

Sharon Dolmans

The value of inventor status

Abstract

Technology licensing officers play an important role in influencing the commercialisation of university inventions. Because the rights to inventions of faculty, staff and students at U.S. universities, as well as most universities in Europe, belong to the institutions where those inventions were made, technology licensing officers regulate which inventions should be commercialized. In this respect, technology licensing officers evaluate invention disclosures and select the inventions they believe are valuable to industry. However, most university inventions are in such an early stage of development that there is much uncertainty regarding the commercial potential of these inventions. Existing research shows that in situations where there is uncertainty about the quality of an innovation, decision-makers are likely to rely on status characteristics in their evaluation. To examine the effect of inventor status on the evaluation of licensing officers, we conducted 3 randomized experiments with technology licensing officers at Carnegie I research universities in the United States. Our experiment reveals that licensing officers are influenced by inventor status and that the inventions of high status inventors are considered more valuable to industry. We discuss the implications of these findings for university technology commercialization.