

# Nobody Told Me My Work Was R&D

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The deadline arrives. It comes in many forms; A tax credit claim, a grant report, a board update on the R&D programme. Someone asks you to document what you have been working on for the last six months. So you open Jira, dig through your emails, try to remember which of the things you solved were genuinely novel and which were just hard, and start writing something that sounds technical enough to be convincing.

This is not how R&D documentation is supposed to work. But for most engineers, it is exactly how it works.

## The Problem with Retrospective Documentation

Reconstructing technical work after the fact is harder than it looks. By the time you sit down to write it up, the context has dissolved. You remember the solution, but not the dead ends. You remember what you built, but not the three approaches you tried first, or why you abandoned them. You remember the outcome, but not the state of the art you were working against when you started.

That missing context is not just inconvenient, it is what makes R&D qualifying. The uncertainty you were navigating, the systematic investigation you conducted, the advancement you achieved beyond what was previously known. These are the things that turn technical work into claimable, fundable R&D. And they are exactly what gets lost when documentation is retrospective.

The engineers who feel this most acutely are usually the ones doing the most genuinely innovative work. In manufacturing, it is the engineer who solved a materials joining problem that no one had solved quite that way before. In software, it is the developer who built something genuinely novel on top of an existing platform. In industrial automation, it is the person who figured out how to integrate a new system into an environment where it had never been done. In MedTech, it is the engineer whose testing methodology pushed beyond the established validation protocols because the established ones did not fit the device.

All of that work may qualify. None of it is easy to reconstruct six months later.

## Why the Structure Matters as Much as the Work

The documentation problem is not really a documentation problem. It is a structure problem.

When R&D activity is organised purely at the project level, engineers are asked to document project outputs. That produces a record of what was delivered, not a record of what was learned. The learning, the uncertainty, the investigation, the advancement, is the R&D. But without a structure that connects the work to the technologies being advanced, the learning disappears into the project record and becomes invisible.

Companies that solve this problem do it by connecting work to something that persists beyond the project: the core technology areas being advanced. When an engineer's work package is connected to a named technology area and when the investigation, the challenge, the approach, and the outcome are recorded at the time they happen — the documentation writes itself. Not as a burden added on top of the work, but as a natural account of what the work actually was.

The difference between capturing this in real time and reconstructing it later is not just efficiency. It is accuracy. The record that exists at the time the work happens is the only record that genuinely reflects what was understood and what was uncertain. Everything written afterwards is an approximation.

## What this Means in Practice

If you are regularly asked to document work you did months ago, the system is not working for you. The knowledge you generated during that work has already partially dissolved by the time anyone asks for it.

ReaDI-Watch is built around the idea that R&D should be captured as it happens, connected to the technologies being advanced, and structured in a way that makes the evidence available when it is needed. This should happen without requiring engineers to reconstruct history under deadline pressure.

It is worth understanding if you have ever stared at a blank document and tried to remember what you were thinking six months ago.

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