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Biotechnology Entrepreneurship

# Biotechnology Entrepreneurship

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# **Biotechnology Entrepreneurship**

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### Abstract

Biotechnology is one of the strongest growing industries of the twentyfirst century. Yet, the sector is still young and many biotechnology firms are at an early stage of their life cycle. Thus, biotechnology and entrepreneurship are intrinsically linked together, and over the last years a substantial number of articles in the entrepreneurship literature have studied biotechnology at the regional, firm, and individual level of analysis. This monograph reviews the literature on biotechnology entrepreneurship. First, at the regional level, we focus on innovation networks and biotechnology clusters. Second, at the firm level, we illustrate strategies and business models of biotechnology firms and the determinants of their success. We also elaborate on strategic alliances of biotechnology ventures, and on mergers and acquisitions in the biotechnology industry. Third, at the individual level of analysis, we review the

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literature on strategic decision making in the biotechnology industry and the role of the management team for biotechnology ventures' development. We conclude our review by offering future research opportunities within and across levels of analysis for scholars interested in the field of biotechnology entrepreneurship.

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Over the last 35 years, the biotechnology industry has been booming. Since the inception of Genentech — which is often referred to as the first modern biotechnology firm — in 1976, many thousands of new biotechnology ventures have been founded, and some of these ventures have been extraordinarily successful. For example, Genentech's market capitalization was \$100 billion in 2012, and the firm employed more than 11,000 people. Similarly, firms like Amgen (founded in 1980; market capitalization \$53 billion in 2012; 17,000 employees) and Biogen (founded in 1978; market capitalization \$28 billion in 2012; 5000 employees) are not small firms anymore but global players. These and other firms have been so successful because they have developed and commercialized radically new technologies based on scientific advancements that improved our understanding of cellular processes at the molecular level. For example, based on the scientific breakthrough of recombinant DNA technology, Genentech was first to produce insulin from bacteria to treat human diabetes.

Today the biotechnology sector has a substantial economic impact. The global biotechnology market had total revenues of \$200 billion in 2009, representing a compound annual growth rate of 10.2% for the

### 2 Introduction

period spanning 2005–2009. Further, US biotechnology firms employed about 112,000 people and European biotechnology firms about 31,000 people in 2010 (Ernst and Young, 2011). Due to these impressive numbers, biotechnology has attracted considerable attention not only from policy makers, but also from academic researchers. For example, a number of studies have investigated how governments can create regional environments that trigger the formation of a biotechnology industry. This research has found that regional clustering of biotechnology ventures, universities, investors, and incumbent firms can stimulate biotechnology development (e.g., Audretsch and Stephan, 1996, 1999; Cooke, 2002; Stuart and Sorenson, 2003a,b; Zucker et al., 1998). Other studies at the regional level have investigated how trans-organizational networks in the biotechnology sector are organized (e.g., Liebeskind et al., 1996; Maurer and Ebers, 2006; Powell et al., 1996), and the role of policy and national innovation systems in the formation of networks and clusters (e.g., Chaturvedi, 2007; Dodgson et al., 2008; Dohse, 2000; Kaiser and Prange, 2004; Lehrer, 2007; Phene et al., 2006).

Further, as the examples of Genentech and others illustrate, the successful development and commercialization of biotechnological techniques can form the basis for new firms' overwhelming success. Indeed, biotechnological techniques have substantially triggered the research output and productivity in many industrial sectors. For example, recent industry statistics suggest that the biotechnology industry discovers roughly two times as many new drugs as the traditional pharmaceutical industry, but spends only one quarter as much on R&D (Ernst and Young, 2011). However, many biotechnology firms never bring a product to market and fail to successfully commercialize their technology. One reason for these frequent failures is that the biotechnology ventures' environment is highly dynamic and competitive (Fildes, 1990; Greis et al., 1995), and that bringing biotechnological products to market is therefore one of the most complex managerial challenges. Moreover, new product development costs and product failure rates are substantial (DiMasi et al., 2003; Evans and Varaiya, 2003), illustrating that biotechnology can be characterized as a high-risk industry. The development process requires on average more than \$100 million and 10 years of R&D investment (DiMasi et al., 2003). Moreover, only one out of 5000 initial drug candidates reaches market launch (Evans and Varaiya, 2003). Due to the environmental conditions and the complexity of newly developed biotechnological methods, managing a biotechnology firm is a highly complex endeavor. Understanding the factors that contribute to the success of biotechnology ventures has been an important research avenue for researchers from the field of strategy and entrepreneurship.

Finally, some studies have focused on the individuals starting and managing biotechnology ventures. Many of these individuals are different from entrepreneurs outside the biotechnology industry since in addition to managerial and entrepreneurial skills they need to possess substantial scientific knowledge to assess both the technological feasibility and the commercial potential on new biotechnological developments. Indeed, many biotechnology entrepreneurs are professors at research institutions (Audretsch and Stephan, 1996, 1999; Zucker et al., 1998) who when becoming entrepreneurs often face problems in the development of their shared occupational identities, the distribution of their limited time between research and entrepreneurship, and the acquisition of managerial skills required to run a startup firm.

The purpose of this monograph is to review past research on biotechnology at different levels of analysis. As for most reviews, we cannot be exhaustive on the studies included. Rather, our goal is to highlight important research streams that scholars have pursued over the last two decades and illustrate some key findings. In the following section we introduce important definitions and concepts which are necessary for readers new to the field of biotechnology entrepreneurship to understand (some of) the studies subsequently introduced. We then summarize work on biotechnology entrepreneurship at the regional level. Next, we extend our review to the firm and individual levels of analysis, respectively. Finally, we highlight future research opportunities in the field of biotechnology entrepreneurship within and across levels, and draw final conclusions.

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