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WHO IS THE ACADEMIC ENTREPRENEUR? (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

This is an explorative study of academic entrepreneurship with the purpose to investigate the commercialization of knowledge and research among academics. As academics should be at the cutting edge of research and knowledge generation, they should also have the potential to identify opportunities with high growth potential. However, we know little about the extent to which these opportunities are commercialized and what factors are important in their exploitation. Researchers define academic entrepreneurship differently. While some only consider university spin-offs, defined as new companies exploiting intellectual property created in academia, to be academic entrepreneurship (cf. Shane, 2004), others work with a broader definition and include companies started on the side of academic employment, and some also focus on activities such as consulting, commissioned research and teaching, large scale science projects, patenting/licensing, sales, and testing as indicators (cf. Klofsten & Jones-Evans, 2000; Stankiewicz, 1994). We apply a broad perspective and study three commercialization activities: founding a company, receiving a patent/copyright, and taking a product to the market. This broader definition of the concept is in line with Davidsson’s (2004) definition of entrepreneurship as new economic activity.

Method

Data were collected from academics at 30 Swedish universities from all scientific fields during January 2006. The response rate was approximately 50%, giving a total of just over 10,000 responses. Focus was on the individual academic and their engagement in commercialization of knowledge and research. Due to the number of potential interaction effects in the data, following Reynolds (1997) we use Automated Interaction Detection Analysis.

Results Implications

Based on preliminary results a number of interesting finding can be drawn from the study: those who carry out the three activities write popular science publications; men commercialize more than women; the scientific fields of Technology, Medicine and Odontolgy dominate. The link between communication in the form of popular science publications and commercialization is interesting – a tentative explanation for this is popular science publications are used as a tool to communicate research to the general public and in this way provide a platform from where commercialization of products can be achieved. If this is the case, popular science publications can be seen as a form of marketing.

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