

10 Top Tips for Modernizing Project Management

Organizations are now competing in a global, application-based economy, driven in many industries by the reality of the internet of things, digitalization and other technology enabled transformations. To succeed in this environment your business approach must be efficient and enable a work environment that is flexible and adaptable enough to keep pace with customer and marketplace demands.

Despite the need to stay nimble, organizations frequently find themselves with processes that have become inefficient, ineffective and inconsistent through a failure to evolve to changing conditions. Nowhere is that more prevalent than where a “set it and forget it” approach to work and project processes creeps in. Unfortunately, this can lead to a delayed awareness that the status quo needs to evolve. To correct this issue, organizations must not only execute process improvement initiatives, they must also implement cultural change that fundamentally changes how project management is conducted.

These three areas of adjustment – technology, process and culture, must all be integrated to build the effective, sustainable project execution organization that is required today, and here are ten tips for making that happen in your own organization without significantly disrupting the projects you still need to execute.



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1 Fully understand your issues

Before you can start addressing your problems you must understand what those problems are. This might sound obvious, but many organizations fail to assess the full extent of their difficulties. They identify process issues and seek to address them without recognizing that the process problem is merely a symptom of a larger cultural and / or technological problem. When you fully understand and acknowledge all of your challenges in each of the three areas you will be much more able to solve them.

2 Define what success looks like

Once you have understood your current situation you must define what the end goal is. Perfection is the wrong goal, it requires investment in areas of diminishing returns and is a temporary state anyway – the world will evolve faster than you can. Far better is a state that eliminates major problems in technology and process and creates a culture as near to ‘perfect’ as possible in order to facilitate ongoing adjustments to maintain effectiveness and efficiency.

3 Gain active buy in from all key stakeholders

Having a sponsor and stakeholders sign off on a project charter isn't enough for this kind of change; support has to be active and consistent. All stakeholders must publicly commit to the importance of this work and must remain committed even when it requires some compromise in their other priorities. The organization is looking to fundamentally change the way it executes projects to deliver greater future success. That isn't going to happen without a little pain.

4 Develop areas in parallel

There's a natural temptation to focus on culture, process or technology – delivering early success in one area to leverage commitment to improvements elsewhere. However, to be successful all of the areas need to improve, and that improvement has to be integrated. You can't improve processes without considering technology implications, and you can't ensure improvements evolve and grow without cultural commitment.

5 Don't compromise your needs

Many organizations will impose restrictions on their attempts to modernize their project execution approach. Commonly this is working within the confines of an existing tool under the assumption the tool can't be upgraded. This is a flawed approach that immediately limits the opportunity to succeed. You must define what you need regardless of current limitations and then find ways to implement those needs. Modern technology tools are flexible and scalable, growing and evolving with your needs, and that's the type of tool you need to succeed. Better to make changes to the tool at the outset than fight the tool while attempting to evolve.

6 Measure and validate performance regularly

Not all of the changes you make will deliver the results you hope for, and that's OK. It's part of the process to learn what does and what doesn't work and make further adjustments. However, that requires you to measure the results of your changes effectively in order to confirm the results or to identify additional adjustments that may be required. If you make too many changes without measuring you won't know what did and what didn't work and may be building problems into your approach.

7 Engage all business areas, and focus on common approaches

Success comes not just from effective and efficient processes, managed through the right tool in a project focused environment, it also requires consistency. That may require compromise in process and technology, in order to find an approach that works best across the entire enterprise, rather than to develop an approach that is optimal for one area but problematic for other areas.

8 Implement change with sensitivity to ongoing work

It's important to address existing shortcomings as quickly as possible to drive problems out of the organization, but at the same time there needs to be consideration of the projects that are underway. Replacing an ineffective and inefficient process with an improved version may seem like a good way to increase the chances of success on a project that is underway, but the cost of the disruption caused by changing things midway can far outweigh any benefits. A better approach is to phase the changes in as projects are initiated.

9 Cultural change takes time, and it is fragile

While process and technology improvements can occur relatively quickly, changing an organization's culture can take much longer. Changes to the fundamental makeup of the organization require commitment from all levels of the organization and they require evidence that the shift is permanent. Culture cannot be trained and each employee will need to adjust at his or her own speed. Employees need to be supported and any skepticism needs to be overcome through consistent demonstration of the changed behaviors. Until the culture is embedded within the organization the changes are fragile, a single incident that undermines the cultural shift can have far reaching and long lasting implications. Cultural change is fundamental to success in other areas – it will allow for project teams to truly understand and focus on business value over project constraints. However, it is also the hardest to achieve and will require the most attention

10 You're never done

By the time you have implemented the changes that will allow you to claim success based on the definition you developed in tip two above the world will have moved on and you will need to implement further changes. If you have made the correct cultural changes that won't be difficult, but you do need to ensure you have a continuous improvement approach in place. That needs to ensure your processes and technology evolve to the shifting demands and changing competitive landscape your organization exists within. Done well you will also find your culture evolves naturally and helps to prevent future problems.

Summary

Most organizations recognize they have some inherent inefficiency in their project execution approach. Without conscious monitoring and enhancements there will be a gradual erosion of project effectiveness. Meanwhile, projects must more closely align with organizational strategy and project success must be measured more by the business value delivered than the performance against project constraints.

If organizations have not yet made that adjustment, they have significant amounts of 'catch up' to do. They can only be successful if they focus on culture, technology and process, to deliver an integrated approach across the entire enterprise.

Learn more by watching our informative product tour.

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