Terms of Reference for the Skunk Works Framework

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Innovation
Ecosystems
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Terms of references for the skunk works framework

The Skunk Works model, introduced by Lockheed Martin in 1940s, is a proven way to introduce intrapreneurship within large organisations and companies. Skunk Works were central to Lockheed Martin's Advanced Development Program and allowed such a large organization to harness internal innovation, often by combining more practical vocational skills with advanced technological skills in an informal environment. Skunk Works as a form of innovation has been widely used for companies to make their business outstanding from the others and achieve sustainable development, and at the same time try to compete with the increasing number of competitors.

"Skunkworks or skunkworks project is a phrase commonly used in business and technology to describe a small and loosely structured group of people who research and develop a project for the sake of innovation in technology."

In Work Package 6 the first key element is the managing and sustaining of the multi-stakeholder knowledge partnerships in each partner country. The function of these partnerships is to foster cooperation and interaction between representatives of the business and VET communities. The MSKP's have a key role for developing innovation and achieving the expected results within the innovation ecosystem proposed as part of the InEcVET project.

In the InEcVET project the skunkworks are represented by the multi-stakeholder knowledge partnerships, as they are organized as small and loosely structured groups working towards the aim of fostering innovation within the VET sector. This was even clearer to the consortium after analyzing and observing the activity and functioning of the multi-stakeholder knowledge partnerships during the first and second meeting.

As the MSKP's highlight the main issues and identify innovative approaches, it's important to develop a format of the Skunk Works Framework in order to help VET professionals to scope out potential innovative solutions to the issues identified at local level.

This paper presents terms of references for the skunk works framework, and it aims to help the partners and the MSKP members to develop and foster the skunk works environment in order to ensure that the frameworks will be appropriately developed and resourced during the local partnership meetings.

A bottom-up approach will be implemented to develop the skunk works framework. This in necessary in order to ensure the quality of the final evaluation and the benefits

for VET community that is aiming to use it for regulating and developing a skunk works environment.

The skunk works framework will be developed and tested during local partnership meetings by analyzing the work, the results and methods used by the VET professionals forming the multi-stakeholder knowledge partnerships.

In order to lower the risk and uncertainties of skunk works projects, it is necessary to identify some elements and conditions which could lead skunk works to success . The terms of references contain the most prominent success factors of skunk works projects, for the benefit of the MSKP's and future skunk works teams.

Factors and actions that have a positive impact in developing skunk works projects:

Motivation

Motivation is an important ingredient for the development of skunk works project. As these teams will often face lots of difficulties during the implementation of the project. It is important because it provides the drive for people to accomplish their goals, maintain their responsibilities or solve problems.

Team leader and leadership

John Naisbitt said, "Whenever the world changes so dramatically, what characterizes appropriate leadership also changes". A team leader plays an important role in guiding the team members and motivating them to stay focused. Effective team leaders ensure that team morale remains high and that workers are motivated to perform well. The Skunk Works manager must be delegated with complete control of the programme in all aspects.

Team members

Comprised of small groups of talented people. Team members must also be highly qualified and experienced. Most managers succeed because of the strength and skill of their staff.

Secretary

The Skunk works team must be separated from the parent organization. It is mostly a win-win situation, due to the fact that both the parent company and small organization can have its own goals and work separately without intersection with each other (Rich, 1994).

Management support

Strong support and encouragement from high-level management makes the innovation process easier, which also reduces risks in the projects in many cases. There must be mutual trust between the management and the skunk works team. There must be very close cooperation and liaison on a day-to-day basis.

Timing

Rich (1994) also raised the opinion of" time is money" for skunk works projects. Create great value in limited time is an important competitive advantage for skunk works projects.

Rewarding performance

Because only a few people will be used in most other areas, ways must be provided to reward good performance by pay not based on the number of personnel supervised.

Factors and actions that have a negative impact in developing a skunk works project:

■ Don't forget that motivation is always temporary. It does not actually help you achieve amazing success. So you must be sure that the team members and the team leader implementing the skunk works project are fully committed and believe in the goals of the project.

■ A lonely leader can sometimes become confusing, so a leader should have a soul mate that will help him (Peter, 2002). It is very important for a leader to provide for the skunk work project a direction to follow and create team members a cultural environment inside the team (Gwynne, 1997).

■ Do not forget to do an extensive recruitment of the personnel implicated. The source of most problems is people. Know the people working on your project, so you know what the real weak spots are. A research from American Express found 85% of the unsuccessful skunk works projects had the same problem: involving wrong people in the project.

■ Don't start executing without defining and planning the project first. "Begin with the end in mind" - Stephen Covey. Goals should be specific because general objectives are more difficult to achieve. It's a classic mistake: eagerly starting to develop a product without knowing what the end game is, and how to get there.

■ Efficiency and clarity is very important in implementing a skunk works project. There must be a minimum number of reports required, but important work must be recorded thoroughly.

■ Funding a program must be timely so that the contractor doesn't have to keep running to the bank to support government projects. So, don't start without having a clear budget and funding schedule.

References

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