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THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF AN INNOVATION CENTRE

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INTRODUCTION

The INVENTION requires, to serve and promote it, the setting up of :

- Structures,
- Competences.
- Structures because the INVENTION has to be accomodated in specific premises so that it can be followed and managed with all the needed attention.
- Competences because the **INNOVATION Centre** has to be run by **experienced men and women**, who can be assisted, depending on the files, by **external Consultants** specialized in the various ranges of services **necessary to the environment of INVENTION and INNOVATIVE COMPANIES.**

During these three days, we will have the opportunity to enter together the different steps which make the “ innovation development ”.

It will enable us for sure to understand that assisting and **developing INVENTIONS** is a MISSION which can only **take place in an organization able to ensure the continuity** in the actions undertaken.

WHAT IS AN INNOVATION CENTRE?

In the broadest sense, it must be a link between Invention and the industry/market.

On a practical point of view, who can contact this organization?

- The individual inventor,
- The small- and medium-sized company,
- The major company,
- The laboratory,
- The engineering course.

We know that there is something in common bringing these various individual and legal entities together : the INVENTION.

Indeed, in most cases, these different actors of innovation have to face the issues of developing their INVENTION.

- The individual inventor, is probably the less informed about the path to follow to :
 - File a patent application;
 - Find a reliable industrial partner;
 - Negotiate a licensing agreement;
 - Run the exploitation of the licence granted;
 - etc...

- The small- and medium-sized company, which generally has no practical experience of innovation, although being an economic actor, and will have to :
 - Validate the invention it intends to use;
 - Get a sufficient knowledge of the market the invention is aimed to;
 - Draw up a business plan, projected on at least three years, in order to know the costs it incurs in as well as the resources it can expect from its invention.
- The major company, which - although very structured - has no research and innovation development department to manage and above all secure a return on the investments dedicated to develop, in some cases, inventions which only have a distant connection with its activity.

In this case, the company can call for the Innovation Centre which, thanks to its competences and network, will be able to assist in finding licencees or buyers for the inventions and patent(s) concerned.

- The laboratory which, as a research centre, regularly files patents developed by its engineers, and just like the major company, does not have a research development department.

This laboratory will surely find a great interest, calling for the services of the Innovation Centre, in finding there the medium to make profit from its research efforts by granting licencees to use, or even by selling the whole patent rights.

- The engineering course which, within the context of the works carried out by its students, is led to file patent applications which generally remain an intellectual exercise without any industrial and commercial outcome.

There is a source of income for the school as a source of wealth and employment for the industrial companies and others, in the country concerned.

THE ORGANIZATION OF AN Innovation Centre

In order to be mobile, adjustable, thus the most effective, we believe that an Innovation Centre must be a light organization, firstly at least.

Geographically, it has to be located preferably nearby an economic centre so as to benefit from the proximity of the intervention and decision centres.

Indeed, it will be regularly in contact both with the Intellectual Property Services and the main institutional actors of the Industry, Banks and other financial services, commercial delegations located in the country, etc...

COMPETENCES

We have briefly mentioned the various expectations regarding the Innovation Centre. During our next speeches which will respectively deal with:

- the evaluation of inventions;
- and
- the role of entrepreneurs,

We will enter into the detail of the services companies have to call for in their process of innovation development.

To face these needs, the Innovation Centre should put at its “ customers ”’s disposal the competences necessary to assist effectively the invention.

These specialists, internal or external to the Innovation Centre, will be required to:

- Have an experience of the industry within the company;
- If possible, be specialized in certain business fields;
- Know how to analyze financially a project or a balance sheet, and draw a justified synthesis of it;
- After studying the file, define the nature of the partnership(s) to be established;
- On a legal level, be able to write up and assist a draft agreement (licensing or other) until its signature;
- Be able to propose a strategy so that the invention can be transferred to the industry.

SERVICES

In order to effectively support the economic development, which remains the main target, the Innovation Centre must be able to bring the following services:

- The technical assistance in evaluating the invention;
- The auditing of the company in terms of manpower, production and financial resources;
- The marketing evaluation of the project;
- The connection with the various national actors of the industry;
- The connection with specialized Consultancy firms;
- Information on the financing possibilities; etc...

MEANS

In order to gather the necessary conditions to the starting of an Innovation Centre, it shall have the means required for its operating.

We propose firstly that the financial contribution of the Innovation Centre be brought, on the one hand by the national governments and institutionals, and on the other hand by the private industrial firms which could benefit directly or indirectly from the action of the Innovation Centre.

However it remains necessary that the Innovation Centre be independent toward the various governments and majors companies.

So as to formalize this project, we could suggest the creation of an Innovation Centre as a pilot project, which could be set up in one of the countries in the Region.

To this end, we could propose that the project's specifications be written up and then submitted to the authorities interested in the effective establishment of an Innovation Centre.

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