

Who Performs R&D? Understanding Research & Experimental Development | ReaDI-Watch

06/05/2026 4:22 pm IST

Research and Experimental Development (R&D) is often associated with laboratories, scientists, or dedicated research teams, but in reality, innovation activity occurs across many different parts of modern organisations. Engineers, software developers, operations teams, manufacturing specialists, product managers, and technical leadership teams may all contribute to solving technological challenges, developing new capabilities, and advancing products or processes.

Understanding who performs R&D and what qualifies as experimental development is critical for organisations seeking to improve innovation management.

Different types of Research & Experimental Development (or R&D) is carried out by companies, universities, RPOs (research performing organisations), institutes of technology and others.

According to the **OECD's Frascati Manual**, the definition of R&D is outlined below:

What is R&D: Definition

Definition of "Research & Development":

Comprises **creative** and **systematic work** undertaken in order to increase the **stock of knowledge** of humankind, culture and society - and to devise **new applications** of available knowledge

Definition of "Experimental Development":

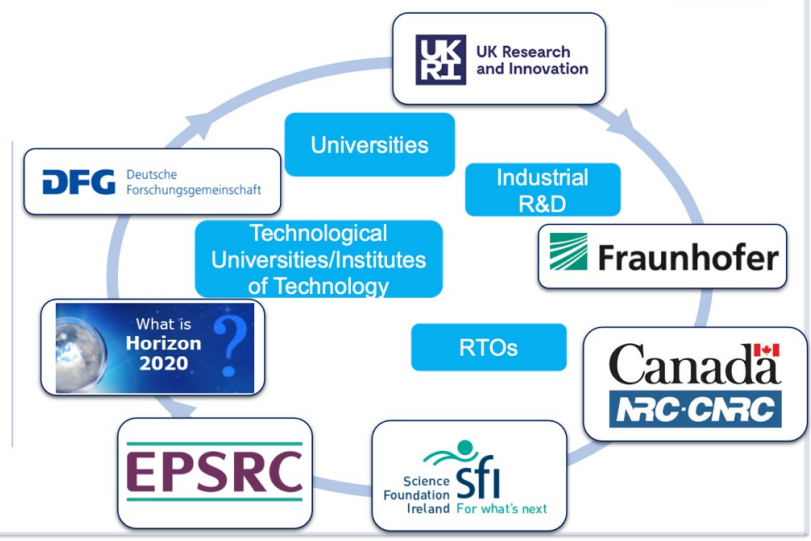
Experimental development is systematic work, drawing on knowledge gained from research and practical experience and producing additional knowledge, which is directed to producing new products or processes or to improving existing products or processes.

[OECD Frascati Manual 2015]

This definition is broad and covers a vast range of R&D that takes place across many different types of organisations.

Universities (generally) carry out basic, blue skies research. Applied research organisations (such as the Fraunhofer Gesellschaft in Germany) try and bring an area of science to a more practical application (otherwise known as Applied Research). Experimental Development (a sub-section of Applied Research) is generally carried out by companies.

R&D Landscape: Europe & Canada



So how do you categorize or classify the different work that these different R&D bodies are performing? The internationally recognized methodology for classifying such work is known as the Technology Readiness level (TRL) scale.