

24.7.2024

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Title

Situated Knowledge Production, International Impact: Changing Publishing Practices in a German Engineering Department / Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner

Publication year

2018

Source/Footnote

In: Minerva. - 56 (2018) 3, S. 283 - 303

Inventory number

47876

Keywords

Informationsgesellschaft / Wissensgesellschaft ; Hochschule und Wirtschaft ; Berufsfragen : Ingenieure

Abstract

In this paper, I analyze how recent calls to internationalize publication behavior affect research practices at an automotive engineering department in Germany. Automotive engineering is a field with traditionally rather scarce publication activity and strong connections to industry. Substantial authority to define suitable research problems and ways of organizing knowledge production on a daily basis was therefore reserved for local academic elites as well as corporate partners. However, as engineers are increasingly expected to prove their performance through publishing in international peer-reviewed journals, the judgment as to what should be considered “interesting” or “robust” research is partly relegated to a gradually globalizing community of academic peers. This generates a variety of tensions with established ways of coordinating epistemic work at the department studied here. For example, the thematic interests of journals tend to exert a disruptive centrifugal pull in the context of an otherwise highly modular research culture, and possibilities to publish in international

24.7.2024

venues are unequally distributed across individual research projects. But while department members agree that there is a lack of fit between current practices and new expectations towards their publishing behavior, their opinions about the conclusions that should be drawn differ significantly. Some researchers argue that profound organizational changes are necessary to foster the academic rigor of German engineering research. Others believe that evaluation criteria should simply be adapted. This situation is arguably characteristic for research areas with a traditionally strong orientation to local stakeholders, and it suggests a need for more deliberative, participatory approaches to research evaluation in such fields. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)