

Seven Claims on Market-Driven Research and Development

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For the panel discussion I propose to defend the following claims:

1. The idea that one Dollar spent in basic research can drive ten Dollars in development cost and a hundred Dollars in application costs is badly misleading in a situation where developers have to be forced to pay attention to results of basic research and basic researchers would rather die than do anything as dirty as even consider any real life problems.
2. The situation hinted at in (1) is not entirely fictional. It is the result of educational and company structures that date back to the 19th Century and will probably not live to see the 21st.
3. Even though the brute forces of the market will eventually take care on their own, we may try to be more civilized and influence the developments to come. This involves a gigantic shift of resources from large undefined areas of research into clearly application-driven research, and, at the same time, great care in the set-up of management and funding instruments for basic research (though probably much smaller resources than are currently spent).
4. The current division between academic research and education on the one hand and industrial research on the other is probably not a functionally sensible division, but rather an expensive way of maintaining 19th Century illusions about academic freedom.
5. Thesis (4) is not meant to dispute the academic freedom for subjects like archaeology, comparative literature, or philosophy, nor do I want to dispute the need for academic freedom in basic research. I am definitely opposed to a laissez-faire attitude that expects market mechanisms to take over wherever the state has failed. But academic freedom for, e.g., engineering subjects somehow does not seem to make a great lot of sense, nor does it make a lot of sense to expect of philosophers that they should prove the value of their work on the market.
6. Industrial research cannot fulfil its role if all of it is directly driven by current market requirements. Mid and long term strategies are required. This is an area where much more coordination is required between industry and public funding agencies.
7. The above claims do not express any point of view that my company may entertain, nor even my own. The point of these claims is rather to provoke discussion of a number of moot points.