

7 WAYS TO STAY ON TOP

Leadership demands innovation in thought—and in deed.

BY NEAL WHITTEN, PMP, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



We all have innovative ideas for improving our projects and organizations, but many of us invest little time and energy in putting those thoughts into practice.

Writer Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.” Project management practices advance slowly—far too slowly—in most organizations and sometimes in the wrong direction.

Although they're well-qualified to take the initiative and bring innovative change to their projects and organizations, most project managers add limited value beyond what's required. And unfortunately, most organizations rely too heavily on management to drive change instead of placing the responsibility with the folks on the front lines who are experts in their chosen craft.

But you don't have to stick with the *status quo*. Here are seven ways project managers can advance innovation within their organizations, with only minimal involvement from management:

1. **Perform lessons learned for every qualified project.** Set the criteria at projects costing at least US\$100,000 or requiring a minimum of 2,000 people hours or whatever makes sense for your organization. Just make sure you look at what went right and wrong.

2. **Create a review board** where project managers working on new projects must demonstrate to their peers that they've reviewed—and applied—lessons learned from recent relevant projects.
3. **Introduce culture classes for all team members at the start of every qualified project.** This class will provide formal training in all skills and processes deemed essential for the project, ensuring team members have a common understanding of how the project will be run and the role that each one is expected to play.
4. **Create a process for institutionalizing improvements.** Rather than simply talking about changes needed in an organization, project managers should develop a process that details how to plan and execute those changes.
5. **Teach project management best practices.** Gather project managers and key stakeholders from across the enterprise in a classroom setting to review the health of multiple projects, identifying both good and bad practices.
6. **Assign a small group of successful senior project managers to mentor all of the organization's project managers.** And then hold the senior project managers accountable, in part, for the success of the projects owned by the project managers they mentor.
7. **Create measurements for evaluating project manager performance.** Depending on the level of project manager, these measurements should encourage innovation, cross-project cooperation and support, and the advancement of project management best practices.

Innovation is essential for any organization to remain competitive. And no organization ever truly arrives at a spot where it can justify standing still or coasting. An organization innovates to be on top—and continues to innovate to remain on top. It's up to project managers to do their part. *PM*

Neal Whitten, PMP, president of The Neal Whitten Group, is a speaker, trainer, consultant, mentor and author. His latest book is Neal Whitten's Let's Talk! More No-Nonsense Advice for Project Success—Over 700 Q&As.

