

# The Front-End of Innovation – the key to scalable growth?

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**Axis Communications, a market leader in high-end network video, has been growing the last 15 years, and the growth is projected to continue. To enable and cope with this, Axis operations department (*Operations*) is looking to become more innovative and believe that harnessing the innovative powers of their coworkers is the solution. That's where we come in.**

After an initial round of interviews and diagnostics of the organization, it was determined that the main problem was not that the organization lacked ideas, but rather that it lacked a process for reaching evaluable concepts. There was no way to make decisions on possibilities apart from long and costly development projects with rigorous pre-studies. The missing piece is known as the Front-End of Innovation (FEI), the initial part of the innovation process (where the latter are Formal Development, and Launch). FEI is gaining increasing attention from researchers and industry, as proficiency is closely related to future innovation success.

Our research started with a solid foundation in innovation literature, where contributions from seminal writers were compared, contrasted and condensed. Their opinions showed some superficial discord, but underneath the surface, a framework for how the Front-End of Innovation could be managed emerged.

However, industry in general and Axis in particular need tangible tools. So, a process was developed and filled with key activities suggested by literature, important roles and critical success factors (CSFs) to consider, and ultimately measurement criteria to match.

The result is a Stage-gate process in three parts, designed to accommodate CSFs identified in literature and by Axis, with a comprehensive toolbox of activities and criteria adapted to Operations. It intuitively illustrates the progression through FEI, from an identified opportunity to the point where a decision on formal development is made, and identifies key roles and contributors. It communicates a holistic innovation program to all coworkers, no matter innovation experience, of what it would mean to pursue an opportunity. In an attempt to assure that the whole innovation process, from FEI to Launch, is seen through, it integrates directly into formal development.

So... is this process the be-all and end-all of Operations innovations efforts? Of course not. We believe that a holistic innovation approach, with continuous improvements in all parts of the innovation process, is needed and we recommend that Operations continue the innovative path they're paving for themselves. Only then can the goal of a scalable Operations that is ready for future growth, be realized.

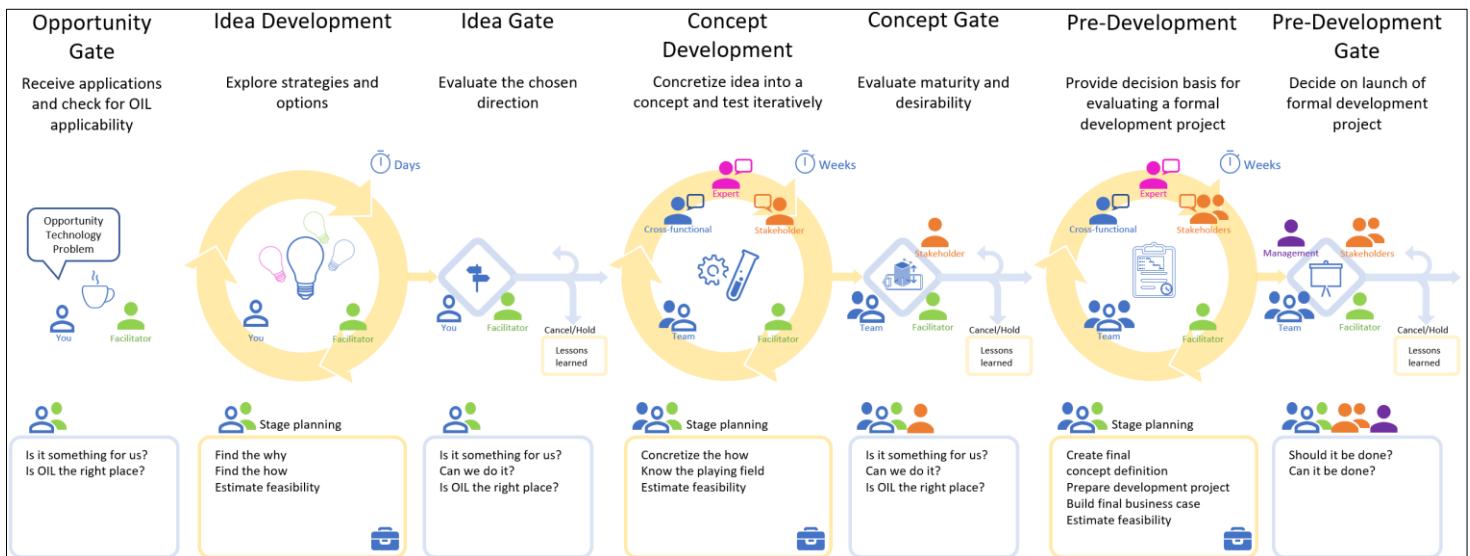


Figure 1 The suggested process for managing FEI, called the Operations Innovation Lab internally