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Author

ROOIJ, Arjan van

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Gaps and plugs : TNO, and the problems of getting knowledge out of laboratories

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Abstract

This article aims to clarify and improve thinking on normative government laboratories: partly publically funded laboratories that work to improve the functioning of society, particularly through boosting innovation. This article focuses on a case study of TNO, a large Dutch laboratory, and an exemplary case of this type of laboratory. This article argues that TNO is perceived as a plug to fill a gap between knowledge production and use, in a belief that there is a direct and causal link between laboratory knowledge production and use. As a plug to fill a gap, however, TNO, and laboratories like it, can never perform satisfactorily, making an enduring cycle of negative performance evaluations and major reorganizations inevitable. This article suggests that a network model of innovation might provide a way out of the impasse.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)