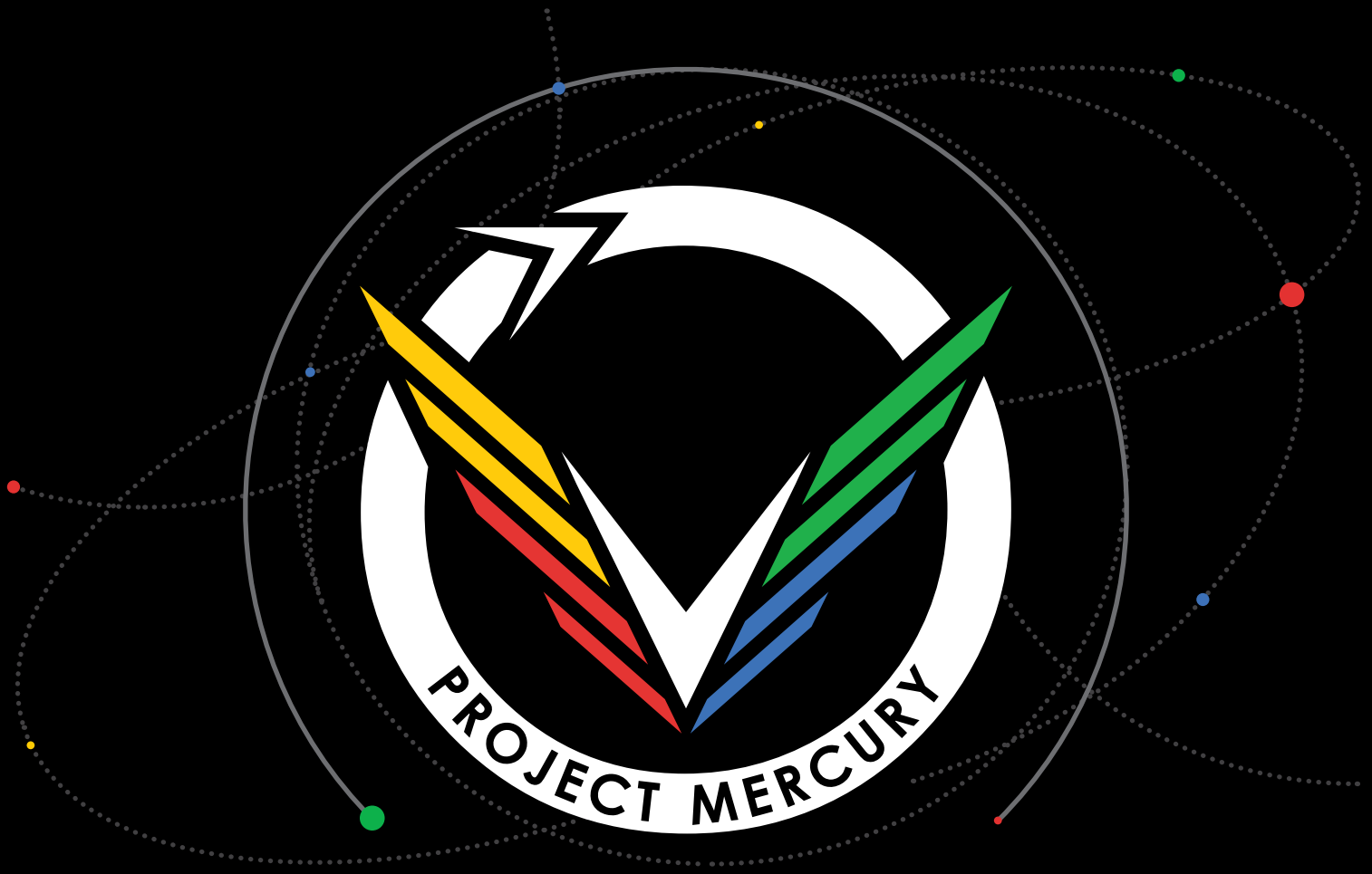

ON ORBIT

PROJECT MERCURY 2025

PART OF THE INTELLECTUAL EDGE ALLIANCE

THE INTELLECTUAL EDGE ALLIANCE

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WELCOME: A DISPATCH FROM MISSION CONTROL

In 2019 the United States Air Force began a partnership with the Innovatrium and Dr. Jeff DeGraff at the University of Michigan to develop and deliver a world-class innovation program, driving a wave of bold, adaptive innovators throughout the Air and Space forces: Project Mercury. Originally envisioned as a "train the trainer" program for Air University, the power of coaching teams through rigorous and relevant challenges quickly caught fire. Alumni of these first cohorts imagined and advocated for similar programs for their organizations, resulting in a series of programs, each adjusted for the partner organizations and participants they serve: AIM-HI (National Guard, sponsored by ARCWERX), RSAF-CPI (Republic of Singapore Air Force), and Project Mercury NATO (sponsored by NATO ACT). As a part of the broader mission to develop the Intellectual Edge Alliance, these programs focus on building innovation readiness—developing innovators who shape culture, competencies, and community across the DoD, our allied services, and beyond. Like RED FLAG, the concept is to give participants their first "10 innovation sorties" through twin tracks of academics and team-led projects.

Together, Project Mercury and the other programs of the Intellectual Edge Alliance have produced **nearly 1,000** Certified Professional Innovators and over **100** Innovation Coaches. While the original goal was to unlock the true potential of our Total Force Airmen, the program has smashed that original goal, and now includes members of all active duty services, guard and reserve components, and over 30 allied countries.

Project Mercury has also delivered dozens of short interactive workshops around the world over the past four years, from Osan to AFCENT, from Warsaw to the Pentagon, helping organizations adopt creative practices. In May, Estonia hosted a Project Mercury NATO workshop titled "Innovators in the Baltics," gathering participants from 11 countries. This fall we will be delivering workshops at Dover AFB, Little Rock AFB, and at NATO JFC Brunssum. We will take our partnership with NATO even further, coaching 3 teams for a full year as they embark on a critical concept-to-fielded capability sprint, expanding on the success of Task Force X.

Our coaches and alumni have also included these principles into the curriculum at ACSC, USAFA, SNCOA, TPS, ROTC, FTAC, CLC, and ASLDS just to name a few. Our alumni carry the adaptive mindset into their work throughout the DoD, from the Pentagon to the maintenance squadron, and are supported by a healthy alumni network.

Through the uncertainties and challenges of the current era, our determination and dedication remains steady. We must build and maintain an **Intellectual Edge** over our adversaries, and this edge depends on agile, high-performing teams. If our people and our teams are going to be able to rapidly adapt to a changing battlefield, then we need to provide them with the training, tools, and time to build. Our programs are the crucible–developing skills, teams and informal networks–ensuring our alumni are prepared and ready to make a difference when it counts most. We here at the Intellectual Edge Alliance are proud to be part of this effort, and will continue to partner with organizations and leaders who have an urgency for change.

With Courage,

W. Ethan Eagle
PhD, Aerospace Engineering
Project Mercury USA
Project Mercury NATO
PM Workshops

Melissa "Cleo" Smith
Lt Col (ret)
AIM-HI
RSAF-CPI (Singapore)
Project Mercury NATO

Johnny Barnes
Col (Ret) USAF
Intellectual Edge Alliance

Jason "TOGA" Trew
PhD, History of Technology
Col (Ret), USAF
AIM-HI
PM Workshops

THE INTELLECTUAL EDGE ALLIANCE (IEA) COHORTS 2019-2025

After completing the program, hundreds of Project Mercury alumni have carried the torch of innovation back to their units and organizations and now operate as a web of change agents throughout the DoD.

The impact of Project Mercury extends far beyond the original audience. Several graduates and sponsors have now built customized programs of their own such as ARCWERX's premiere AIM-HI program, the Republic of Singapore Air Force's Certified Professional Innovator program, Project Mercury NATO, or the NATO Innovation Project Team sprint (new in Fall 2025).

Project Mercury Cohorts		Jumpstart Location	Sponsor
2020	PM Cohort 1	Maxwell AFB, AL	Air University
2020	PM Cohort 2	Virtual	Air University
2020	PM Cohort 3	Virtual	Air University
2021	PM Cohort 4	Virtual	Air University
2021	PM Cohort 5	Virtual	Air University
2022	PM Cohort 6	Virtual	Air University
2022	PM Cohort 7	Virtual	Air University
2022	PM Cohort 8	Virtual	Air University
2023	PM Cohort 9	BRICC, VA	Air University
2023	PM Cohort 10	MGMWerx, AL	Air University
2023	PM Cohort 11	The KRESS, AL	Air University
2024	PM Cohort 12	NSIN JIL, VA	Air University
2024	PM Cohort 13	NSIN JIL, VA	Air University
2025	PM Cohort 14	Virtual	412 TW/96 TW

Other IEA Cohorts		Jumpstart/Accelerator Location(s)	Sponsor
2021	AIM-HI Cohort 1	• Innovatrium, MI • Selfridge Air National Guard Base, MI • Washington, DC	ARCWERX
2022	AIM-HI Cohort 2	• ARCWERX, AZ • Innovatrium, MI • Hap Arnold Innovation Center, CA	ARCWERX
2022	AIM-HI Cohort 3	• ARCWERX, AZ • Innovatrium, MI • Selfridge Air National Guard Base, MI	ARCWERX
2023	AIM-HI Cohort 4	• Duke University, NC • SOFWERX, FL	ARCWERX
2023	AIM-HI Cohort 5	• Wright Brothers Institute, OH • Innovatrium, MI • Selfridge Air National Guard Base, MI	ARCWERX
2024	AIM-HI Cohort 6	• SW Mission Accelerator Center, AZ • The Eagle Institute (AU), AL • Washington, DC	ARCWERX
2025	AIM-HI Cohort 7	• ARCWERX, AZ • UT San Antonio, TX • Washington, DC	ARCWERX
2025	AIM-HI Cohort 8	• Austin, TX • ARCWERX, AZ • San Francisco, CA	ARCWERX
2020	RSAF Cohort 1	Virtual	RSAF
2021	RSAF Cohort 2	Virtual	RSAF
2022	RSAF Cohort 3	Singapore	RSAF
2023	RSAF Cohort 4	Singapore	RSAF
2024	Goh Keng Swee CPI	Singapore	Command & Staff College
2025	RSAF Cohort 6	Singapore	RSAF
2024	PM-NATO Cohort 1	Ramstein AB, Germany	NATO-ACT
2025	PM-NATO Cohort 2	Brussels, Belgium	NATO-ACT

THE AGE OF ANSWERS IS OVER: BUILDING ADAPTIVE TEAMS FOR THE FIGHT AHEAD

At the 2022 NATO exercise in Europe, a logistics team found themselves in a situation no playbook had prepared them for: communications went dark, coalition partners dropped out, and priorities shifted from combat objectives to humanitarian aid. Their carefully built plan collapsed within minutes. But instead of freezing, they adapted. They improvised solutions with the tools and talent at hand. And in doing so, they discovered a better way forward—one later adopted in follow-on wargames.

That is the future of warfare.

The age of answers is over. What matters now is not what we know, but how fast we can learn, reframe, and act together. That requires **adaptive thinkers**—leaders at every level who can hold paradoxes without flinching: discipline and initiative, tradition and transformation, chain of command and decentralized action.

This is the spirit behind **Project Mercury** and the **Intellectual Edge Alliance**. Our work has shown that innovation is not born of certainty, but of tension. By embracing paradox instead of rushing to resolve it, Airmen and Guardians build the agility required for modern conflict.

And now, we are taking the next step. With support from the Air Force's Digital Transformation Office, we've launched a **Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) initiative** to harness **artificial intelligence to rapidly assess and build high-performing, adaptable teams**. Think of it as a "Military Combine" for cognitive agility—testing not only what people know, but how they think, adapt, and perform under stress.

We are partnering with two of the most accomplished innovation leaders in the field—**Dr. Joe Byrum** and **Dr. Michael Tschirhardt**—both of whom have served as Chief Innovation Officers at Fortune 500 companies.

Joe has been a pioneer in applying AI analytics to real-world challenges, while Michael is recognized for creating and deploying breakthrough assessment systems that identify and grow adaptive talent. They are builders who make innovation operational—turning ideas into impact. Together, they are helping us design AI-driven tools that will enable commanders to stand up the right teams faster, with greater precision, and with adaptability built in from the start.

Asymmetric threats. Shifting alliances. Accelerating technologies. The next fight won't wait for perfect answers. It will demand agile leaders who can learn faster than the fight changes.

If you're interested in seeing how Project Mercury and our new AI-driven assessments can help build adaptable, high-performing teams, we'd welcome the opportunity to collaborate. Reach out to explore how you and your command can be part of shaping this future.

That's the mission we are pursuing—together with you.

Onward, ever onward.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeff DeGraff
Professor, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan
Founder, Intellectual Edge Alliance

NATO COHORT 2 DELIVERS SOLUTIONS TO ALLIANCE CHALLENGES

BY STACIE N. SHAFRAN
Project Mercury Coach

NATO's Allied Command Transformation celebrated a milestone in defense innovation as six multinational teams presented their solutions at the Project Mercury showcase on May 6, 2025. The virtual event marked the culmination of a 12-week innovation journey bringing together participants from 10 NATO nations.

"Innovation knows no spectators," said Jeroen Franssen, project manager of NATOs Innovation Branch, opening the showcase. "By graduating from Project Mercury, you've shown the initiative and willpower to be more than spectators."

The showcase spotlighted practical solutions to pressing NATO challenges, evaluated by a distinguished panel including Brig. Gen. Thorsten Lyhne Jørgensen, Gen. Peter Voss, Col. Michael "T-Man" Trautermann, and Dr. Jeff DeGraff from the University of Michigan.

The innovations clustered around three critical areas where NATO faces operational friction:

Team "Otter the Box" tackled knowledge management with an AI system capturing exercise lessons previously "buried within siloed unstructured data." Similarly, Team "TONE" created "Clarity," an AI role-mapping platform addressing the six-month learning curve new officers typically face.

Digital overload received attention from Team "Full Gear," who proposed enhancing NATO's existing messaging platform with AI capabilities. Gen. Voss, relating to "arriving at several hundred emails" after leave, praised their approach to reducing "lost decisions, wasted hours and operational drag."

Administrative burdens were targeted by Team "Skynet Scrapers" with a travel claims app and Team "Mixologists" with "Observa," a multilingual tablet system. The latter colorfully described NATO's current lessons-learned process as "cooking a mission-critical meal with 32 chefs using 25 languages, writing recipes on paper that dissolves in the rain."

"Sometimes it's so simple to get the focus of the warfighter to what he's supposed to do," noted Col. Trautermann, appreciating these efficiency-focused innovations.

Meanwhile, Team "Pathfinders" proposed an "innovation connector" integrating development directly into NATO exercises. "This problem is extremely relevant to warfighters," acknowledged Gen. Voss. "Everybody appreciates the need, but how to do it is the big question."

Transforming NATO Through Innovation Capacity

"Their work represents more than just solutions to specific problems, it's cultivating an innovation mindset and methodology throughout the Alliance," Franssen explained.

Dr. DeGraff emphasized the long-term mission for graduates: "Your job is to basically infect the organization with the culture, the competencies, the communities that are required to have dynastic innovation, innovation at scale that's sustainable, which is the whole key to this."

Project Mercury transforms defense personnel into "Certified Professional Innovators" through an intensive program combining a one-week in-person jumpstart with a 90-day virtual component. Participants dedicate approximately 10 hours weekly while maintaining their regular duties.

The cross-functional, multinational nature of the teams challenges participants to collaborate beyond traditional organizational boundaries, precisely the skill NATO needs in today's complex security environment.

"In a rapidly changing security environment, our ability to innovate across organizational and national boundaries isn't just an advantage, it's a necessity," emphasized Franssen.

NATO's innovation momentum continues with the upcoming "Project Mercury in BENELUX" workshop at JFC Brunssum, the Netherlands (Nov 17-19, 2025) and Project Mercury NATO Cohort 3 in Berlin, Germany (Mar 17-19, 2026); applications are now open.

NATO COHORT 2: BUILDING INNOVATION ACROSS THE ALLIANCE

BY RUNE KØHLER

Principal Engineer / Deputy Director
A4, DNK, NAEW&CF
MSEC

Following the success of the inaugural NATO Project Mercury in 2024, NATO colleagues from across the Alliance came together in Brussels, Belgium, to jumpstart NATO Cohort 2 in February 2025.

Around 40 participants from ten member countries, representing 19 different NATO organizations, made up the cohort. I had the pleasure of being part of this dynamic and diverse group.

Participants are expected to invest significant time and effort on top of their regular duties. Managing these expectations beforehand was crucial to ensuring everyone could commit fully and contribute effectively to the program's demanding schedule.

Forming and Storming

The Jumpstart was a fun and insightful three-day event that allowed participants to form teams made up of diverse personalities and perspectives. This was a rewarding experience in itself, as friendships were forged across the Alliance through innovation challenges and team-building activities.

By the end of the Jumpstart, six teams had been established, each with their own charter and a plan to deliver an innovative idea within 13 weeks. Our team was tasked with generating ideas on how to 'digitally transform NATO.'

Once back at my office, the reality of urgent tasks quickly pulled my attention away. Fortunately, the embedded Project Mercury coaches supported—and pushed—our team to stay on track and remember our commitment.

Innovation rarely follows a straight line. In the early weeks, our team was spun around as we tried to find direction. But this was all part of the process as we slowly refined our ideas into something that could positively impact NATO.

Through weekly teleconferences and many discussions, we gradually moved forward and matured our ideas. However, about halfway through, we realized our ideas were still too diffuse. We had to make some serious decisions to focus our efforts and be able to deliver on time.

Norming and Performing

Thanks to coaching and lectures from the Project Mercury team, we eventually reset and identified an achievable idea which could add value to NATO: a simple phone application handling staff members' travel claims.

Our final idea was far from our initial grand ideas of fundamentally transforming NATO's digital posture. But it had something special: it was achievable and added immediate incremental value to a lot of people.

Once we focused on this specific, tangible idea, things moved quickly. Leveraging the Project Mercury community and our broader network, we engaged the right stakeholders and sprinted toward the finish line.

By week 13, we had pitched our idea to NATO decision-makers and received authorization to implement it. In parallel, we partnered with a start-up company now developing the application for NATO implementation.

Project Mercury gave us the freedom to experiment and aggressively explore solutions we otherwise might not have considered. Through this journey, we learned to think differently and saw firsthand how innovative ideas can be realized within NATO to add real value.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of this exciting initiative and look forward to seeing how Project Mercury continues to push innovation forward across the Alliance.

If you are interested in driving innovation and shaping NATO's future, consider applying for the 3rd NATO Project Mercury Cohort launching early next year. This is your chance to collaborate across nations, challenge the status quo, and bring new ideas to life.

AIM-HI RETURNS TO DUAL-COHORT FORMAT IN 2025 AFTER TRANSITIONAL YEAR

The Academy, Industry, Military – Hybrid Innovations (AIM-HI) program continues to grow as a premier incubator for innovation across the Air National Guard (ANG). After a transitional year in 2024 when the program operated a single cohort, AIM-HI returned in 2025 to its two-cohort format: one from January to May, and another launched in August and, set to conclude in Los Angeles this November.

Delivered in partnership with ARCWERX, AIM-HI immerses participants in a 14 to 16-week curriculum that emphasizes problem framing, experimentation, and real-world application. Cross-functional teams composed of Guard, Active Duty and Reserve members work through phases of Jumpstart, Project Acceleration, Experimentation, and Pitch Week, ensuring their ideas are tested and refined before being presented to senior leaders.

The spring 2025 cohort, AIM-HI 7-1, featured five diverse teams:

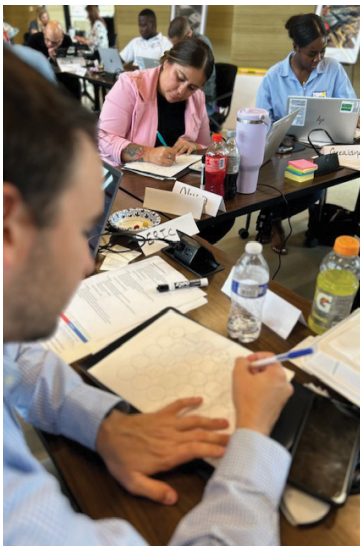
- **Team X Collection:** Explored forward-deployed manufacturing to transform base logistics from contingency to fully operational.
- **Team LCD:** Applied artificial intelligence to disaster response, exploring how to pre-position resources and personnel for faster recovery.
- **Team TRIPS:** Investigated solutions to strengthen the Guard's access to advanced counter-unmanned aerial systems (C-UAS) technologies and partnerships.
- **Team Decepticoms:** Imagined a communications network to enable search and rescue responders to locate and evacuate disaster victims more effectively.
- **Team Jedi Squirrels:** Focused on developing lightweight, durable, and affordable ISR drones to enhance visual and infrared detection capabilities for small units.

Guided by experienced coaches and subject matter experts from Academia and Industry, these teams blended military insight with innovation frameworks to create hybrid solutions ready for operational testing. The process emphasized experimentation, encouraging teams to run multiple radical trials before finalizing concepts, ensuring solutions were both novel and practical.

AIM-HI's collaborative model continues to attract participants from across the ANG and partner organizations, making each team intentionally diverse. This variety of perspectives not only fuels creativity but also ensures that solutions are relevant and adaptable across multiple contexts.

The second AIM-HI cohort of 2025 (Cohort8) will conclude this fall in Los Angeles, where teams will showcase their innovations to a panel of senior military leaders, industry stakeholders, and policymakers. Cohort 8 is exploring Beyond Line of Sight authorities, advanced medical technology, base defense, and personnel recovery.

As AIM-HI continues to evolve, its impact is clear: strengthening readiness, cultivating a resilient innovation culture, and ensuring the Air National Guard remains at the forefront of defense strategy and technology. By bridging military, academic, and industry expertise, AIM-HI equips today's innovators to meet tomorrow's challenges with vision and agility.



EMBRACING INNOVATION: A JOURNEY FROM STUDENT TO COACH

BY SMSGT VICTORIA HUNT
106th Rescue Wing, Chief Innovation Officer

Participating in the ARCWERX-sponsored professional development course, a collaboration between the Innovatrium and the University of Michigan, has been a transformative experience in my innovation journey. Stepping into this program initially as a student and subsequently as a coach has deepened my understanding of innovation itself. The AIM-HI (Academia-Industry-Military-Hybrid-Innovations) program is central to this, equipping students with crucial problem-solving abilities, fostering their creativity, and cultivating an innovative mindset.

As a student, AIM-HI opened my eyes to the multifaceted nature of innovation. It wasn't just about inventing the next groundbreaking technology; it was about reframing problems, leveraging diverse perspectives, and actively seeking creative solutions. The curriculum challenged me to think outside the box, pushing me beyond familiar approaches and encouraging experimentation. I quickly learned that the most innovative ideas often emerge from unexpected collaborations and a willingness to embrace failure as a learning opportunity.

However, it was the transition to a coaching role that truly solidified my understanding. Guiding students through the same program, I realized that coaching isn't about being a master of all things innovation; it's about facilitating the learning process, encouraging exploration, and fostering a collaborative environment. I saw my role as more of a guide than a guru, someone who could point students towards valuable resources and help them navigate the complexities of problem-solving.

One of the key lessons I learned in both roles is the importance of leveraging your strengths and seeking out the talent around you. Whether I was a student contributing my particular skill set to a team project or a coach helping students connect their individual talents to a larger problem, I realized that innovation thrives on diversity of thought and experience. By leaning into my strengths and actively seeking out new ideas from my peers, I discovered potential solutions I never would have conceived on my own.

Perhaps the most profound takeaway from my experience as both a student and a coach is that an innovative mindset can be cultivated at any age and in any individual. There's no single mold for an innovator. Your unique experiences, perspectives, and insights are invaluable assets in the problem-solving process. This realization has empowered me to embrace my own individuality and to encourage others to do the same. Ultimately, by teaching innovation, we are developing a force that will be proactive, rather than reactive, in addressing problems, and that force is powered by the diverse and unique perspectives of everyone involved. My journey with ARCWERX has instilled in me a deep belief in the power of innovation and the potential for everyone to contribute to a more creative and problem-solving future.

A GENERATIONAL CHANGE: INVESTING IN SINGAPORE'S RISING LEADERS

In 2019, officers from the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) participated in an Innovation elective while attending the USAF's Air Command and Staff College at Air University. Seeing promise and potential for this approach to innovation education in their own service, the RSAF partnered with the Innovatrium to launch a program mirroring the elements of Project Mercury cohorts and leading to the same Certified Professional Innovator certification from the University of Michigan.

Since then–for six years and counting–every Airman at the *Goh Keng Swee Command and Staff College* has gone through the Certified Professional Innovator Program with the goal of empowering RSAF leaders to drive innovation from within. As one senior leader put it,

> *"These leaders will inherit the RSAF, and so they must develop their thinking, their gumption and conviction…when they become senior, they will drive the implementation. It may not occur now, but we are sowing the seeds for things to occur in the future when [these officers] inherit the RSAF."*

The Jumpstart Event: Laying the Foundation for Intrapreneurship

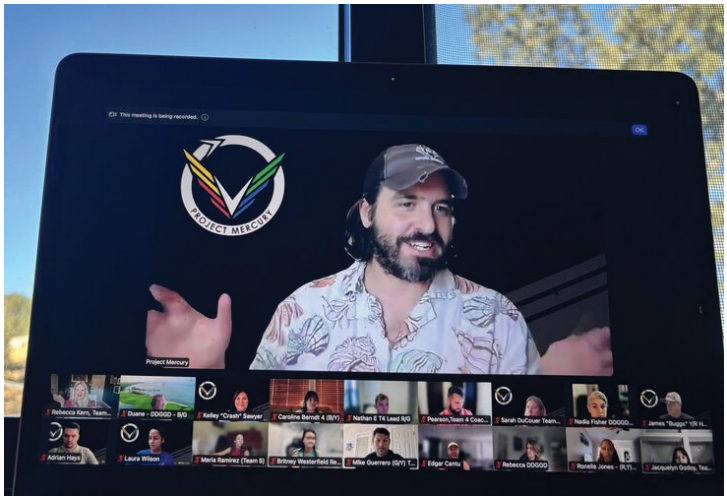
In July 2025, RSAF-CPI Cohort 6 kicked off with a three-day Jumpstart that brought together top leaders, alumni coaches, and participants, from the ASEAN, UK, Australia, and New Zealand, ready to tackle priority complex problems. Dr. Jeff DeGraff, known for his expertise in creating innovation ecosystems within organizations, emphasized the importance of "disruptive intrapreneurship"—the idea that individuals within an organization can act as entrepreneurs, driving change and innovation from within. The Jumpstart event also focused on change leadership, teaching RSAF leaders how to effectively manage and guide their teams through the process of innovation. By equipping commanders with the skills to lead through change, the program aims to encourage a more agile and innovative approach to military strategy and operations.

A Future-Focused Approach to Military Leadership

During the next 2 months, participants will continue to experiment with new ideas, run pilot projects, and implement innovative solutions within their branches. The goal is not just to develop new technologies or strategies, but to fundamentally transform how the RSAF and its allied partners approach leadership, problem-solving, and operational effectiveness.

Plans are underway for a Fall 2026 cohort, marking 7 years of collaboration. Through this program, the Republic of Singapore Air Force will not only cultivate intrapreneurial leaders but also ensure that they remain at the cutting edge of military innovation, well-positioned to maintain its strategic advantage in an increasingly complex and uncertain global landscape. The Republic of Singapore and Innovatrium are pursuing a stronger collaboration in accelerating the existing technology transfer and manufacturing process to distribute new tech to the hands of the service member quickly.

ECOSYSTEM SPOTLIGHT: AIR FORCE TEST CENTER



Project Mercury Cohort 14 kicked off in August 2025, comprised solely of Test Community participants from Edwards, Eglin, and Arnold Air Force Bases. 30 participants (officer, enlisted, and civilians assigned to missions across the Air Force Test Center portfolio) have accepted the challenge to get outside of their comfort zones, learn new and creative ways to solve complex problems, generate real-world innovative solutions, and pitch them to Air Force sponsors.

This cohort is not a singular event; rather, a continuation of years-long investments in innovation training and adaptive thinking. Project Mercury is proud to be a partner in building creative and adaptive thinking within the Air Force test community over the past 3 years through a range of events: 2 Project Mercury Innovator Workshops at Edwards AFB, 1 Project Mercury Innovator Workshop at USAF Test Pilot School, individual test community participants in numerous cohorts (resulting in Certified Professional Innovator), test community innovation coaches, and invitations to the NATO Open Innovation Conference and Expo (NOICE).

For Cohort 14, the “starting flags” for the teams include these topics: Data is the New Oil; Reclaiming “Test” in the Era of AI and Automation; Rapid Range Response; Reimagining Customer Engagement; and Transforming Our Aging Infrastructure.

For more information about building an innovation ecosystem or to follow the progress of the current cohort, follow us on Project Mercury Innovator Forum (LinkedIn).

TEAM LCD EXTENDS AIM-HI INNOVATION INTO REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Team LCD from AIM-HI Cohort 7 continues to drive success beyond the program, working with NGB J2, Texas A&M, Puerto Rico Air National Guard and National Weather Service units to implement their AI-powered disaster response solution. By using artificial intelligence to provide rescue crews a pre-disaster intelligence brief on location and expected number of stranded citizens requiring assistance, the team is helping accelerate recovery efforts and strengthen resilience, with potential reduction of deaths by 40%, reducing stranded personnel rescue time from 5 days down to 24-48 hours. Their progress exemplifies how AIM-HI transforms innovative ideas into operational solutions with lasting impact. Of note, one Team LCD member Daniel “Wish” Kinger has returned to serve as a coach in AIM-HI 8, bringing valuable experience full circle to inspire and guide the next generation of innovators.

NATO TASK FORCE X: A MODEL OF AGILE EXPERIMENTATION

Project Mercury NATO alumni from NATO ACT were selected to join a small, agile team and given an ambitious challenge: how quickly could they go from nascent concept to a viable proof-of-concept?

The weeks and months that followed were filled with the sort of obstacles, deadends, opportunities, and breakthroughs that is relatable to every Project Mercury alumni. A risk appetite driven by “end of the bell curve” urgency? Check. Continuous experimentation loops “off broadway”? Check. Failures and set backs? Check. (Not many of us can relate to live streaming our successful solution live at the Hague NATO conference or shaking hands with the French Prime Minister, however; massive props to the team!)

The project—a high speed Uncrewed Surface Vessel that launches amphibious and air drones—was driven by a need to prevent events such as the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline in 2022. The vessels provide persistent surveillance and rapid response capability, freeing up limited crewed vessels in the safeguarding of critical undersea infrastructure.

Following the success of NATO Task Force X, NATO ACT has asked Project Mercury to help launch more Innovation Project Teams beginning Fall 2025 in Norfolk, VA.

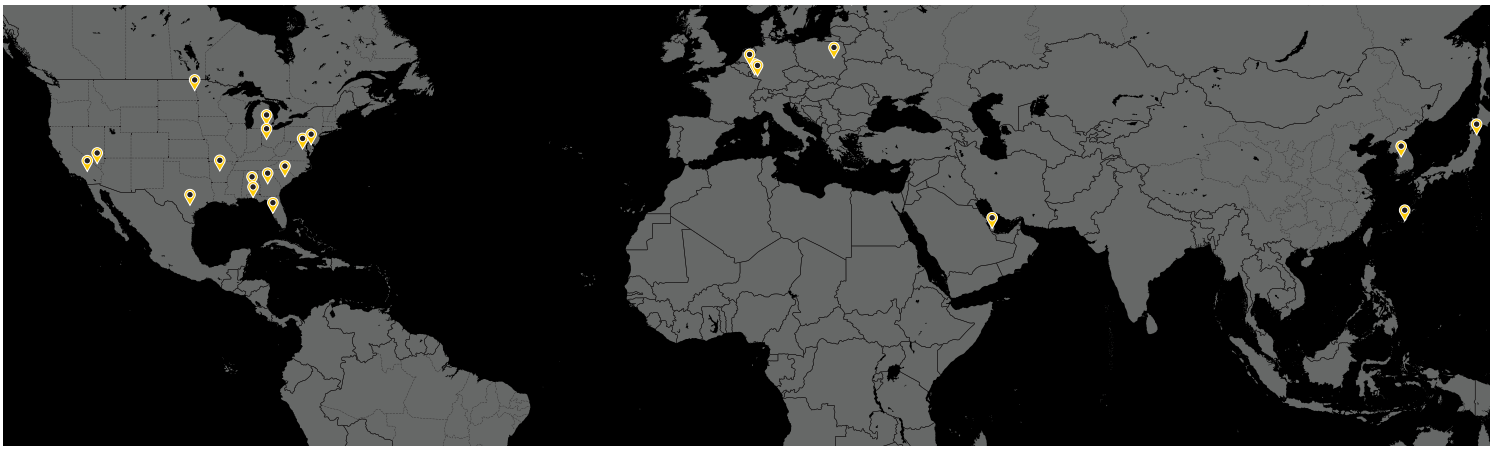
From concept to operational relevance, the Task Force X team has met the challenge, filling a critical gap in defence and warfighting capability.

For more information on this and other NATO ACT innovation initiatives go to: www.act.nato.int/article/tfxb-future-nato-maritime-vigilance

PROJECT MERCURY INNOVATOR WORKSHOP (PMiW) 2022-2025 AT A GLANCE

Project Mercury Innovator Workshops are designed to magnify and accelerate the efforts of our Project Mercury alumni in the field. By sending a head coach and team of alumni facilitators, each workshop brings the opportunity to grow, equip, and leverage a dynamic network of adaptive thinkers.

From Tallin to Misawa; from spark cells to the Joint Staff, we are proud to be part of the growing cadre of innovators across the DoD and beyond.



PMiW Beta	Nellis AFB NV	Jul 21
PMiW 22-1	Hurlburt AFB FL	Mar 22
PMiW 22-2	Grand Forks AFB ND	Apr 22
PMiW 22-3	Robins AFB GA	May 22
PMiW 22-4	Edwards AFB CA	Jun 22
PMiW 22-5	MacDill AFB FL	Jun 22
PMiW 22-6/7	Wright Patterson AFB OH	Jul 22
PMiW 22-8	Ramstein AB Germany	Jul 22
PMiW 22-9	Spangdahlem AB Germany	Jul 22
PMiW 22-10	Little Rock AFB AR	Aug 22
PMiW 23-1	Civil Air Patrol Nat'l Conclave DC	Mar 23
PMiW 23-2	Task Force 99/AOR	Apr 23
PMiW 23-3	Grand Forks AFB ND	May 23
PMiW 23-4	AFCENT/Shaw AFB SC	May 23
PMiW 23-6/7	San Antonio (Regional) TX	Jul 23
PMiW 23-8	5 teams/Virtual^	Aug 23
PMIW 23-9	AETC Conference/Maxwell AFB AL	Aug 23
PMiW 23-10	AFWERX Fellows/Virtual	Sep 23
PMiW 24-1	Michigan ANG/NG, Ann Arbor MI	Nov 23
PMIW-LFC	Land Forces Conference, Poland	Nov 23
PMiW-24-99	Task Force 99/AOR	Dec 23
PMiW 24-2	AFCENT/Shaw AFB SC	Dec 23
PMiW 24-3	Edwards AFB CA	Feb 24
PMiW 24-4	AFWERX Fellows/Virtual	Feb 24
PMiW 24-5	AETC Workshop/Randoph AFB TX	Apr 24
PMiW-NATO	Warsaw, Poland^^	Jun 24
PMiW 24-6	USAF Test Pilot School CA	Jul 24
PMiW 24-7	Osan AB, Korea	Jul 24
PMiW 24-8	Kadena AB, Japan	Aug 24
PMiW 24-9	AFWERX Fellows Crystal City VA	Sep 24
PMiW 2025	Joint Staff, Washington DC	Feb 25
PMiW 2025	Misawa AB, Japan	Mar 25
PMiW-NATO 25-1	Tallinn, Estonia^^	May 25
PMiW 2025	Little Rock AFB, AR	Sep 25
PMiW 2025	Dover AFB, DE (pending)	Nov 25
PMiW-NATO 25-2	JFC Brunssum, the Netherlands^^ (pending)	Nov 25

^5 teams: Hanscom/Kadena/Holloman/Lakenheath/Spangdahlem
^^ Comprised of participants from NATO and allied Nations

INNOVATORS IN THE BALTICS: A PROJECT MERCURY NATO WORKSHOP

Tallinn, Estonia May 26-28, 2025. “Innovators in the Baltics” was a dynamic three-day workshop sponsored by NATO ACT and hosted by the Estonia Ministry of Defense. Building on the success of last year’s “Innovators on the Eastern Flank” (Warsaw, Poland), NATO-ACT shifted this year’s focus to addressing the threats and challenges confronting the Baltic states.

Returning as key facilitators this year were Dr. Jeff DeGraff and Dr. Ethan Eagle. Julie “Pistol” Janson, Project Mercury Master Coach added relevant military and NATO experiences to her mentoring approach as well as alumni coaches from NATO-ACT: Jeroen Franssen, Bart Hollants, and Thomas Belka. Participants represented 10 different NATO nations and multiple NATO organizations, offering a unique opportunity to cut through communication silos and form new, agile networks.

NATO workshops are designed for three primary audiences: leadership, participants actively working to adopt innovation, and those new to or curious about innovation. The participants formed teams to tackle problems such as:

- How might we connect grassroots innovation efforts to long-term strategic effect commanders care about?
- How might we deliver rapid technology in formats that end users in the field can test, adapt, and trust?
- How might we prototype policy workarounds that allow good ideas to move faster, without breaking accountability?

Early work consisted of Problem Finding and Clarification drills like impromptu networking, group decision making, and leveraging Robert Quinn’s “21 pressing problems of modern organizations.” On day 2 we pressed into creativity through both light hearted fun (championship rock-paper-scissors!) and taking a hard look at how to increase risk appetites in the right context.

By the end of the workshop, these teams had experienced a full cognitive workout, resulting in a more thoughtful and impactful problem statement, a solution array that reflected a wider range of answers, and hybrid solutions ready to be tested in the days and weeks ahead. Strategies for advancing ideas through organizations and stakeholders were practiced and the day ended with team outbriefs.

Over these three days, the conversations did not end at 1630! Following the scheduled events of the day, participants headed into the evening hours to enjoy themselves and make new connections. The coaches were honored to meet with many of the local nodes of innovation, including a meeting with the Estonia Minister of Defense, several Estonia General Officers, and the leadership of Estonia’s DIANA hub.

For those who missed this workshop, do not be discouraged…we have another workshop coming up soon! Join us in the Netherlands for “Innovators in the BENELUX”, 17-19 Nov 2025.

MISAWA AFB

When Col. Paul Davidson walked the halls of the Air and Space Forces Association's fall conference in September 2024, he was just weeks into his new command at Misawa. Amid briefings on Pacific posture and contested logistics, he paused at an unlikely corner with an odd request. Davidson had set a bold vision for Misawa - to bring a structured approach to innovation to the 35th Fighter Wing. Davidson was clear: Misawa needed more than ideas. It needed recurring, disciplined opportunities to turn Airmen's ingenuity into mission impact. He asked his team for quarterly innovation events. He was at the Project Mercury booth to ask how we could help him deliver.

Six months later, that handshake bore fruit. In early March 2025, Misawa hosted its first **Project Mercury Innovator Workshop**, bringing together 36 Airmen from across the wing. Over three days, they were given tools in the workshop toolkit, frameworks for questioning assumptions, prototyping quickly, and learning from failures. The workshop pushed participants out of the comfort of repetition and into the discipline of experimentation, crossing siloes, and ultimately executive communication.

The results spoke for themselves. Six cross-functional teams generated solutions aimed at immediate operational challenges: faster clearance for 3D-printed parts, streamlined classified cargo handling, stronger bilateral exchanges with the JASDF, and resilient communications for emergencies. Each team's work aligned with Davidson's priorities, protect, deter, and lead in a complex Indo-Pacific environment but did so by empowering Airmen to take ownership of the problems.

At the center of this effort stood Tech. Sgt. Andrew Schaeffer, the Spark Cell (WeaselWerx) lead. Already known for his restless curiosity, Schaeffer found himself energized by the workshop's momentum. Within months, his Spark Cell was pushing forward with advanced projects like the "Moneyball" AI flight maintenance project and 3D-printed training aids for exercises. The March workshop didn't just produce ideas, it validated Schaeffer's instincts and positioned him, and the Spark Cell, as trusted engines of change. Following his leadership in this event, our team was pleased to learn of AFWERX approval for Schaeffer's request to become a full-time innovation airman (9I) and pathfinder initiatives.

For Davidson, this was exactly the point. The workshop was not a one-off event but the first in a series of quarterly innovation efforts designed to sustain momentum. By coupling leadership intent with grassroots energy, he set the tone: innovation at Misawa wouldn't be a buzzword, it could become a rhythm.

Project Mercury stands ready to support Spark Cells like Misawa's—to help them grow from pockets of creative energy into high-achieving, well-orchestrated change agents with the buy-in of commanders and stakeholders alike.

BUILDING BRIDGES: GUARDIANS OF INNOVATION IN THE MERCURY ECOSYSTEM




BY THE MERCURY INNOVATION COUNCIL

Paul Ellis
(Alumni PMC4)

Barbara Hopkins
(Alumni PMC13)

Robert Rivers
(Alumni PMC7)

Craig Buying
(Alumni PMC7)

Friction as Fuel for Innovation

When the Guardians of the Galaxy first stumbled together, they were less a team than a collision—radically different voices, perspectives, and temperaments clashing in spectacular chaos. Yet that very friction allowed them to save worlds.

The Mercury Innovation Council sees a similar truth: the future of innovation depends not on harmony alone, but on constructive disruption.

"Innovation thrives when assumptions are challenged. When perspectives collide, ideas sharpen, resilience grows, and breakthroughs emerge."

Like Star-Lord's crew, the Mercury ecosystem is strongest when unexpected partnerships form and when rivals are willing to clash—not out of animosity, but to stress-test ideas, expose weaknesses, and forge solutions resilient enough for the real world.

The Connective Tissue: Building Bridges

Every guardian team needs ways to stay connected. For Mercury, that connective tissue comes through initiatives designed to spark debate and collaboration.

PMiW Alumni Clashes
Project Mercury Innovator Workshops will feature purposeful collisions between alumni and next-gen disruptors. Debate turns experience into opposition, and opposition into opportunity.

Competitive Training
New programs in design thinking, entrepreneurial skills, and aggressive innovation will equip alumni and disruptors with the tools to dominate challenges ahead.

The "Not-So-Great Strengths" Survey
Even superheroes have blind spots. This assessment will uncover barriers to conflict and guide strategies so no weakness goes unchallenged.

A "Shots on Goal" Experiment

No one saves the galaxy on the first try. Like Rocket's endless tinkering, Mercury embraces an experimental "shots on goal" approach—test, measure, refine, repeat. Conflict becomes not a liability but the fuel of adaptation.

The Council calls on members to:
- Take the Survey to help map weaknesses into opportunities.
- Engage in Alumni Clashes where rivalries sharpen steel.
- Challenge and Support innovators with honest critique.
- Champion Perspectives often sidelined.

Toward Collective Ingenuity

The Guardians of the Galaxy found strength not in sameness, but in difference. The Mercury Innovation Council believes the same: the ecosystem will thrive only when conflict is embraced as constructive, when bridges are built across divides, and when every voice is given the chance to disrupt.

Together, our chaos builds constellations.

#PROJECTNEXT

BY THOMAS BELKA
Personnel Management Officer, Alumni of Cohort 12

I am a proud graduate from Project Mercury (USA) Cohort 12. Together with six other international participants we formed the **InnoNATOrs**, a team formed of members from NATO Allied Command Transformation (Norfolk, VA) and HQ Allied Air Command (Ramstein, Germany).

The atmosphere within the entire cohort and the encouragement of our international team quickly made me realize that this could only be the beginning of my love affair with Project Mercury. Luckily, in 2024 NATO ACT decided to adopt and adapt the program for NATO, providing me the chance to further my experience as a Project Mercury coach. Since then, I have coached both NATO cohorts and am seeking ways to adapt this for German government audiences.

In my military job I can only pursue innovation on a part-time basis. But I felt a strong desire to create more time and space for innovation. My supervisor, "T-Man", himself a graduate of Project Mercury Cohort 3, supported me in this. With this strong backing, I have developed ideas and started a lot of projects that have not yet been completed, and new projects are added every month…and I love that! (I am a prismatic "green," of course).

What was difficult right after completing Project Mercury was that I often felt like a lone fighter in my workplace. But over the following year we increased the number of PM alumni to 15, and we were able to institutionalize a small innovation team at HQ AIRCOM. We established a HQ Directive on Innovation, and we allocated a budget to it. We have pulled the "Head of Innovation" position up to the Chief of Staff level. Our innovation focus in HQ AIRCOM is clearly defined on innovation **culture**.

In August 2025, I left the NATO Command Structure by accepting a new military position at the Federal Office of Personnel Administration for the German Armed Forces, the home of administrative bureaucracy.

Did it change my innovation ambitions and ideas? Not at all. I've just shifted the focus from international to national efforts. However, there is one major difference. National innovation involves more practical and technical developments—although there is an urgent need for a new culture of innovation, too. My goal is to address both.

Out of my many projects I am working on, I want to share two that are my main focus:

1. Project Mercury Germany

Challenge: Execute Project Mercury as a national cross-agency program for employees of the public sector in Germany in 2026 and establish a collaboration between a German university and Innovatrium to implement it sustainably.

Scalability: Up to 1.2 million employees in the public sector in Germany.

2. AI-supported, interactive assistant for recruitment and public relations

Challenge: Modernize personnel recruitment in the German Armed Forces by using modern means of communication while at the same time improving the quality of information.

Scalability: Up to 40.000 new recruits per year.

As with our challenges in Project Mercury, I am not the decision maker for either of these projects; rather these are **my ideas** that must be developed and tested, and I will learn where I need to adapt.

My recommendation for everyone is to set high goals, see how far you get and adapt your approach to achieving them. Moon shots are important to find out what is possible and please don't ask for permission, just do it!

Thomas Belka is a Force Protection officer by trade and staff officer in the Federal Office of Personnel Management of the German Armed Forces in Cologne/ Germany. In his role as personnel management officer, he is responsible for assigning positions and individual development of more than 300 officers in the areas of Force Protection and military engineering in the Air Force.

INNOVATE THE PROCESS, NOT JUST THE PRODUCT

BY LT COL JULIE JANSON, USAF
Lt Col Janson is a Master Coach for Project Mercury. She is currently attending Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

Innovation is a muscle—and fighting bureaucratic processes is where you can train it. Project Mercury taught me that breakthroughs don't just happen at the finish line; they can happen during the race. As lead author of the USAF Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment—a four-star–directed, three-year effort across the Air Staff, DoD, and interagency—I learned to win with coalitions, flood the table with options, and keep the window open with visible progress. Here are five lessons I've turned into everyday habits.

1. **Win with a coalition.**
   Build a bench of stakeholders early—know what you need from each and what they need from you. You won't use all of them every day, but you'll know exactly who to tap when the moment comes. In rooms where votes count, allies are your path to success.

2. **Overproduce options, but frame the choice.**
   Design sprints can yield an 80% solution in a fraction of the cost and time of traditional assessments—good enough to learn, decide, and keep momentum. Generate hundreds of ideas (yes, sticky notes), then let leaders each strike five "no-go" items; they feel heard while you preserve a broad solution set.

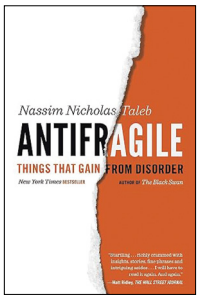
3. **Race the closing window and show return on support.**
   In political and military environments, the window starts closing the minute you're tasked because senior leaders juggle competing priorities. Processes aren't built for speed—so don't accept them as fixed. Shorten loops, strip steps, and act. Keep the window open by delivering visible progress as you go: connect people who don't know each other, unblock side problems, and report those micro-wins in every update to demonstrate a return on support.

4. **Decide together, once.**
   Stop serial re-staffing. Put decision-makers, program owners, and skeptics in the same room to resolve conflicts live—one hard meeting beats weeks of contradictory edits through traditional staffing systems. While they're together, solve their problems too—show what you'll take off each leader's plate so agreement sticks.

5. **Hone the message in public (and prep for the bar fights).** Brief early and often, tailoring each pitch to what that person values. Do the homework—arrive with receipts: data, collaborators, and names inside their organization who've weighed in. If your work threatens a program, show how it helps their mission. Iterate until senior leaders echo your lines back to you. Be generous with credit upward; progress beats ownership.

Process innovation is disciplined defiance—reject default timelines, shorten loops, decide together, move fast. Stack quick wins, share credit, and refine the message until leaders repeat it. As I continue to train this muscle, what once took years now takes months, weeks, or even days. Innovative thinking can overcome the hurdles of bureaucracy.

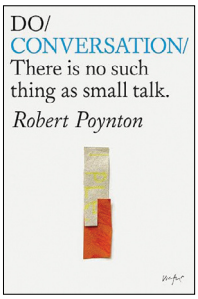
THE BOOKSHELF: WHAT OUR COACHES ARE READING



Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

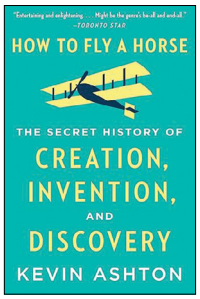
Antifragile is a standalone book in Nassim Nicholas Taleb's landmark Incerto series, an investigation of opacity, luck, uncertainty, probability, human error, risk, and decision-making in a world we don't understand.



Do Conversation: There's no such thing as small talk

Robert Poynton

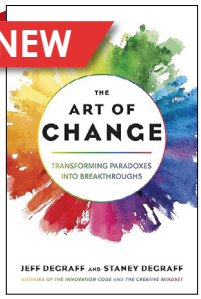
Conversation is about more than communication. It's how we connect with each other and make sense of the world—it's an essential part of being human. And something we're naturally very good at. Robert Poynton explores and celebrates this "everyday miracle hiding in plain sight".



How to Fly a Horse: The Secret History of Creation, Invention, and Discovery

Kevin Ashton

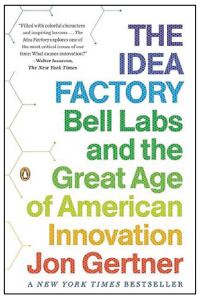
Technology pioneer Kevin Ashton has experienced firsthand the all-consuming challenge of creating something new. Ashton demystifies the sacred act, leading us on a journey through humanity's greatest creations to uncover the surprising truth behind who creates and how they do it.



The Art of Change: Transforming Paradoxes into Breakthroughs

Jeff DeGraff and Staney DeGraff

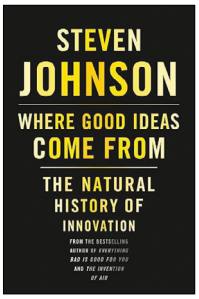
In a world of unprecedented disruption, mastering the art of change isn't just an advantage—it's essential for survival. Drawing from decades of work with global organizations, Jeff and Staney DeGraff reveal how true transformation emerges not from avoiding contradictions, but from embracing them.



The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation

Jon Gertner

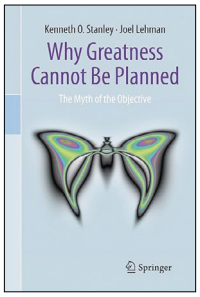
In *The Idea Factory*, Jon Gertner traces the origins of some of the twentieth century's most important inventions and delivers a riveting and heretofore untold chapter of American history.



Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation

Steven Johnson

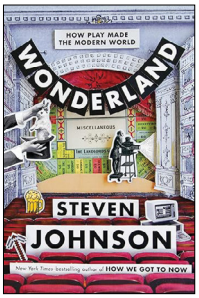
How do we generate the breakthrough technologies that push forward our lives, our society, our culture? Steven Johnson's answers are revelatory as he identifies the seven key patterns behind genuine innovation, and traces them across time and disciplines.



Why Greatness Cannot Be Planned: The Myth of the Objective

Kenneth O. Stanley and Joel Lehman

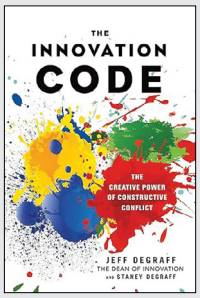
Stanley and Lehman make the case that great achievement can't be bottled up into mechanical metrics; that innovation is not driven by narrowly focused heroic effort; and that we would be wiser (and the outcomes better) if instead we whole-heartedly embraced serendipitous discovery and playful creativity.



Wonderland: How Play Made the Modern World

Steven Johnson

This lushly illustrated history of popular entertainment takes a long-zoom approach, contending that the pursuit of novelty and wonder is a powerful driver of world-shaping technological change.



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The Innovation Code by Jeff DeGraff and Staney DeGraff

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BUILDING THE FUTURE FORCE NOW: INNOVATION AS OUR STRATEGIC MULTIPLIER

"The age of answers is over. Victory now belongs to those who can live in the unknowns and adapt faster than the fight changes."

The work we do within **Project Mercury** and our affiliate **Intellectual Edge Alliance** programs has never been more critical. Instilling adaptive thinking and building networks of collaborators is the antidote to irrelevance—or worse, to falling behind our adversaries.

My passion for working with the military stems from a deep respect for your commitment to protecting our nation and our allies. By equipping you with the tools and mindset to innovate, we secure not only our present but also our future. The ***see one, do one, teach one*** (SODOTO) approach has proven invaluable in unlocking the problem-solving potential of Airmen and Guardians at every level. With it, we see the ingenuity of individuals scaling across teams, wings, and commands.

The **Innovation Code**, rooted in the Competing Values Framework, has become a cornerstone of our programs. By embracing adaptive mindsets, diverse worldviews, and the creative power of constructive conflict, we've helped **cultivate cultures of innovation that cross silos, services, and borders**. I hold great respect for the paradoxes you balance every day—speed vs. safety, tradition vs. transformation, discipline vs. initiative. Learning to embrace those tensions, rather than eliminate them, is itself a superpower—and one we strive to instill in every Project Mercury and IEA cohort.

Looking to the horizon, I am encouraged by what we are building together.

- **NATO** has asked us not only to deliver workshops and cohorts, but also to mentor designated teams through concept-to-fielding sprints, inspired by Project Mercury graduates who have already proven what's possible.

- **In the Pacific**, we are expanding workshops and seminars, guided by alumni coaches from our six-year partnership with Singapore's Air Force.

- **The Air National Guard's AIM-HI Program** is linking thinkers and doers across state lines, taking smart risks and leading change where it matters most.

- **Military-adjacent business partners** are engaging in Innovation Quick Sprints, speaking the same language and applying the same methods pioneered in Project Mercury.

To my fellow innovators: our mission is far from finished. The future belongs to those who are bold enough to shape it. Your leadership—every day, everywhere—makes innovation real.

We invite you to take part—whether by joining a Project Mercury or AIM-HI cohort, supporting IEA initiatives, or helping us expand this network of innovators. Together, we can build the adaptive force our nation needs.

Thank you for your service and for the trust you've placed in our team.

Onward, ever onward.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeff DeGraff
Professor, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan
Founder, Intellectual Edge Alliance

INNOVATORS IN THE BENELUX

NATO WORKSHOP | JFC BRUNSSUM, THE NETHERLANDS | 17-19 NOV 2025

Join us for an immersive 3-day conference where multinational teams will build the innovation culture, competencies, and community that are vital for today's competitive environment.

DAY 1
- Warm Up + Welcome
- Foundations of Innovation
- Project Sprint (1 of 3)
- Leadership Seminar

DAY 2
- Creativity Exercises
- Team Field Exercises
- Project Sprint (2 of 3)

DAY 3
- Project Sprint (3 or 3)
- Leadership Outbrief

(Office Hours ~ 3 + 6 weeks)

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13-WEEK HYBRID COHORT
MAR-JUN 2026

IN-PERSON JUMPSTART
17-19 MAR 2026

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BEHIND THE SCENES

All of us at the **Intellectual Edge Alliance** would like to give a special thanks and appreciation to **Kelley "Crash" Sawyer** for her passion and professionalism. As the senior course director for AIM-HI, Project Mercury, and Project Mercury NATO, Kelley is known to each participant as a confident guide, a wise counsel, an empowering connector, and a fixer for when things go awry. From her flight time as an F-15 WSO and platform time at Air University, to challenging each new cohort of innovators to expand their mental horizons, Crash brings a wealth of experience to her role. On behalf of the hundreds of innovators you have poured into, **thank you** for your steadfast dedication to this community!

THE INTELLECTUAL EDGE ALLIANCE

BUILDING AN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Innovation Mindset See-One, Do-One, Teach-One (SODOTO)

iGenome / Competing Values Framework

"People are at the heart of all military advantage in the twenty-first century. Because of this, we must build a more robust intellectual edge in our people and institutions."
– Maj Gen Mick Ryan, "War Transformed"

LEADING BEYOND

WHO: Senior leadership (colonel and above, SES, command chiefs)

WHAT: Envision, build, and reward a culture of adaptive leadership

HOW: Executive education model of seminars and consultancy

EXAMPLE: Advanced Senior Leader Development Seminar (ASLDS); Air Force Civilian Leadership Course (AFCLC)

LEADING OUT

WHO: High potential future leaders, strategically selected leverage points

WHAT: Invest in a core powerhouse of adaptive, courageous innovation leaders

HOW: Fellowship model requiring a 6-12 month masters-level deep dive

EXAMPLE: Chief of Staff of the Air Force Innovation Leadership Seminar (CHILS), Certified Professional Innovation Leader (CPIL) certificate

LEADING ACROSS

WHO: Exemplary mid-career officers, enlisted, and civilians

WHAT: Equip key personnel with the mindset, tools, and community needed to expedite collaboration across organizational silos

HOW: Coaching track built on the See-One, Do-One, Teach-One model

EXAMPLE: AIM-HI and Project Mercury cohorts followed by mentored team leadership, Innovation Coach certificate

LEADING WITH

WHO: Individuals/teams charged with creating change at the tactical and operational level

WHAT: Equip key personnel with the mindset, tools, and community needed to expedite collaboration

HOW: Practitioner track built on the See-One, Do-One, Teach-One model

EXAMPLE: AIM-HI and Project Mercury cohorts, Certified Professional Innovator (CPI) certificate

LEADING SELF

WHO: Unit personnel who are subject matter and mission experts

WHAT: Magnify the effectiveness and reach of individuals, equipping them with a common lexicon, effective change tools, and a supportive community

HOW: Cross-unit training events and/or modularized content

EXAMPLE: 2-3 day Project Mercury Innovator Workshop (PMiW); Project Gemini (modularized units); USAF Academy (USAFA) electives; Tech Training modules

PROJECT MERCURY

OUR PURPOSE

The mission of Project Mercury is to strengthen the innovation culture, competency, and community in the US military, partners, and allies. Since 2019, Project Mercury and the Intellectual Edge Alliance have graduated nearly 1,000 Certified Professional Innovators, conducted dozens of workshops, and grown an international community of practice.

Project Mercury (PM) introduces participants to proven practices required to stimulate and manage innovation. Using collaborative seminars, real projects, and individual study, participants learn frameworks for designing, developing, and implementing innovation within and across organizations. This program provides not only perspective, vocabulary, and skill base—but also the tools to lead innovation-focused projects, people, and ventures through a practical project-based approach.

OUR METHOD

Project Mercury applicants are invited from a wide range of ranks and responsibilities and placed in intentionally diverse teams. These teams strengthen their innovation mindset and toolkit as they grapple with challenging problem sets that are relevant to their collective organizations.

Guided by experienced PhD coaches and Project Mercury alumni mentors, participants learn how innovation tools and methods can be successfully employed in real work situations through a dual track of academics (conceptual) and project application (experiential). Throughout the course, participants engage with graduate level academics and dynamic group work, resulting in a professional certificate from the University of Michigan School of Engineering. More importantly, our alumni graduate with the mindset, tools, and network that changes their effectiveness in their units and future endeavors.

OUR REACH

From Project Mercury's founding in 2019 until today, the scope of this program has expanded substantially. Original participants quickly responded to the methodology of "See One, Do One, Teach One" and many of them co-created workshops and spin off programs. PM has laid the foundation for sister programs such as AIM-HI (tailored for the National Guard), RSAF-CPI (Singapore), Project Mercury NATO Cohorts, Project Mercury Innovator Workshops (for both DoD and NATO audiences), and our Gemini modules throughout PME. PM programs range from a short 2-day workshop to a longer 15-week project acceleration and everything in between.

WWW.PROJECTMERCURY.US

INNOVATRIUM

www.Innovatrium.org