

## 15 Concrete Ideas to Manage an Improvement Project

Strategy	Ideas to Try
<p><b>Frontload the work</b></p> <p><i>The beginning of improvement projects are often more work and more challenging because no progress has been made yet. However, it is very important not to shortcut the planning, which includes understanding the problem or opportunity, gathering baseline data and information, developing a measurement plan, and organizing the team. Dedicated and thoughtful time at the beginning of a project is likely to lead to a successful project.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Block time on your calendar at the beginning of an improvement project to manage the upfront bolus of work.</li> <li>2. Hold a full-day kaizen event, process mapping session, or team retreat to kick-off the work and organize the project. At the session, you can build the team, deeply study the process, finalize the aim and your theory to achieve the aim, draft measures, and brainstorm changes to test.</li> <li>3. Use a checklist of tasks to show the team progress before you start testing.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Focus on learning, not perfection</b></p> <p><i>When you move to implementation, you should have buy-in and confidence in your improvements. However, the beginning of the project should focus on learning quickly so that you can make progress faster. This includes keeping your aim, measures, and changes flexible; trying to step-down tests; and ensuring that everything is designed to help you understand what it takes to bring about improvement.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Don't laminate your aim, measures, or change ideas; these can and should change throughout the course of the project.</li> <li>5. Build data collection and reflection into standing meeting (e.g., ask for staff satisfaction of the process at a standing huddle).</li> <li>6. Use sampling to avoid survey fatigue and accelerate learning (e.g., send 10 different staff members a three-question survey every week rather than all 40 staff members a survey every month).</li> </ol>
<p><b>Make it easy</b></p> <p><i>Since improvement work is often added to improvement team members' full-time jobs, successful project teams leverage existing structures to get work done. Collect data and test during work whenever possible, keep everything in</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Use existing meetings, structures, and one-to-one check-ins to do improvement work.</li> <li>8. Make any improvement team meeting the best part of team member's day. For example, build in time to share stories about how the work is meaningfully impacting customers' or patients' lives. Make it applicable to their work, and have fun activities like music and energizers.</li> </ol>

<p><i>one place, and make the work meaningful to each team member.</i></p>	<p>And, of course, celebrate success and learning from failure.</p> <p>9. Look for opportunities to swap existing meetings or work for improvement team time and work.</p>
<p><b>Build a big tent</b></p> <p><i>The most effective improvement teams leverage various resources and organize the work to make the most of the human capital in the organization. They identify ways to bring in future improvement sites early and engage all the necessary stakeholders for effective change.</i></p>	<p>10. Ensure you have the right team. If you can't engage a key stakeholder (especially someone who might "stop" the work), consider the impact on the success of the project. Here are a few options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Change the team.</li> <li>b. Identify "consultants" to provide regular guidance to the team.</li> <li>c. Re-scope the project.</li> <li>d. Use your sponsor to gather support for the team.</li> </ul> <p>11. Use visuals (e.g., run charts, storyboards) to share progress and information in common, visible areas.</p> <p>12. Put your sponsor to work—ask your sponsor to help push and provoke the team, scope the project to the timeframe, set the aim, or contribute to the project development. Development could include deciding on a theory of change, brainstorming change ideas and related PDSA cycles, or thinking through compelling measures.</p>
<p><b>Have an end date</b></p> <p><i>Improvement work rarely has a natural conclusion or deliverable. In order to keep momentum, it's important to keep improvement projects time-limited.</i></p>	<p>13. Set a start and end date; stick to the end date and re-charter a team if needed.</p> <p>14. Be intentional and never lose sight of your goal. One good tip is to start meetings with the aim and predict how each PDSA cycle will contribute to the larger goal.</p> <p>15. Create 30-, 60-, and 90-day plans for the end of the project.</p>