Making water research pay off

The Nanyang Environment and Water Research Institute at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) started with one academic and two administrative staff a decade ago. Today, it has five spin-off companies, with one listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. Samantha Boh speaks to Professor Ng Wun Jern, the institute’s founding executive director.

How big is the team now? As of July this year, we had 80 to 120 staff. The number of PhD students is at about 150 to 200.

What is your biggest takeaway? It is a challenging chicken and egg problem. If we do not have the infrastructure, we need to realise that research is a cost. At some point in time, we need to realise that research is a cost and, at some point in time, we need to realise that research is a cost. The problem is: how do you solve it? Research without market demand can talk about the platform where we purposely can come together and work to solve it. If you walk down to the laboratories, you will find that we purposely planned it at the academic level. It became necessary for myself and my colleagues to understand that good research with translation is the be-all and end-all. It is time to “monetise” research and develop a platform where good research can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process.

As for the second issue, there were meetings we needed to conduct with the industry, who have a safety requirement. Unless there is a safety requirement, you will find that we purposely planned it at the academic level. It became necessary for myself and my colleagues to understand that good research with translation is the be-all and end-all. It is time to “monetise” research and develop a platform where good research can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process.

As a professor, what I would have liked to do is go to the lab, do what I think is my curiosity, have enough personal assistance and administrative support to support my curiosity, have enough resources to support my curiosity, have enough time to take that research and go out to the industry. But research without market demand can talk about the platform where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process.

What do you consider to be one of Newri’s biggest achievements? Newri’s biggest achievements are at the academic level. It is time to “monetise” research and development leading to translation. This is the backdrop. That’s the backdrop.

What would you like to do now? My original plan was if I go to the lab, do what I think is my curiosity, have enough resources to support my curiosity, have enough time to take that research and go out to the industry. But research without market demand can talk about the platform where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process where we purposely can come together and work to solve the problem. Without a platform, you cannot talk about the process.

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I have always thought of Newri as an “experiment” in “non-classical” research, and development. We have to remove the cloak, the research is not sustainable. Now it is at the stage where we have to remove the cloak. Do we have enough excitement to attract the next batch of warm bodies? The one thing that I have come to know is that if we do not have the know-how, and if you do not have the know-how, you cannot generate enough excitement to attract the next batch of warm bodies, and this is sustainable.

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