

## “Startups must focus on articulation as much as the product development”

<https://www.biovoicenews.com/startups-must-focus-articulation-much-product-development/>

By : Rahul Koul - July 10, 2017



The Bengaluru-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms, also popularly known as C-CAMP, was set up by the Department of Biotechnology in 2009 as an enabler for successful bioscience research and entrepreneurship. In an exclusive freewheeling interview with the BioVoice News, Dr Taslimarif Saiyed, Director and Chief Executive Officer of C-CAMP explained the do's and don'ts for the startups besides sharing insights on the current trends in Indian startup ecosystem



**Please tell our readers about the latest activities at C-CAMP? What has been the long-term vision of the institute?**

**As you know, since its foundation, the C-CAMP has been known for its activities around innovation, entrepreneurship and seed funding. We have been operating the Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG) scheme in partnership with the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) since last few years, it has enabled technology innovators and entrepreneurs to pursue a promising technology idea, and establish and validate proof of concept for the idea. We later started the incubation space as well. But more recently, we have been able to add seed funding capabilities as well.**

**One of the latest activities is that C-CAMP has been selection under NITI Aayog program which has given us an arm to run seed fund besides tremendous support we have been able to get due to it. The NITI Aayog support has helped us to expand incubation space and do lot of other activities. It has expanded the room for funding per say. It is the huge addition we have.**

**At the same time, BIRAC has been able to given us an equity model program, The Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (SEED) that will support 8-10 life sciences startups for its first batch with funding allocation upto Rs 30 lakhs. We have now also partnered with the Ministry of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This allows C-CAMP to do the early stage seed funding.**

**Our strength is that we are driven by technology based startups. Idea is to identify the technologies that are early stage and possibly support them. So, our role lies in funding, incubation and mentoring. We are building our capacity in all the three areas. Having more of seed funding allows more opportunities to support such technologies. Because we believe that more you fund risky ideas, the larger the pool and thus more impact.**

**As a part of Bangalore Life Sciences Cluster, we have been collaborating with many other institutions. The National Centre for Biological Sciences and In-Stem are in our close vicinity and we have also partnered with GKVK, University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore which is an agriculture university. Since we share the same campus, it makes sense for us to collaborate. They have the expertise in agriculture and we have know-how in innovation and technology. They understand agriculture and we have capacity to find solutions. Our long term vision of course is to create an ecosystem for startups to do innovative research and entrepreneurship.**



**Which is the most critical area where startups struggle and what is the role of C-CAMP there?**

**As soon the technology driven startups finish their R&D and are ready with the prototype, then starts the business part. This is the area where startups struggle. Our job is to add capabilities here. We ask few basic questions to startups including who is their customer, market definition and market strategy besides the kind of competition their product would have. These are very crisp, straight questions that they may not answer right there but idea is to get them go back and make them to do their homework and tell us why did they do it. It helps them to sharpen the idea.**

**Let me give an example. If there is a startup that has a medical device product, they should**

know the right place to sell. They should be aware that it is the wholesale dealers who will be creating market for them and not directly the hospitals. If the startups aren't aware of it, they won't be able to sell it. The market understanding for startups is necessary part of success. This what we have started providing right here at CCAMP.

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**Given your experience in dealing with new startups, what is the most common mistake they do?**

**One aspect that is very important but ignored quite often is the articulation of your idea before the investors or while applying for funding. Communicating the novelty of idea that startups bring in must be clear. Therefore, the startups must focus on the articulation as much as the product development. And at the same time, they must understand that idea alone won't take them forward. They must know how to convert the idea to business. It is a combination of factors.**

**A lot of people come but the knowledge of competitive landscape is not yet known. They have only looked at their own technology and said this is the best technology. They have no idea of what the rest of the world is doing.**

**As an innovator, you are largely solving the drawbacks of the competitor products. In few cases, the competitor's product is unaffordable or may be inaccessible in the rural areas. The startups must understand that unless and until they have identified a drawback or a problem, they will not be able to create a solution or market respectively.**



**What are the challenges that startups generally undergo after receiving the seed funding?**

**It is a very difficult phase for a startup. That is where they must survive. Some have to survive long enough to figure out where they are heading. Generally, when startups get funding, assuming maximum of Rs 50 lakhs, the honeymoon period begins. Suddenly realization starts after a while that they have to bring the bread on table. So, they ask the question that how do I get that. Then they go and meet people and realize that the solution you have is not working out.**

**For startups, the early realization and response to realization is very important. What I have**

been thinking is not right but now another version for me is right. That realization is the key.

Next stage is where the Venture Capitalist or VCs come in with at least a half a million fund. Challenge is when the technology intensive startups get that in absence of the clear market understanding. And they fall short of expectations of these VCs. This has happened earlier leading to lack of confidence. Now it has been seen that they are ok with a government funded startup mostly because the idea is already validated.

This is where the gap lies. Here we should help these startups to build the technology and proof of concept but equal attention must be given to the thorough understanding of the market and business model as well.



Which type of startups are building more traction in the bioscience market? For that matter, are these agriculture, medical technology or biotechnology driven startups?

Medical technology and diagnostics are the prominent ones and there are reasons behind it. MedTech startups are technology intensive i.e. engineering intensive and less in biology in terms of proof of concept. And these also have the less gestation time than pharma.

A lot of investors are more interested in visibility. While somebody makes a product prototype that is much visible in nature, another one says I have a molecule with CNS aspect where there is no clear visibility though. We know it has to go through clinical phase 1, 2 and 3. The first guy comes up with a small toy and says it works. So, it excites investor much more. So that is where the significant percent is going in terms of the funding. But making a toy is not the final solution as it has to sell in numbers. If you have a blockbuster pharma drug, you will make money even if in small numbers obviously but here all these so-called toys may not get sold. The need might not be there and may be market is less.

Hence, the investors that must also understand that the dynamics of this sector are far different than what works for other industries.



Has the scenario over industry academia collaborations changed? Are enough technology transfers happening in India?

It is happening here and there but it is still in an early phase. I think more and more it happens, more students will get inspired to take up challenges. We will see more and more academia-industry partnerships building up over the period.

The technology transfers are happening but not at the level we expect. Comparatively lesser than other nations.



How can we change the scenario?

It can't be changed overnight. It is time consuming as one has to build more and more pathways to do that. But it is happening. If we see in last 5 years, the BIRAC's existence itself shows that how the DBT wanted to fund the startups through a dedicated agency.

Lot of feedback has come. State government of Karnataka has started programs such as Grand Challenges at local level. Now other governments too will follow. Lot many academia are getting into it yet not at the level one is expecting. So, this is slowly in making.



**How do you think the startups culture will shape up in next five years?**

I think it is going to grow tremendously in the next five years. The competitiveness has come in as well as the risk-taking capability has increased besides the number of people who want to build on fresh ideas. In a way, larger number of startups will come up due to the supportive environment.