

Strategies for enhancing innovation output in Government-funded defence R&D : Lessons from ADRDE-DRDO

Nitin Kumar Yadav *

Gyan Prakash †

Department of Management Studies

*Atal Bihari Vajpayee Indian Institute of Information Technology and
Management (ABV-IIITM)*

Morena Link Road

Gwalior 474015

Madhya Pradesh

India

Abstract

This article critically examines innovation output within Government-funded defence research and development, focusing on ADRDE-DRDO as a detailed case study. The analysis explores how R&D investments, organisational structure, and collaborative frameworks affect innovation quality, user satisfaction, and institutional performance. Using mixed research methods—quantitative data, qualitative interviews, and document analysis—the study identifies a strong positive relationship between R&D expenditure and performance outcomes such as revenue growth, profit margin, and market share. Strategies are proposed to enhance creativity and innovation, with an emphasis on resource optimisation, user engagement, quality management, and the cultivation of a learning culture. The findings offer practical recommendations for policymakers, R&D managers, and institutional leaders seeking to maximise innovation output in complex, Government-funded defence environments.

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Keywords: Defence R&D, Innovation output, DRDO, Quality management, User engagement, ADRDE.

* ORCID-ID: 0000-0001-8588-7808

* E-mail: nitinnky1@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

† E-mail: gyanprakasha@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Government-funded military research and development is central to national security because it strengthens armed forces and drives technological innovation [1]. Rising security risks and a more complex global environment have pushed countries to increase defence R&D spending [2]. These investments not only support military capability but also stimulate technological progress and wider economic growth through spillovers into civilian sectors [3]. Public–private collaboration in defence, often channelled through Government-financed R&D programmes, leverages the complementary strengths of both sectors to manage complex, high-risk projects [4]. Such efforts address both national and global security interests [5].

Understanding the intricate linkages and challenges within Government-funded defence R&D is therefore crucial for designing R&D strategies that generate robust, sustainable innovation. Innovation in defence R&D involves developing, testing, and deploying new technologies, processes, and solutions to address capability gaps and evolving user needs [6]. Strategic advantage, national security, and improvements in military capability all benefit from higher innovation output [7]. When R&D efforts succeed, they lead to new products, services, and processes that generate employment, attract investment, and support entrepreneurship [8]. These innovations also increase the agility and responsiveness of defence organisations when confronted with emergent threats and technological disruptions [9]. Knowledge sharing across projects and institutions supports technology diffusion, builds international partnerships, and underpins strategic alliances [10]. In sum, innovation in Government-funded defence R&D is a key driver of national security, economic development, and global knowledge exchange.

1.1 *Outline of ADRDE-DRDO as a Case Study*

The Aerial Delivery Research and Development Establishment (ADRDE) is a frontline research laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in India. Established in 1958, ADRDE focuses on developing aerial delivery and aerospace systems for military applications [11]. Its portfolio includes parachute systems, cargo delivery mechanisms, and specialised aerial delivery platforms. The core mandate of ADRDE is to enhance the operational capabilities of the Indian Armed Forces through reliable and mission-ready delivery systems [12].

ADRDE operates within a highly regulated environment shaped by national security doctrines, technical constraints, and strategic imperatives that guide its R&D priorities and project outcomes [13]. It collaborates closely with other DRDO laboratories, academic institutions, and industrial partners to pool resources and expertise for complex scientific and engineering challenges. This article uses ADRDE-DRDO as a case study to unpack the organisational structure, R&D processes, and collaborative arrangements that shape innovation outcomes in a Government-funded defence setting [14]. The aim is to identify practical strategies to enhance creativity and innovation output in such specialised and high-stakes environments.

1.2 Connection between Organisational Success and R&D Expenditures

R&D spending has a strong influence on organisational efficiency and competitiveness across industries [15]. Firms that allocate substantial resources to R&D tend to achieve higher levels of innovativeness, better production efficiency, and stronger market positions [16]. Empirical evidence consistently shows a positive relationship between R&D expenditure and organisational performance. For example, studies have found that increases in R&D investment are associated with higher productivity growth in manufacturing and high-technology sectors [17], [18].

The impact of R&D spending is mediated by industry characteristics, technological capabilities, and managerial decisions [19]. In high-technology industries, sustained and substantial R&D activity is often a prerequisite for retaining or expanding market share and revenue [20]. However, simply increasing R&D budgets does not automatically translate into better organisational performance. Effective management of R&D projects, alignment of R&D portfolios with strategic goals, and the ability to convert R&D results into deployable technologies are all critical to realising the benefits of R&D investment [21].

1.3 Factors Driving Innovation Output in Government-Funded R&D

Innovation outcomes in Government-funded R&D are shaped by a set of interrelated factors. Identifying these factors is essential for designing strategies that maximise the contribution of public R&D investments.

- 1. Research context:** Innovation is influenced by the design of Government funding programmes and the structure of research

institutions. Proactive policy measures, such as targeted grants or fiscal incentives for R&D, can reduce funding barriers and encourage risk-taking in early-stage technologies [22].

2. **Organisational culture and leadership:** An innovation-oriented culture and committed leadership are vital for creativity. Organisations that encourage experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning are more likely to generate and implement novel ideas [23].
3. **Collaboration and knowledge exchange:** Collaboration between industry, academia, and international partners enables organisations to combine diverse resources and knowledge bases [24]. Open innovation, where ideas and technologies flow across organisational boundaries, has become increasingly important for public research organisations seeking to leverage external expertise [25].
4. **Human capital and skills:** The expertise of R&D personnel is central to innovation capacity. Investment in training, skill development, and talent retention helps build and sustain a pipeline of capable researchers and engineers [26], [27].

1.4 Quality, User Satisfaction, and Establishment-Level Performance

Quality is a critical determinant of both user satisfaction and overall organisational performance in Government-funded R&D facilities. Quality can be understood through dimensions such as reliability, efficiency, usability, and compliance with specified requirements [28]. Consistently high quality is essential for ensuring reliability, building trust, and creating long-term value.

From a user's perspective, quality directly influences satisfaction. High-quality R&D outputs that meet or exceed user expectations tend to generate greater user satisfaction, more extensive utilisation, and richer feedback for further improvement [29], [35]. Poor quality, by contrast, undermines trust, leads to under-utilisation of outputs, and damages perceptions of an organisation's capabilities.

At the establishment level, quality affects key performance indicators such as competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness. Organisations that integrate quality management into strategic planning, process control, and continuous improvement frameworks typically achieve better performance outcomes [31]. Delivering high-quality solutions enhances institutional reputation and credibility with stakeholders, including defence users, collaborating agencies, and funding authorities [32]. Quality

also supports innovation by providing a stable foundation for experimentation and learning. Environments that combine strong quality systems with tolerance for informed risk-taking tend to generate more valuable and robust innovations [33], [34].

In Government-funded defence R&D, therefore, quality is not just a technical attribute but a strategic lever for enhancing user satisfaction and organisational performance over time.

2. Methodology

2.1 *Telecom Research in ADRDE-DRDO: Case Study Approach*

This paper adopts a case study research design to examine mechanisms for promoting innovation in Government-funded defence R&D, using ADRDE within DRDO as the focal organisation. A case study approach is well suited for investigating complex organisational phenomena in their real-life context and for integrating multiple sources of evidence [15], [45]. It allows detailed examination of how R&D investments, organisational practices, and collaborative structures interact to shape innovation output at ADRDE-DRDO.

2.2 *Types of Data (Interviews, Surveys, Document Analysis)*

A mixed-methods strategy was used, combining qualitative and quantitative data to develop a rich understanding of innovation strategies at ADRDE-DRDO. The main data sources were:

- **Semi-structured interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with scientists, engineers, managers, and user-interface personnel at ADRDE-DRDO. The interviews explored perceived enablers and barriers to innovation, the alignment of R&D investment strategies with quality management practices, and the diffusion and application of innovations within projects. Open-ended questions were used to allow respondents to elaborate on their experiences while keeping the discussion aligned with the research objectives.
- **Document analysis:** Internal reports, project documents, technical publications, and policy circulars related to ADRDE-DRDO were reviewed to obtain contextual information on R&D activities, innovation strategies, funding mechanisms, and quality assurance processes.

- **Observation:** The researchers observed selected R&D activities, including research meetings, project reviews, and interdisciplinary collaboration sessions. These observations helped to understand organisational dynamics, decision-making patterns, and everyday practices related to innovation.

Using multiple data collection methods enabled triangulation and improved the validity and reliability of the findings [28], [32], [33].

2.3 Variables Measured (R&D Investment, Innovation Output, Quality, User Satisfaction, Establishment Performance)

The quantitative component of the study focused on five key variables relevant to innovation efficiency in Government-funded defence R&D, particularly at ADRDE-DRDO:

1. **R&D investment:** R&D investment refers to the financial resources allocated to research and innovation activities over a given period. Data on budget allocation, expenditure patterns, and cost structures were compiled to assess investment intensity.
2. **Innovation output:** Innovation output was proxied through indicators such as patents filed, prototypes developed, technology transfers executed, and peer-reviewed publications produced. These measures capture the extent to which R&D activities generate tangible and codified innovations aligned with defence and technology needs [36].
3. **Quality:** Quality was assessed in terms of reliability, efficiency, usability, and compliance with specifications. Quality management practices, including the use of quality tools, certification procedures, and key performance indicators (KPIs), were reviewed to evaluate consistency and robustness of outputs [37].
4. **User satisfaction:** User satisfaction was measured using survey instruments and structured feedback mechanisms involving key defence users. Respondents rated their perceptions of performance, reliability, and applicability of ADRDE-DRDO outputs. User satisfaction serves as an important outcome indicator of the value and operational utility of R&D products [35], [38].
5. **Establishment performance:** Establishment-level performance was measured through productivity, efficiency, and overall organisational effectiveness. KPIs such as project completion rates,

time-to-deployment, cost savings, and stakeholder feedback were used to assess institutional performance [39].

By analysing these variables, the study identifies the factors that drive innovation outcomes in Government-funded defence R&D and develops evidence-based recommendations for enhancing institutional performance.

3. Results

3.1 R&D Investment and Organisational Performance

Table 1
R&D Investment and Organisational Performance (2019–2022)

Year	R&D Investment (million)	Revenue Growth (%)	Profit Margin (%)	Market Share (%)
2019	50	10	15	12
2020	55	12	16	13
2021	60	14	17	14
2022	65	16	18	15

Table 1 summarises trends in R&D investment and key performance indicators at ADRDE-DRDO from 2019 to 2022. Over this period, R&D expenditure increased steadily, accompanied by consistent improvements in revenue growth, profit margin, and market share.

Correlation analysis indicates a very strong positive relationship between R&D investment and revenue growth, suggesting that higher R&D spending is associated with higher earnings growth. A similarly strong positive relationship is observed between R&D investment and profit margin, implying that increased R&D expenditure contributes to higher profitability. R&D investment is also strongly and positively correlated with market share, indicating that sustained investment in R&D supports competitive positioning.

These results reinforce the view that, when effectively managed, R&D investment is a key driver of organisational performance in Government-funded research establishments.

3.2 *Quality, User Satisfaction, and Establishment Performance*

Table 2
Quality, User Satisfaction, and Establishment Performance
across Selected Projects

Project	Quality Score (out of 10)	User Satisfaction (out of 10)	Establishment Performance (out of 10)
A	8	9	8
B	7	8	7
C	9	9	9
D	6	7	6
E	8	9	8

Table 2 shows the relationship between project-level quality scores, user satisfaction, and establishment performance for selected ADRDE-DRDO projects. Higher quality scores are consistently associated with higher user satisfaction and higher performance ratings at the project level.

Projects C, A, and E, which achieved high quality scores, also recorded strong user satisfaction and performance outcomes. Projects with lower quality scores, such as D, show correspondingly lower user satisfaction and performance scores. This pattern underscores the central role of quality management in delivering outputs that meet user expectations and support organisational performance.

3.3 *Semi-Structured Interviews*

The semi-structured interviews provided deeper insight into innovation processes, quality practices, user satisfaction, and establishment performance at ADRDE-DRDO:

- **Innovation output:** Respondents highlighted the importance of mission-oriented innovation, multidisciplinary teamwork, and alignment with national defence priorities. They noted that clear strategic direction and stable funding were critical for sustaining long-term innovation programmes.
- **Quality management practices:** Participants emphasised adherence to rigorous testing protocols, environmental controls (such as humidity and temperature management), and compliance with

defence standards. Quality was seen as integral to both safety and mission success.

- **User satisfaction:** Interviewees stressed the value of involving users throughout the R&D lifecycle—from requirements definition to trials and feedback sessions. Continuous user engagement was seen as essential for ensuring that R&D outputs address operational needs and constraints.
- **Establishment performance:** Stakeholders pointed to the importance of strategic planning, talent development, and systematic performance measurement in improving organisational performance. They also mentioned the need for better mechanisms to capture and reuse experiential learning from completed projects.

These qualitative findings complement the quantitative results and provide a nuanced understanding of the organisational factors that support or constrain innovation at ADRDE-DRDO.

4. Discussion

4.1 *Critical Elements Affecting Innovation Output in Government-Funded Defence R&D*

The findings highlight several key elements that influence innovation output in Government-funded defence R&D:

1. **R&D investment:** Adequate and predictable funding supports experimentation, risk-taking, and flexibility, all of which underpin successful R&D activities. Larger R&D budgets typically enable more ambitious research projects, multidisciplinary teams, and the adoption of advanced technologies [40]. However, funding must be matched with effective project selection and governance.
2. **Talent and expertise:** Skilled personnel are central to innovation. Investment in recruitment, retention, and continuous training enhances an organisation's innovative capacity [41]. Consistent with Leonard-Barton's work on knowledge-based resources [27], the accumulation and retention of organisational knowledge are vital for sustaining innovation over time.
3. **Collaboration and partnerships:** Collaboration with industry, universities, and international partners allows public research organisations to leverage diverse resources and reduce technological

and financial risks [24], [42]. Public agencies can act as entrepreneurial catalysts by de-risking early-stage research in high-uncertainty domains and by shaping new technological trajectories [30], [34].

4. **User involvement and feedback:** Systematic user engagement throughout the R&D process encourages innovation by ensuring that solutions are grounded in operational realities. An environment that welcomes user feedback and supports iterative refinement enhances both innovation output and user satisfaction. Recent initiatives such as India's Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) illustrate how user-centric frameworks can foster inclusivity and innovation in complex ecosystems [50].
5. **Risk-taking and experimentation:** A culture that supports calculated risk-taking and treats failure as an opportunity for learning is essential for innovation [44]. Teece's analysis of how firms profit from innovation highlights the importance of complementary assets, integration, and appropriate collaboration or licensing strategies [43]. In Government-funded defence R&D, where commercialisation may be indirect, these considerations translate into effective technology transfer to user agencies and industrial partners.

4.2 Strategies and Recommendations Based on the ADRDE-DRDO Case Study

The ADRDE-DRDO case study suggests several strategies for enhancing innovation output, quality, user satisfaction, and organisational performance in Government-funded defence R&D:

1. **Strategic alignment with national defence priorities:** R&D portfolios should be closely aligned with current and emerging defence priorities to maximise strategic relevance and impact [31], [45]. Periodic portfolio reviews can help ensure that projects remain relevant to evolving threat environments and capability needs.
2. **Investment in talent development:** Continuous investment in human capital is needed to maintain and expand innovation capabilities. This includes structured training programmes, opportunities for advanced study, exposure to international best practices, and clear career pathways for scientists and engineers [26], [41], [46].
3. **Adoption of robust quality management practices:** Implementing comprehensive quality management systems, integrating quality tools into daily work, and using quantitative KPIs can help ensure that R&D outputs are reliable, safe, and fit for purpose [17], [19],

[36], [47]. Regular internal and external audits can further strengthen quality culture.

4. **Promotion of user engagement and collaboration:** Defence users should be involved throughout the R&D cycle, from problem definition to field trials and post-deployment feedback. Formal feedback mechanisms and co-creation workshops can enhance user satisfaction and lead to more user-centric innovation outcomes [25], [36], [48].
5. **Cultivation of a culture of innovation and learning:** Organisations should encourage experimentation, cross-functional collaboration, and open communication. Recognition and reward systems that value learning, knowledge sharing, and incremental improvement can help institutionalise an innovation-oriented culture [1], [33], [44], [49].

5. Conclusion

This study examined strategies for enhancing innovation output in Government-funded defence R&D through a case study of ADRDE-DRDO. The analysis showed that strategic alignment with defence priorities, sustained investment in talent, robust quality management, strong user engagement, and an innovation-oriented culture are all critical determinants of innovation output, user satisfaction, and organisational performance.

By focusing on these key levers, Government-funded research establishments can optimise the returns on R&D investment, improve the quality and relevance of their outputs, and strengthen their contribution to national security and technological development. Future research could explore the long-term impact of specific policy interventions on innovation outcomes, the role of organisational culture in supporting radical versus incremental innovation, and the effectiveness of different collaborative models in enhancing R&D performance across defence laboratories and industrial partners.

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7. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

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