

Editorial

Drying is a multi-disciplinary research field. Long before it became fashionable in the academic world to encourage seamless inter-disciplinary research drying R&D was always carried out in this manner. At a minimum it involved fusion of transport phenomena with material science. Products and processes are tightly intertwined and give rise a bewildering variety of complex and challenging real-world problems for exciting R&D. The objectives of such work are often to develop better and more cost-effective ways of dehydration for a variety of reasons. The energy crunch of the early seventies gave a boost to drying R&D as industry became aware of the importance of saving energy while producing better quality products at lower cost and with minimal environmental impact. This, however, has a flip-side that is not so rosy.

The fact that drying is essentially a unit operation of industrial interest, academic granting agencies expect that such R&D be supported by industry which stands to benefit from the outcome. This way, the limited research resources can be diverted to “academic” research. Hence, I have been appealing for strong industry-university interaction with tangible support by industry of drying research in academia. Research of industry interest in academic environment falls between the wide crack between academic research funding and industrial funding. The latter does not exist in any measurable manner in most places. It is therefore very difficult to carry out cutting-edge research in drying that requires sophisticated analytical instruments, for example. Fortunately, digital technology has become very inexpensive and powerful to assist drying researchers but this does pose some severe limitations on what can be accomplished.

More recently the phenomenon of “research support by impact” has caused further difficulties in finding academic support for drying research. Since drying R&D is applied and aimed at potential application in industry rather than to encourage follow-up publications in archived literature, the number of citations are limited and hence the so-called impact as measured by ISI’s well-known impact factor is automatically limited. Young faculty members seeking “impact” are thus discouraged from entering an otherwise challenging research arena. Only the “bold” researchers enter the field, in fact. Often they are forced to mix drying research with another area that can drive up their citations somehow. This is clearly an unhealthy situation.

Despite the above, our journal continues to have an increasing manuscript flow. The number of papers presented at the numerous drying-oriented conferences around the world continues to increase. My hope is that somehow industry-academia cooperation will increase. This is happening in a big way in India and Brazil. It is probably happening elsewhere too but I am not aware of such activities. Regrettably, the trend to place all eggs in one basket, especially when there are few eggs and the basket is big, continues unabated in most parts of the world. I hope this trend will reverse soon.

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