Valorization strategy BETA

Over dit document

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Summary Valorization Strategy

INTRODUCTION

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is committed to create knowledge and impact via three, equally relevant core activities: *research*, *education*, and *valorization*[1]. At the Faculty of Science, we fully endorse these missions. It is for this reason that we have elaborated a specific strategic plan that could bring our valorization efforts at par with our research and education achievements.

Within the Faculty of Science, we have a long list of excellent valorization examples in each and every department. However, when it comes to recognizing and acknowledging the success of our departments or the career of our staff members on the valorization topic, there is still limited attention for "third mission" initiatives and results. For instance, only a few departments have elaborated a valorization strategy, and knowledge transfer and knowledge co-creation have been only rarely included as a topic in the yearly appraisals or in promotions. It seems therefore important that we give those initiatives more space, more support, more visibility, and more recognition in relation to education and research. In this way, we provide researchers the opportunity to expand their network and generate new social or financial capital for further research and education, and give them recognition and reward for those efforts.

To obtain this result, we need to keep laser-focused attention on what valorization is actually all about: creating economic and/or societal value for the benefit of the society we are immersed in[1]. In line with the VU vision on valorization, our ambition as faculty is to support valorization providing tools that could foster an intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial academic culture and unleash the knowledge transfer and knowledge co-creation potential of our organization.

VALORIZATION STRATEGY

The valorization process depends on the context it is developed in, which relates to the research activity it is based on, the societal problem it aims to tackle, and the stakeholders involved. Due to the breadth of scientific topics that our faculty is engaged with, we expect that the valorization process develops along three strategic paths (see figure 1), namely:

- *End-of-pipe knowledge*, where valorization is expected to emerge as a by-product of blue sky research (from solution to problem; idea-to-society)
- *Society driven knowledge transfer*, where valorization is generated by undertaking research activities that are driven by an external societal need (from problem to solution; idea-for-society);

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[1] Valorization is the "the process of creating value from knowledge by making knowledge suitable and/or available for economic and/or societal use and translating that knowledge into products, services, processes and entrepreneurial activity" (see: https://www.rathenau.nl/en/knowledge-policy/definitions-and-policy .

- *Impact by design knowledge co-creation*, where groups of researchers and groups from society (e.g., citizens, industry, government, NGOs) come together to form an ecosystem aimed at identifying and solving different aspects of industry related or societal problems (blended problem solving; idea-with-society).
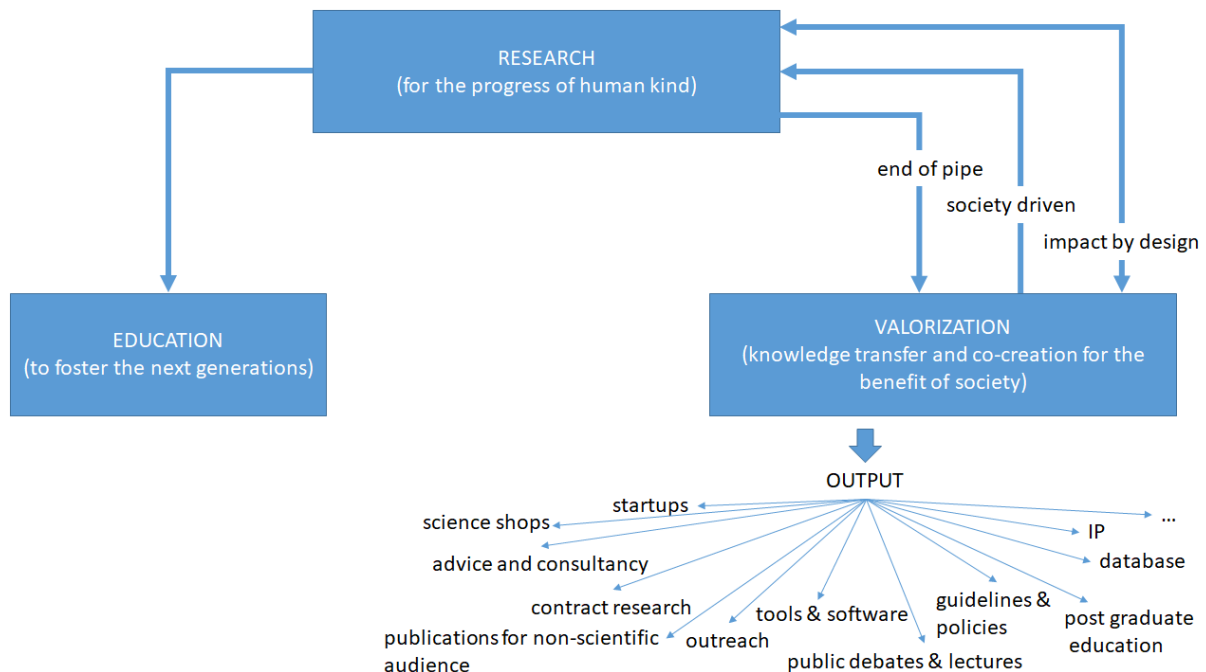

Figure 1: Valorization process as result from interaction between knowledge and society

The three paths can be different for different research projects, and the valorization process can result in different outcomes. Clearly, valorization via **'end-of-pipe' strategy** is, by design (but not exclusively), more serendipitous and therefore may be more appropriate for blue sky research. A **'society driven'** path is often more suitable when the research activities are focused on specific user groups, target groups, or stakeholders. Finally, an **'impact-by-design'** path is more conventional for research that is focused on improving a specific practice or societal context in collaboration with societal partners. This path resorts, among others, to so-called 'participatory action research', 'citizen science', 'transdisciplinary research', or 'practice-based research'. All these opportunities are already applied more or less implicitly by our departments and also generated various valorization outputs, as illustrated, for example, in figure 1.

TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE DEPARTMENTS

In the next 5 years, the faculty board has the ambition to facilitate the valorization process by (see overview in appendix 1):

1. Define a valorization vision and strategy at departmental level that is related to the departmental research and educational programs and aligned with the faculty and VU strategy;

2. Support researchers by defining policies and initiatives that could: a) promote, support, and regulate valorization in a broad sense; b) offer proper reward and recognition of valorization, ancillary activities, contract research; and c) nurture cross-departmental activities and harmonized communication approaches to foster a coherent image of our knowledge transfer initiatives;

3. Support network initiatives to attract external partners and, in this way, contribute to the VU campus as innovation hub;

4. Support startup initiatives and incentivize a (societal) entrepreneurial culture among our students and staff.

These activities are carried out in close collaboration with all the relevant partners within our university, including IXA, project control, marketing & communication, grant office, HRM and FCO. Furthermore, the faculty board plays a central role in the implementation of knowledge transfer initiatives that require a campus-wide effort.

1. Define departmental valorization vision and strategy

To achieve our ambition and implement our faculty strategy on valorization, the input of departments is essential. After all, departments are ultimately responsible for connecting their valorization activities to their research strategy. The three valorization pathways described above can be considered as a guideline for the departments to define their valorization vision and strategy. An adjusted version of the 'Strategische Personeelsplannen', which will be soon discussed with the department heads, will then help the departments align with the VU Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

2. Support researchers

To help the execution of the departmental plans, we must support our researchers in all the three phases of the valorization process, namely: 1) motivation, 2) opportunity recognition, and 3) implementation. The first two phases will be stimulated via three means, namely, a) giving space to role models, b) opening the door to external organizations via network initiatives (see paragraph 3 'support network initiatives initiates), and c) offering training programs and coaching (see paragraph 4 'support startup initiatives and entrepreneurial culture'). As for the third phase (implementation), we will work on different internal policies to provide researchers adequate support as described below.

2.1 Reward system

It is important to acknowledge that knowledge transfer and knowledge co-creation, whether it is for society, students, or for academia, requires time and should be equally rewarded. The reward system of academia has been so far mainly focused on research and teaching results. However, there is a growing movement towards a more balanced way to review the recognition and reward system of academics, where valorization is gaining a more relevant role. Our faculty fully endorses this new approach. This means that the faculty board will evaluate results and time spent on valorization activities as part of research, education and management tasks, for example via the yearly appraisal

and promotions of staff members. The faculty will stimulate this cultural change by developing various tools that enable researchers to make their valorization activities more visible, for example in portfolios for promotions and in the research portal.

2.2 Ancillary activities

Ancillary activities have been so far treated on a case-by-case basis. In 2019, IXA has developed a new regulation for the exploitation of research results, which represents a significant step forward in this area, especially when it comes to startup initiatives. Yet, there is still room for creating a policy that could help researchers manage their time, their resources, and their conflict of interest when enrolling an ancillary activity – a task that we will tackle in coordination with IXA and HRM. The policy will be aimed at stimulating researchers to engage ancillary activities, while protecting them from the risk of reputation damage and preserving their full commitment to their institutional tasks. These policies can be then extended to support researchers who collaborate with external parties as part of their academic working time as well.

2.3 External collaborations

Contract research and other research activities that are related to collaborations with third parties are another extremely important tool for knowledge transfer and knowledge co-creation. Together with Project control, IXA and department managers, we will therefore investigate how we can improve our legal support and whether we can provide more project management assistance.

2.4 External communication

Concerning external communication, we want to incentivize public engagement while managing the risk of reputation damage for our researchers and for our organization. There are several existing training workshops on communication as well as guidelines for a responsible use of the press and the social media. Our aim here is to increase the visibility of these initiatives and, if needed, develop additional tools to create awareness of the importance of external communication and to promote a professional development of communication initiatives.

2.5 Local valorization support

Finally, the faculty board will, in consultation with IXA, look at whether we can create the resources for a local valorization support centre. There are some real bottlenecks in our valorization processes that are specific for our faculty, namely, contracts, IP management, and legal aspects in both medical research (e.g., medical device dossiers) and research of genetic resources (e.g. Nagoya protocol). One possibility is to set up a help desk that is coupled to IXA, grant office, and project control for practical information on business development, legal issues, and project management.

3. Support network initiatives

We believe that the course of actions described above will help our departments (as well as individual researchers) initiate, among others, more collaborations with external partners. Yet, in the next five years the faculty board will also evaluate whether, for some specific research areas (e.g., Human Health and Life Sciences and Sustainability), we could develop an office for thematic business

development similar to the [Industry Alliance Office](#) or other faculty-wide visible initiatives to manage the relationship with external stakeholders. Also, we will investigate whether we can better connect to our alumni network, who could bring in resources and capabilities that we currently have no access to.

We will further continue supporting ARCNL and other initiatives in which our department has taken strong commitment with industrial partners.

4. Support startup initiatives and entrepreneurial culture

To promote the entrepreneurial culture, in collaboration with the School of Business and Economics, we will continue to promote courses on entrepreneurship and valorization for undergraduate students and young researchers (PhD students and postdocs). In collaboration with IXA, we will promote shorter workshops for staff members who may be interested in this field.

Furthermore, we will continue supporting and promoting, among others, the Demonstrator Lab, the Iconic Lab, and Tech4Science. Some of these initiatives, as well as other new ones, might have to be evaluated under a more central perspective, and be aligned with the plans that the Executive Board is developing to make our campus a reference point of society oriented research. For example, in the coming years the Demonstrator Lab should be structurally embedded at the VU campus for supporting startup initiatives of our university at large and contributing to the entrepreneurial academic culture across campus.

Appendix 1: Management summary

The table below summarizes the main objectives that we will tackle in the next 5 years.

Our **ambition** is to support valorization and foster an intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial academic culture that could unleash the knowledge transfer potential of our organization.		
GOAL	TOOL	OUTCOME
To define a valorization strategy.	- Faculty valorization strategy - New SPP format, including valorization vision and strategy for departments	Optimized valorization effort.

To define policies and initiatives that could promote, support, and regulate knowledge transfer.	- Role models, interaction with external parties, training; - Planning, at department level, of time for valorization; - Explicit references to valorization in the annual appraisal and portfolios for promotion to UHD/HL; - Space for valorization activities in research portal; - New policy on ancillary activity; - Support on external collaborations and more specific on contract research; - Training and support on outreach and communication; - Dedicated legal support.	Professionalization of knowledge transfer, which is now regarded as integral part of a researcher's tasks and career.
To support network initiatives.	- Dedicated thematic business development; - Alumni.	Increase in the number of contract research initiatives.
To support startups initiatives and create an entrepreneurial culture to promote awareness of the importance of valorization among our students and staff.	- Demonstrator Lab; - Iconic Lab; - Tech4Science - Bachelor and Master programs in business and science related topics; - Courses (undergrad and PhD) in entrepreneurship and valorization.	Increase in the number of startups. A group of students and staff members with a stronger intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial attitude.