

66th International Astronautical Congress 2015

BUSINESS INNOVATION SYMPOSIUM (E6)
Public/Private Human Access to Space - Supporting Studies (2)

Author: Ms. Paola Belingheri
Italy, pbelingheri@luiss.it

LICENSING AS A TOOL TO ENCOURAGE TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER FROM SPACE

Abstract

The theme of technology transfer from Space has been extensively discussed over the years, and has shown some promising results in programs such as the NASA and ESA Technology Transfer Programs. However, similar efforts have not been replicated to date in other research centres, and especially in most private firms. Therefore exploring means which could stimulate the industry to participate in technology transfer initiatives could further improve the ability of space programs to make a difference on Earth. An increasing number of universities, research centres and private companies are using licensing as a means to transfer technologies between different sectors and to find new applications for existing technologies. Often, these transferred technologies are being taken on board by start-ups who wish to tackle new markets. This practice can be very interesting also in the space sector, where technologies are often pushed to the limit in terms of reliability and efficiency, and can have applications in very different industrial and service sectors. In general, there is currently a very large diversity in the licensing practices which are being implemented both in the Space sector and elsewhere, and it's not always clear what their impact is on the start-ups taking the license on board. This paper discusses best practices to ensure that technology licensing between a licensor and a start-up can bring advantages to both parties involved. Using multiple case studies a first attempt is made to understand the licensing process towards start-ups, evaluating the difficulties faced by these firms and how they can be overcome. The study is based on a sample of European Start-ups, all born with licensing agreements for a technology, some of which originate from the space sector (in particular the ESA Technology Transfer Program), while others come from different sectors, and this enables also to draw on best practices from a variety of settings. Interviews with these startups have enabled us to reflect on different factors such as the role of the licensed technology in the final product/service of the firm, the role of the knowledge possessed by the founding team, the role of different contractual clauses and the role of the relationship between the licensor and the licensee, identifying the advantages and disadvantages they presented for both parties.