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Abstract

According to IASP's definition, there are two science parks in Thailand: the Thailand Science Park in Rangsit and the KMUTT Industrial Park in Bangkhuntien. The former was established by the National Science and Technology Development Agency (a public R&D institution) while the latter was established by King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (a public university). Several other public universities are planning to open up new science parks in major Thai cities including Chiang Mai in the north, Khonkan in the northeast, and Songkhla in the south. It is customary for science parks to offer their tenants basic infrastructures such as building, utilities, and communication facilities, in addition to testing facilities, pilot plants, and proximity to knowledge centers like universities or research laboratories.

Above and beyond these general basic amenities, a science park should offer a value-added service of intellectual property management, including intellectual property strategy consultation and patent application drafting, filing, prosecution, and maintenance. Most importantly, the services should include in- and out- licensing activities such as licensor and licensee intelligence search, negotiation assistance, contract drafting, and license maintenance. In case a startup company is to be formed, the science park would offer consultation and facilitation services, including general legal and business consultation, commercial registration, tax planning, investment promotion application, and venture capital coordination.

These services should be handled by a specialized office in the science park tentatively called the "Intellectual Property Management Office," which also implements the general intellectual property policy of the science park. In case of a research institute science park, such an intellectual property management office would serve as an indispensable component of the park. In case of a university-owned science park, such an office could service the university as well for an additional income to the office and savings for the university. This type of office is a "selling point" of any science park since researchers and tenants should be delighted to be relieved of the agony of having to find reliable intellectual property consultants and to coordinate with so many agencies to protect and commercialize technologies invented in the science park or elsewhere.

The above proposal is based on our experience with the Thailand Science Park, which can be categorized as a publicly owned and operated research center based science park. The Park was established in 2002 around the core of three decade-old national technology research centers: BIOTEC for biotechnology, MTEC for material and metal technologies, and NECTEC for electronic and computer technologies. Each of these National Centers is equipped with its own technology licensing office, the prototype of which was set up in the pre-science park year of 1996 by the author and the former Director of Examination at the Thai Patent Office. After about a year of science park operation, the technology licensing offices in these National Centers were examined with respect to their international counterparts. Five types of problems were identified. The first was the need for continuing education for licensing professionals and associates. The second problem had to do with "fair" remunerations, bonuses and benefits for intellectual property and licensing personnel. The third problem involved working environment and infrastructure. The fourth problem was how to increase the volume of inventions and creations that enter and leave these Offices. Last but perhaps the most important problem was the lack of unified "Thailand Science Park" intellectual property policy, regulations and operational guidelines. After an analysis of international practice benchmarks, we first proposed seven models of organizational improvement ranging from doing nothing at all to closing some or all technology licensing offices to consolidating them into one unit with a few possibilities. These options were then narrowed down to one plausible development path. The separate technology licensing offices (and possibly the investment unit that handles startup companies) would first be combined into one administrative entity with branches that are still physically located close to researchers in the National Centers. For a year or so, the new Technology Management Office would enjoy a special status of incubating startup service unit inside the National Science and Technology Development Agency. This special status requires and allows the new Office to have its own business plan and budget (including a new salary scale) just like a newly-formed venture. During the incubation period, the new Office is expected to conduct more active marketing on both the researcher and business sides while drafting a unified intellectual property policy for the Science Park. Surviving through this gestation period, the Office will be spun-off as a private legal entity that is equipped with seed money and special promotional privileges for a certain period of time, after which the privileges will be withdrawn in a model similar to that of the British Technology Group (BTG). At present, the scheme is undergoing revisions and approval by the Science and Technology Development Board. Implementation is expected by the end of 2004.