The reverse tragedy of the commons: an exploratory account of incentives for under-exploitation in an open innovation environment

This paper presents an empirical account of a phenomenon that we refer to as the ‘reverse tragedy of the commons’ in open innovation. The name signifies the ‘under-exploitation’ of intellectual property (IP) under weak appropriability. The name is this graphic because the tragedy is costly, and can also render IP effectively worthless and block innovation in the short to medium term. We propose that the tragedy is borne out of the interaction between enterprise characteristics, a competitive setting and the framework that is set by the policy intervention. This finding is pertinent to policy-makers with regard to the design of research, development and innovation instruments, as well as managers who must determine how to implement open practices in innovation.

General information
State: Accepted/In press
Organisations: Department of Management Engineering, Technology and Innovation Management, Gaia Consulting, Prime Minister’s Office
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Number of pages: 14
Publication date: 5 May 2017
Main Research Area: Technical/natural sciences

Publication information
Journal: Technology Analysis and Strategic Management
ISSN (Print): 0953-7325
Ratings:
BFI (2017): BFI-level 1
Web of Science (2017): Indexed Yes
BFI (2016): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2016): SJR 0.653 SNIP 0.88 CiteScore 1.56
BFI (2015): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2015): SJR 0.651 SNIP 0.639 CiteScore 1.43
BFI (2014): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2014): SJR 0.562 SNIP 0.834 CiteScore 1.22
BFI (2013): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2013): SJR 0.548 SNIP 0.792 CiteScore 1.37
ISI indexed (2013): ISI indexed yes
Web of Science (2013): Indexed yes
BFI (2012): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2012): SJR 0.765 SNIP 0.992 CiteScore 1.48
ISI indexed (2012): ISI indexed yes
BFI (2011): BFI-level 2
Scopus rating (2011): SJR 0.622 SNIP 0.969 CiteScore 1.34
ISI indexed (2011): ISI indexed yes
BFI (2010): BFI-level 2
Scopus rating (2010): SJR 0.681 SNIP 0.987
BFI (2009): BFI-level 2
Scopus rating (2009): SJR 0.581 SNIP 1.158
Web of Science (2009): Indexed yes
BFI (2008): BFI-level 1
Scopus rating (2008): SJR 0.517 SNIP 0.719
Scopus rating (2007): SJR 0.576 SNIP 0.957
Scopus rating (2006): SJR 0.584 SNIP 0.859
Web of Science (2006): Indexed yes
Scopus rating (2005): SJR 0.466 SNIP 0.716
Scopus rating (2004): SJR 0.472 SNIP 0.735
Scopus rating (2003): SJR 0.525 SNIP 0.855