

The proposed poster intends to provide an overview of the research on the role of “Networks in Open Innovation”, undertaken at Imperial College Business School. A summary of this line of research can be found below:

## **Open Innovation: how corporate R&D scientists capture and exploit external knowledge from their networks**

Many organizations have attempted to open up their innovation processes by increasingly exploiting external sources of knowledge to help them generate, develop and commercialize innovative ideas. These search activities range from creating and maintaining external connections with universities, suppliers, and customers to attending conferences and technology fairs with the aim of identifying new technologies and products and to promote their development within the firm. These open innovation initiatives require a new set of skills and practices, and many firms have struggled to train and manage their employees to become more externally facing. The ability of scientists, engineers and technical staff to routinely reach beyond the boundaries of the firm for new ideas and to integrate them inside the firm has become a critical organizational challenge. Despite the central role of external engagement in innovation, we still know very little about successful search and networking practices associated with open innovation. Moreover, we lack the tools to assess the ability of individuals to recognize the value of external ideas and to integrate them inside the organization.

Our research aims to improve our understanding of how corporate R&D scientists develop new ideas and subsequently transform them into successful products. R&D scientists are increasingly expected to function as ‘gatekeepers’, proactively gathering external information and then translating this information in terms that are meaningful and useful to other members of the organization. To be able to perform this function gatekeepers need to be strongly connected both to other members of their organization as well as having rich contacts to external sources of information.

This project identifies the search and networking practices of scientists and engineers in a large multinational company by mapping their internal and external networks and measuring successful instances of integration of externally sourced ideas. The core of the research project is a large-scale survey of senior scientists and engineers in the technical career ladder of this company. The survey has been preceded by a series of interviews with senior R&D scientists.

A better insight in the role of networks in Open Innovation allows formulating lessons on how R&D scientists can more effectively utilize their networks to create breakthrough innovations. Further, the results of this study generate greater understanding on how firms can enhance the search and networking activities of their R&D staff and design effective strategies for sourcing and integrating external ideas, a critical component of a firm’s approach to open innovation.

**Dr. Anne ter Wal - Dr. Paola Criscuolo - Prof. Ammon Salter**

**Innovation Studies Centre  
Imperial College Business School**