Innovative-e transforms organizational management with Microsoft Teams

Innovative-e taps into the power of Microsoft 365 and AI to help a forward-thinking university convert their legacy project management challenges into opportunities.

December 18, 2024

Project management has long been a keystone of organizational efficiency, allowing companies to deliver projects on time and within budget, and to improve processes. However, as industries change and adapt to the evolving tech landscape, it's essential to integrate organizational best practices with the latest innovations to keep up with modern needs.

That's where Innovative-e comes in. Founded in 1999, they're a project management modernization company specializing in Microsoft Cloud-based solutions whose goal is to help customers achieve higher organizational performance. A Microsoft partner for over 15 years, Innovative-e has earned two Solutions Partner designations in Modern Work and consistently taps into Microsoft AI Cloud Partner Program offerings to upskill on the latest Microsoft certifications. As a result of their deep investment in the Microsoft ecosystem, they have been four-time finalists and three-time winners of Microsoft Partner of the Year Awards over six years, including the 2024 Partner of the Year Award for Modern Work in the Project and Portfolio Management category.

"Technology has gotten to a place to enable pretty much anything you need. A couple of years ago, the platforms did not have the capabilities to solve previously unsolvable problems in the project and work management space," said Mike Taylor, CEO of Innovative-e. "[With] Microsoft Power Platform, Microsoft Planner, Microsoft Viva Goals, Project Online, and Microsoft Teams as the principal components—you now have secure ways to tie everything together."

As part of their suite of project and program management (PPM) solutions, Innovative-e developed Teams for Project Management (Teams4PM), a Microsoft Azure, Azure OpenAI Service, Power Platform, and Microsoft Dataverse application. Taylor said of the solution, "Teams4PM has AI-powered features built-in to enhance project management capabilities such as automatic meeting summaries, positivity scoring for project sentiment, plus data that can be used by Microsoft 365 Copilot and for Copilot Studio agent development."

Teams4PM is only one of the solutions they offer, and it happened to be just what one customer needed.

Searching for efficiency and reporting to enable strategic alignment

Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) is a private, nonprofit, accredited institution that has served students since 1932. They offer approximately 200 programs, both online and on campus, run by a distributed workforce of more than 4,800 full-time employees and 9,700 adjunct faculty.

To keep up with their innovative goals, SNHU required robust technological capabilities to scale rapidly and function globally. Across departments, however, their project management systems varied greatly. "When Innovative-e's partnership with SNHU first began over five years ago, they were just starting to look at modernizing their PPM strategy and technology footprint. Much of their PPM system was a patchwork that resulted in backlogs, redundancies, and reporting inconsistencies," Taylor explained. "So we looked to Microsoft toolsets, including Power Platform, Teams, and our customizable solution, Teams4PM, to bring them into the future."

It was challenging for the university staff to provide leadership with key metrics such as project status on timeline, budget, and objectives. "A lot of people just weren't sure where to go for project information because it was stored in different places, and tools were not seamless," said Lori Lavallee, Director of Project Management and Value Creation at SNHU.

The university recognized the need to further improve project and portfolio management across the entire organization. Efficiency and modernization were exactly what SNHU was looking for when they first engaged Innovative-e, and after evaluating options for their current needs, they once again chose the organization as their technology partner.

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Evolving to a cloud-based approach

The initial phase of the collaboration was a rigorous analysis of the current environment to help develop a strategically designed system for project management and reporting.

"Our focus was on creating value across the organization by simplifying the experience," Taylor said of the partnership with SNHU. "We recognized the need to adopt a central platform and tools that could interoperate to bring people, applications, and data together. The Microsoft platform was an easy choice; their dedication to innovation means that SNHU's project management operations can scale alongside Microsoft."

Innovative-e helped SNHU make full use of Teams, Power Platform, Project Online, and Planner. In addition to these modernization efforts, Innovative-e built their tailored Teams4PM solution with Microsoft Power Apps to bring Project Online completely into Teams. They also established a Microsoft Power BI dashboard that articulates and visualizes project information across all stages of a project to bring consistency to the reporting experience—all accessible inside Teams.

Innovative-e's solution centralized the project management experience, giving stakeholders across the university instant insights into projects. "The Microsoft solution has brought the ability to pull everyone together into one synchronized system that allows for more transparent visibility into what folks are working on," said Kurt Mithoefer, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Portfolio Management at SNHU.

"The consistent dedication of Microsoft to innovation allows us to help customers navigate and seize this moment. The future holds limitless possibilities…"

—Mike Taylor, CEO, Innovative-e

Increased transparency, capacity awareness, and overall ability to optimize

Adopting a flexible, cloud-based solution quickly netted positive results for the university, on both macro and micro scales. Thanks to real-time, AI-powered insights, SNHU has seen more efficient and transparent project execution, from intake to completion.

Leadership has also improved awareness of resource allocation and holistic visibility into university-wide projects, all on a single platform. "The system is designed to help us better understand the impact of the projects at the university," said Lavallee. "Now we can prioritize around goals, see how they are progressing, and start to measure the resulting benefits."

Teams4PM has additionally empowered SNHU employees to work faster and with better capacity management, in large part due to the ability to work in the apps they're most comfortable with. For example, project managers can work in Project Online or Planner, and stakeholders can access real-time insights and communicate in Teams. Employees get a better view of the pipeline with a singular location for reporting and management. As a result, they're able to "tent stake" future project initiatives.

"SNHU is realizing many tangible outcomes from our partnership—including the ability to visualize project intakes across the organization, seamlessly collaborate on initiatives, time savings from a consistent and automated project creation process, and so much more," Taylor said. "While this journey is ongoing, SNHU's strategy of project and work management centricity is paying dividends today and is helping to future-proof their project and work management as they continue to evolve from legacy and third-party apps."

Seizing the moment by doubling down on Microsoft

This is just the beginning of SNHU's foray into cloud-based project management solutions. Mithoefer said of Innovative-e's work, "Adding in the Microsoft 365 suite, Microsoft Power Platform, and Power BI allowed us to really ramp up our evolution and take us to the next level."

Though Innovative-e built the university's solution to be customizable as needs change, their partnership continues. SNHU connected Teams4PM with Planner to further scale their capabilities, and they continue to build a strategy that will empower the university to tap into the full range of AI capabilities built into Teams4PM. "We have multiple initiatives going with SNHU," said Taylor, "including a Microsoft-supported proof of concept to tie Viva Goals to various projects managed in Planner and Project Online through Teams4PM."

Innovative-e intends to keep looking ahead with Microsoft. As customers move from legacy platforms to AI-powered cloud solutions, this is an exciting time to be working in the PPM space.

"The consistent dedication of Microsoft to innovation allows us to help customers navigate and seize this moment," said Taylor. "The future holds limitless possibilities with the convergence of key Microsoft technologies to help us collectively achieve the once unachievable."

Learn more (https://azuremarketplace.microsoft.com/marketplace/apps/digiopsai.t4pm-subscription?tab=overview)

Discover how Innovative-e taps into the Microsoft ecosystem to create transformative project management solutions.

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