

Process Innovation and Intellectual Property: Is there really a Business Case?

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades people working in the research and development area of mineral processing have been confronted with issues about intellectual property (IP). This is a new factor to contend with: apparently the AMIRA P9 Project operated from 1959-2000 without any formal IP protection or time-consuming legalese.

Two examples from the history of mineral processing innovations viz. the MacArthur-Forrest patent on cyanidation to extract gold and the Minerals separation patent on flotation, together the largest advances in the millennia are examined to discern possible lessons for the prospects of gains from the ownership of IP.

Observations are made on the probable impact of IP rights on the current pace of process innovation; the excessive bureaucratisation of research and development from IP concerns appears to have affected the functioning of the industry's previous successful model of collaborative research and open disclosure.

While companies often extoll the benefits of "free trade", they appear unwilling to apply that principle to the free trade of ideas and innovations.