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SELF-IDENTITY CONFLICTS OF ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURS: WHEN SCIENTISTS ARE ASKED TO DEFINE THEMSELVES BY WHO THEY ARE NOT (ENTREPRENEURS) - (SUMMARY)

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

**SELF-IDENTITY CONFLICTS OF ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEURS:
WHEN SCIENTISTS ARE ASKED TO DEFINE THEMSELVES
BY WHO THEY ARE NOT (ENTREPRENEURS)**

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Principal Topic

Increasing the rate of technology transfer from universities and national laboratories through academic entrepreneurship has been identified as an important issue in creating and sustaining national competitiveness, yet these organizations struggle to achieve even modest technology transfer goals. We build theory to explain why scientists resist engaging in academic entrepreneurship despite incentives and other external programs that encourage their participation. We explore individual level processes of traditional scientists in university and federal lab settings and theorize that identity-based barriers to academic entrepreneurship explain their resistance to engaging in technology transfer activities.

Method

Research participants are scientific researchers from a major research extensive university and a major US National Laboratory. Interviewees are randomly drawn from a complete list of the eligible population. In interviews, we use Repertory Grid Technique to elicit personal constructs (Gustafson & Reger, 1995; Reger et al., 1994; Reger & Huff, 1993) about the domain of interest: self-identities associated with the categories “scientist”, “star scientist”, “entrepreneur”, and “academic entrepreneur.” This method has been found to be a nonintrusive way to learn how the participant in a study thinks about a subject area without imposing the researcher’s mental model and biases (Fransella, Bell, & Bannister, 2004) and is especially well suited for exploring beliefs about self-identities such as current, ideal and future desirable identities (Reger et al., 1994).

Results and Implications

A primary contribution of our work is to develop a theory that integrates the various strands of identity literature and incorporates extant technology transfer literature for a more comprehensive picture of scientists’ thought processes and behavior regarding academic entrepreneurship. Our paper fills a gap in current identity literature and examines how a lack of, or antipathy toward, identity with a particular group leads one to refuse to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the work place. We highlight the importance of recognizing scientists’ dis-identification (“who we are not”) in order for these important research organizations to construct meaningful and effective strategies to create alignment when organizational goals shift.

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