INTER-INSTITUTIONAL CONFLICTS IN TECHNOLOGY COMMERCIALIZATION PROCESSES (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

The commercialization of technologies developed at public research organizations is a major driver of economic development by providing economic and societal value. This has resulted in a growing interest among policymakers in generating wealth and entrepreneurial activity from publicly funded research. Yet, despite its importance, technology commercialization (TC) of scientific research remains a challenging activity with a high failure rate. Therefore policymakers are still in search of ways to coordinate the TC process in a more efficient manner. While TC processes have been approached from various perspectives, the majority of empirical work on TC is limited to within-institution phenomena. Scholars typically address the commercialization process from a single institution's internal perspective, by studying technology commercialization from, for example, the new technology venture-, the technology transfer office- or government agency perspective. However, successful technology commercialization depends on the effective interaction between such institutions, in the ecosystem surrounding new technologies. By conceptualizing TC as a dynamic process, we move beyond a single-institution lens and are able to address the (relation) management of institutions within TC processes.

Method

This study adopts a process research approach to explore the inner workings of TC processes. Our study draws on in-depth case studies, incorporating multiple sources of data to develop theory about TC processes and the interaction between the institutions involved. We interviewed various institutions involved in TC processes, such as a central government agency - established to fund and facilitate the commercialization of scientific research, TTO’s, existing technology firms and new technology ventures.

Results and Implications

Our results give insight into the dynamics of TC processes by pointing to specific interactions among the institutions involved. We observe that inter-institutional conflicts between TTO’s, government agencies, new technology ventures and existing firms permeate the TC process and can impede the commercialization of scientific inventions. Our findings point to several types of conflicts regarding: (1) decision-making autonomy of the institutions involved, (2) distribution of intellectual property rights and (3) commercial application and value of new technological inventions. To effectively orchestrate TC processes aimed at stimulating entrepreneurial activity from research, it is imperative to unravel these inter-institutional relationships and conflicts of interest.

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