementation of cultural change.

We conducted a systematic literature review, held focus groups with 40 academics, and conducted 17 interviews with experts to gather insights on change management, organizational change, and cultural change within HEIs and similar institutions. Furthermore, we identified 40 positive initiatives that support academics in external engagement and entrepreneurialism within HEIs.

The research focused on identifying barriers and drivers for cultural change in universities, particularly in fostering entrepreneurship and engagement. We explored barriers and drivers across four key areas:

AWARENESS of value and benefits of engagement and entrepreneurial activities

INCENTIVES AND REWARDS to act entrepreneurially and engage with external stakeholders

COMMUNICATION of engagement, entrepreneurship and its impact within HEIs

NAVIGATING THE SUPPORT ENVIRONMENT within and outside HEIs

Barriers to academic staff being involved in entrepreneurial and external engagement activities

RAISING AWARENESS:

- External engagement is not recognized as part of an academic's role.
- Academics unaware of the benefits and how to begin.

COMMUNICATION:

- Cultural differences complicate external stakeholder communication.
- Mismatched expectations with external organizations.
- Lack of guidance on entrepreneurship-related issues.

INCENTIVES AND REWARDS:

- Research and teaching take priority.
- Insufficient recognition for external engagement.
- Scarcity of dedicated time for these activities.

NAVIGATING SUPPORT ENVIRONMENT:

- Administrative barriers limit flexibility.
- Limited industry contacts hinder outreach.
- Financial constraints vary between institutions.

Drivers to academic staff being involved in entrepreneurial and external engagement activities

EXTRINSIC:

- Time and budget allocation for external engagement.
- Supportive management and colleagues emphasizing its importance.
- Having influential contacts valued by management and peers.
- Research funding for collaborative projects.
- Building a wide network for new research opportunities.
- Enhancing potential for more research projects through collaboration.
- Student competitions and awards.
- Income differentiation through external activities.
- Annual performance reviews covering assignments, results, work environment, collaboration, and development paths.

INTRINSIC:

- Increased personal and professional satisfaction and enjoyment at work.
- Satisfaction from benefiting students' learning and employability, as well as society.
- Professional satisfaction from staying updated in their field and connected to external organizations.
- Collaboration with external organizations seen as more relevant and impactful.



The focus is on making a difference in the societies we serve and engage with. Therefore, the societal benefit tends to resonate more with many of our colleagues, rather than financial gain.

Time4UniChange Interviewee

Recommendations to fostering culture change across key dimensions of this research

Raising awareness

TIMING MATTERS

- Include external engagement and/or entrepreneurialism as part of each academic's job description and through induction programs for new academics.

SHOWCASING THE IMPACT

- Utilise existing academics stories/experiences with external engagement and/or entrepreneurial activities to raise awareness of the benefits, learning and supports available.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

- Organize institution-wide events about engagement opportunities, promoting them effectively within departments
- Encourage academics to take part in events that involve external partners

The concept of "positive gossip" was mentioned by several experts. It means that the best catalyst of change is people experiencing and communicating about positive examples of change. This is supported through this projects research on the importance of peer-to-peer communication for intrinsically motivated academics.

Time4UniChange Expert Interviews

Enhancing communication

INTERNALLY

- Measure and report on the impact of engagement and entrepreneurial activities to demonstrate the value of these efforts
- Create a system for feedback and evaluation to ensure that engagement and entrepreneurial activities are meeting their intended goals
- Ongoing communication regarding supports, resources, relevant personnel, competitions, training etc. available within and outside the HEI

EXTERNALLY

- Clarify the HEIs strategy regarding external engagement and entrepreneurial activities
- Create a system for reporting on engagement and entrepreneurial activities, such as regular reports to stakeholders and annual reports to the university community.
- Host regular events, such as networking events, pitch competitions, and innovation fairs, to showcase engagement and entrepreneurial activities.

Incentives and rewards

TIME ALLOCATION

- Increase the allocation of time for externally engagement and/or entrepreneurial activities.

PROMOTION AND CAREER PATHS

- Revise the promotional criteria to assign equal importance to time dedicated to external engagement and/or entrepreneurial activities, as well as time devoted to research and education.
- Consider creating distinct career paths for academics who are interested in external engagement and/or entrepreneurialism.

RECOGNITION

- Introduce formal acknowledgements, celebrations, and recognition of externally engagement and entrepreneurial activities within each department

In relation to what incentives or rewards academics would like to see introduced; time, equal weight during promotional opportunities and recognition amongst colleagues and management were clearly identified.

Time4UniChange Focus groups

Navigating the support environment

PROMOTE A POSITIVE SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

- Foster a culture within academic departments that encourages and supports engagement in external activities.
- Create an environment where academics feel valued and encouraged to pursue external engagement activities.

LEVERAGE INTERNAL SUPPORT NETWORKS

- Invest in and listen to informal support networks established by academics
- Encourage participation in internal networks to help academics become more comfortable accessing both internal and external supports.

FACILITATE EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

- Support academic staff's involvement in external networks, committees, and boards.
- Ensure that academics have the resources and opportunities to participate in external activities effectively.

PROVIDE TRAINING, GUIDANCE, AND MENTORSHIP

- Offer training and support in external engagement, including guidelines and peer support.
- Consider creating an induction process or mentorship programs to provide new academics with resources, information, and support at the beginning of their careers.

Conclusion

Our research provides a glimpse into the current state of academics' involvement in external engagement and entrepreneurial activities in HEIs and the importance of cultural change for a more positive outcomes. We've highlighted the barriers, drivers and outlined recommendations for increasing awareness, enhancing communication, providing incentives and rewards, as well as supporting academics to navigate the support environment more effectively.

The investigation has highlighted that there is no “one model fits all”. When it comes to change management frameworks or models, all of them reiterate the need for alignment with organisational mission and vision, the requirement for leadership and management to drive the change, the importance of incentives and rewards, significance of communication and the importance of understanding the existing culture(s) before implementing any change strategies.

Research conducted by:



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice



[Access the full report here](#)

Full Research Report Contributors

Fleur Schellekens, Laura O'Donovan, LisaBeth Sundström, Luciana Gualdi, Rimante Rusaite, Stefan Brolin, Vladi Finotto

Disclaimer

The information and views set out in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use, which may be made of the information contained therein.



UIN Transforming the future of
higher education

uin.org