6-10-2006

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Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol26/iss24/5

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INTERACTIVE PAPER SUMMARY

THE PUBLIC POLICIES TO FOSTER THE CREATION OF RESEARCH BASED SPIN-OFFS FIRMS: THE FRENCH CASE OR THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY EXPECTATIONS AND THEIR RESULTS

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Principal Topic

For the past ten years or so high-tech research spin-offs have received close attention by government authorities in the leading scientifically developed countries. The capacity of prestigious US universities to generate new high growth companies has highlighted the strategic role of public-sector research, not only in the generation of new knowledge but also in the creation and development of high growth technological firms. Start-ups as spin-off of public-sector research have become a key issue in government research and innovation policy in many European countries. Although the creation of academic spin offs is nothing new, what is original is the extent of the phenomenon and the fact that public policies have being introduced to encourage the commercial exploitation of public-sector research results through new businesses.

At the end of the 90s, European governments have defined general frameworks to create an entrepreneurial culture and to develop the creation of academic RBSOs. The French case seems interesting because a specific Law was set up in 1999 to promote the creation of technologically innovative businesses.

This paper analyzes the four main instruments linked to this Law: new status of research staff, national competition for the creation of technologically innovative firms, incubators, public seed capital funds. On the basis of original data from 1236 different firms which have benefited from this four measures during these last six years, this paper shows that these governmental actions have amplified an old trend but still in limited proportion. More, using a dynamic analysis, it shows a decrease of the number of RBSOs from universities and public research institutions from 1999 to 2005.

How can we explain the gap between policy expectations and these results? Two mains stream of answers can be proposed. The first one is linked to lack of autonomy of the actors to invent original configurations. The second one is linked to the underestimation of the difficulties to go from research results to the market.

There is no One best way, but a diversity of RBSOs. There is no One Size Fits All policy, and we need more comparative policy analysis to understand the role of public intervention in this field (at university, regional and national levels).

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