

**TECHNICAL AND BUSINESS CULTURES
IMPACT R&D PRODUCTIVITY**
BY GWEN ACTON, PHD

Life science companies require technically trained experts and business professionals to work together productively in order to be successful. But lab scientists and industry management often have different priorities and training. These cultural differences can negatively impact R&D productivity if they are not understood and managed effectively.

For example, R&D technical culture tends to place a large value on gathering data with as much certainty as possible, regardless of the time frame required to obtain it. In contrast, corporate management is usually under significant financial pressure that constrains the time frames in which they can pursue issues. Business leaders must often rely on their intuition to make decisions in complex situations without conclusive information, and have less familiarity with drawing conclusions from raw technical data.

Technical vs. Business Cultures Examples:

Issues	Science	Business
Goals	Truth	Profits
Certainty/Risk	100%, Data	Action, Intuition
Appearance	Casual, Open	Formal, Guarded
Management	Independence	Control
Time Lines	Long	Short
Values	Intelligence	Leadership
Attitude	Critical	Positive

Conflict between departments in the company can result from these different perspectives. For example, it is not uncommon for R&D staff to discover technical results that they want to pursue further because of possible scientific interest or importance. They may also seek to obtain high accuracy or quality levels in their results. On the other side, company executives are often baffled that their technical experts won't work on the goals that have been so clearly

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outlined for them. From their perspective, the scientists appear to be wasting time on frivolous projects, or in trying to make things perfect when they have already achieved results of acceptable quality.

Another common situation occurs when scientists present important data they consider to be clear and conclusive to their management, only to feel like the facts are ignored or glossed over. Meanwhile, business professionals are often frustrated by technical staff who seem to be “stuck in the weeds” because they present too many details without apparently understanding or appreciating the big picture context or business impact of what they are doing.

These cultural misunderstandings can have a direct impact on R&D productivity:

- First, failure to convey critical technical information for important decisions can influence the company’s success in both the short or long term.
- Second, when laboratories pursue projects that are not aligned with company goals, their technical efforts waste valuable resources and affect timelines and milestones.
- Third, when scientists feel frustrated by corporate management, they have lower moral, higher employee turnover, and less motivation to work hard and creatively.

Strategic leadership at the laboratory or company-wide level can help address and improve these cultural misunderstandings and improve R&D productivity. At the group level, technical leaders can have a solid grasp of corporate values and priorities, and adjust their communications for greater alignment. At the corporate level, leaders can help improve interactions between different departments through facilitated conversations, and by forming cross-functional teams. Management can also invest in training and coaching individuals in all departments to better understand their counterparts in different disciplines in order to improve their productivity.

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