



# A View from the Inside

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As academics we often refer to those 'on the inside' i.e. those working in industry, policy or the third sector who are practically engaged with and implementing those things we research. **Here we interview these people to capture some of their views, challenges and realities.** We do so in order to better appreciate how academics can contribute more effectively to their work

## Damian Coulton | Group Commercial Director | Energy Saving Trust

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### 1. What does your job entail?

The Energy Saving Trust was set up in 1992 as a government funded organisation which received grants to focus on schemes to reduce carbon emissions in the home with a view to hitting 2050 targets...Over time we've collected a lot of information, valuable insights, field trials, a lot of data on the consumer. Around 2010 a lot of funding was withdrawn, certainly in England, and the need to charge for the work we do was created. My role is about how we create value so that somebody will pay us for our work or research or data...whilst staying within the mission, which is to help people save energy every day...My very personal strong view is that if we can do things that people value; organisations value, then actually we're doing a lot of good as the incentive for someone to reduce energy usage will become more intrinsic in their behaviour...We bid for work, through Innovate UK or Horizon 2020, we'll put in proposals for pieces of work or research, in those scenarios we'll work with academia on some of the projects we do. We also work for energy suppliers, for utilities; we use our data and analytical capability to look at future scenarios and what happens with certain low carbon technologies in certain areas, the impacts on fuel poverty, on carbon emissions. We work with new technology companies, we still do field trials...and we still contract for government work...We do some work to drive our policy agenda and to advance some of our policy objectives .

### 2. What is the biggest challenge you face in your work?

I think our biggest challenge is actually around how we continue to diversify and how we continue to create that value, so that people will essentially pay for our work. That's a challenge as we don't want to go off the mission or become any other consulting organisation or research organisation; we want to stick pretty firmly to what is our mission as that underpins why a lot of people work here and why people listen to us...A lot of it for us is understanding the whole advice landscape and the different ways in which people get advice and what sort of advice they want and what works and what doesn't...We've got some really good data and really good understanding and capability around data...for example we know a lot about the UK housing stock...Our ability to analyse that and provide insight is quite powerful...For us, it's continuing to develop our capability...part of it is how we access data and different data sets that have granularity and richness to add to what we've got, and how we continue to derive more insights.

### 3. What would it mean to you to solve these challenges?

It would allow us to develop greater insights and greater understanding...If we're telling people if you behave this way, or if you tell your customer to behave this way, then we'll save carbon...then we start to make a real difference...The more insight we have the more we can inform policy, the more trials we can do, the more evidence we start to gather, the more we are able to inform policies in the way we think are the right ways; again its about the wider mission...Where we add value to academia is that we can make it real, we can make it relevant. We've got the consumer angle and we've got a consumer brand and then you're starting to make it easier for policy makers to understand what the implication is...it makes it a bit more joined up from a policy angle.

### 4. In what ways can academics help solve this challenge?

We do a number of different things to engage with academics; at the moment were working on a project with UCL and we're actually developing a tool that will enable cities to plan their energy infrastructure, funded by Innovate UK. And UCL will bring a lot of academic research on what happens in commercial buildings, and we'll bring the research and insight into what happens in the home, in residential properties...Where it works well is where they recognise what we bring to it – so it's not just academic research to get published, or for the sake of doing academic research, but where we're involved it tends to involve a consumer element and there's more of a deliverable that comes out of it...The challenge is always that the academics involved will want to focus on the pure academic research; and so keeping them on course to deliver something that's of value, so to deliver something at the end that's not just the research but that's a tool or it's a different way of doing things, or its advice or something, so that's a challenge.

### 5. Are there constraints on your work that academics should be aware of?

We're very much focused on our mission, so all our work should be relevant to that. Then the constraints are just around our time; we're an organisation of 190 people but a lot of those are delivering programmes, so our analytics and research capability is spread across a number of people.