Chapter 8
The Role of Project Support in Innovation

The ambition to make innovation processes a competitive asset also involves
the functions that provide project support. For example, ECCO has a lab in the
line function that tests the shoes’ grip, durability and comfort for the develop-
ment projects.

In many innovation projects, most of the development work actually takes
place outside the projects. Sometimes project support is not even part of the
company, but is provided by external suppliers. Take another example from
ECCO, which does not develop its own last for its shoe prototypes. Instead,
they are developed by a subsupplier in another country. Other examples of
project support include, purchasing, quality, documentation of drawings, patent
analysis, prototypes, market communication and developing sales material.
This chapter will concentrate on the support functions associated with project
work – project support.

Some support tasks are purely operational, because they provide a standard
service for the project. Others are development tasks, such as designing and
constructing new packaging. In these types of tasks, the work of the support
functions is commissioned by the projects. Thus, the projects are the customers
and the support functions are the suppliers.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Project support</th>
<th>Administrative support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lab</td>
<td>HR/recruitment</td>
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<td>Prototype workshop</td>
<td>Finance</td>
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<td>Market survey</td>
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<td>Graphic support and documentation</td>
<td>Facility services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patent analysis</td>
<td>Communication/PR</td>
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Figure 8.1. Different Types of Support

In an innovation culture, there is a lot of focus on projects. Working on pro-
jects tends to have a higher status than working with project support. However,
this is unfortunate because the support functions play an important role in the
innovation system as a whole. If this goes unrecognized, the support functions can quickly become a place where the work is requested too late and where it is unclear what the request involves. There is a serious risk that the requests will just be added to the pile in an overfilled in-basket. Once that happens, support can easily become a bottleneck, causing delays to the projects.

There is often untapped potential in making the support functions an active player. Like the other participants in the innovation system, the support functions help create the business results that enable fast and innovative solutions.

By working with the support functions, questioning how things are done or optimizing collaboration with the projects, it is possible to find new solutions that can make the innovation process more efficient. When it comes to project support and efficiency in the innovation process, there are two main problems:

- How do you make communication between the support functions and the projects more efficient?
- How do you make the support functions’ own processes more efficient?

In the following, we will take a closer look at how lean can be used to work with these two issues.

**Give Projects and Support Functions a Common Objective**

Support functions and projects are organized differently and have different success criteria. This, in itself, can give rise to challenges in their cooperative relationship.

Sometimes the primary objective of the support functions is to provide operational support, while project support is a secondary task. This impacts on the projects and can make the project staff feel that they are not receiving the priority and service they need. On the other hand, support functions perform tasks for more than one project, are bound by agreements with the other projects and cannot always reprioritize every time changes are made one individual project. Furthermore, the projects are often not good enough at planning and meeting deadlines, which is disruptive to the workflow of the support function and ultimately creates waste.

To get cooperation on the right track, it can be a good idea to start by giving something. A relationship that is only transactional does not bring the best out of both parties. The projects need to recognize support’s role and value and they need to help them understand why their contribution is important. The project requesting the work has a responsibility. And so does the support function