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Professional Guilds, Tension and Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

Scientific research is a crucial success factor for knowledge intensive firms and is often a joint effort of scientists and managers. However, scientists and managers belong to different “professional guilds,” subscribing to different belief systems and valuing different types of incentives. These differences give rise to tension between scientists and managers. We integrate a large body of literature from knowledge management to develop a new theoretical model predicting that this organizational tension is affected by environmental factors such as the degree of industry munificence, firm-specific factors like knowledge-management policies, and the individual roles of boundary spanners within the firm. Further, we argue that this tension can lead to positive or negative outcomes.

Keywords: knowledge management, R&D, professional guilds, tension