

Who Licenses out Patents and Why? Lessons from a Business Survey

The increasing importance of licensing for innovation is supported by ample anecdotal evidence. However, statistics on this topic are scarce. The OECD, together with the European Patent Office and the University of Tokyo, carried out a business survey on the licensing-out of patents. The goal was to investigate the intensity of licensing to affiliated and non-affiliated companies, its evolution, the characteristics, motivations and obstacles met by companies doing or willing to license. The target population was patent holders: 600 European firms and 1 600 Japanese firms responded to the survey, in the second half of 2007. The results show that patent licensing is widespread among patenting firms: around one company in five in Europe licenses patents to non-affiliated partners, whereas more than one in four does so in Japan. The relationship between size of the firm and probability to license out is U-shaped: small firms and large firms are more likely to license out their patented inventions. In Europe, SMEs have more difficulties to license out their patents than large firms. The major barrier to licensing out patent markets is informational (identifying partners). Finally, we also find that more than one third of young European firms (born after 2000) deem patents as quite or very important to convince private investors and venture capitalists to provide them with funds.

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