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Want to be a more effective project sponsor?
by Yogi Schulz & Jocelyn Lapointe
Advisory

Want to be a more effective project sponsor?[1]

Yogi Schulz and Jocelyn Lapointe[2]

Are you new to the project sponsor role or want to improve? Here's some practical guidance from our new book: A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide - Improving Project Performance.

Too often, we've observed that project sponsors:

- Do not understand this role.
- Are unsure about what others expect.
- Have little or no direct experience with the project subject and mistakenly assume that such a background is essential.
- Are too embarrassed to ask for help.
- Receive no guidance from their organization.

As a result, project sponsors too often retreat into a cursory figurehead or ignore the role to the detriment of the project. Those outcomes don't help anyone.

Executives often don't understand how valuable performing this project sponsor role can be to:

- Reducing the risk of a disappointing project outcome.
- Identifying areas where your intervention is critical to project success.
- Supporting your project manager and the team better.
- Avoiding embarrassing project failure.

Quickly assess your project

Start by completing the warp-speed project assessment at this link. In a few minutes, you will understand the topics that need more attention to reduce the project's shortcomings and increase its likelihood of success. The short project assessment contains the most common topics that can contribute to either project success or failure.

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[2] Schulz and Lapointe are co-authors of the recently published book A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide - Improving Project Performance, available from Amazon at this link. In their book, the authors discuss how to avoid the dysfunction described above.

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Determine your actions to address shortcomings

Now, you've determined the topics that need some attention. Find those sections in the book. They provide collaborative actions you can take as a project sponsor to reduce risk and improve your project's performance.

Here are a few example topics from the book that can contribute to either project success or failure with actions to correct a high-risk situation. For each topic, there are two brief descriptions to help you determine if the topic needs more attention. Where there's a risk of disappointment, there are recommended actions to reduce risk and increase the likelihood of project success.

Project business case

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project business case	There is a document that describes the project's business case. The data underlying the business case makes sense to me. I can summarize the business case as an elevator pitch.	There is no documented business case. The business case data is overly optimistic, or the business case is just a narrative. I can't summarize the business case succinctly.

Starting a project without a business case is like trying to hit a bull's eye with a dart while blindfolded. You'll never reach your project goal.

If you're concerned, pause the project and construct the business case. A business analyst on the team knows how to do this. Give them the time and resources to research and build a legitimate business case.

Once the business case is complete, review it with your steering committee. If it's not credible, improve it or cancel the project now.

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Project charter

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project charter	I've seen a reasonably comprehensive project charter.	The project charter I've seen is vague and incomplete. No project charter has been prepared.

Approving a project without a consensus among the stakeholders on what the project is to achieve makes project failure inevitable.

If you're concerned, ensure the project manager feels supported in developing a project charter by providing the necessary inputs. Even a good project manager might not create a project charter because they felt pressure to "just start the project now" and not take time to develop a project charter.

To help your team understand what a project charter should contain, please have them read this short monograph: Project Charter Table of Contents.

Project management plan

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project management plan	I've reviewed the project management plan, which looks complete.	I've not seen a project management plan. The project management plan feels incomplete or vague, or ambiguous. Various documents contain different parts of the project management plan.

The most important support a project sponsor can give the team is enough time to plan the project accurately. Too often, we observe project sponsors that push the team to hurry the planning or even stop it to start the project work. This push is a false economy.

If you're concerned, instruct your project manager to work with the team to draft a comprehensive project management plan. To help your team understand what a project charter

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should contain, please have them read this short monograph: Project Management Plan Table of Contents.

Become a more effective project sponsor

To help you better understand what you should do as a project sponsor, please read this short monograph: Role of Project Sponsors.

You can explore these and other topics in our new book, A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide - Improving Project Performance. It's available from Amazon at this link.

About the Authors

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Yogi Schulz has over 40 years of Information Technology experience in various industries. Yogi works extensively in the petroleum industry to select and implement financial, production revenue accounting, land & contracts and geotechnical systems. He manages projects that arise from changes in business requirements, from the need to leverage technology opportunities and from mergers. His specialties include IT strategy, web strategy and systems project management.

Mr. Schulz regularly speaks to industry groups and writes a regular column for IT World Canada and for Engineering.com. He has written for Microsoft.com and the Calgary Herald. His writing focuses on project management and IT developments of interest to management. Mr. Schulz served as a member of the Board of Directors of the PPDM Association for twenty years until 2015. Learn more at https://www.corvelle.com/. He can be contacted at yogischulz@corvelle.com

His new book, co-authored by Jocelyn Schulz Lapointe, is "A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide: Improving Project Performance."

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Jocelyn lives in Allen, Texas, with her husband, Trevor, and their two children.

Her new book, co-authored by Yogi Schulz, is "A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide: Improving Project Performance."