

# Project outcomes depend on the project manager's collaboration with the project sponsor <sup>1</sup>

**Yogi Schulz**

Everyone wants successful project outcomes. Project managers, project sponsors, project teams, stakeholders, related vendors, and the senior management groups all contribute to successful project outcomes. Too often, those anticipated outcomes are in doubt.

The project manager's relationship with their project sponsor is among the top critical success factors for every project. This 2x2 matrix, a favourite of all consultants, summarizes the project outcome possibilities.

<b>Project outcomes</b>	<b>No or poor project sponsorship</b>	<b>Effective project sponsorship</b>
<b>Effective project management</b>	Project struggles	Excellent project outcome
<b>Poor project management</b>	Project disaster	Project manager replaced

Let's examine each possibility and consider the recommendations that will move projects toward successful outcomes.

## Project struggles

Even with effective project management, projects with poor project sponsorship will struggle. Project managers and stakeholders can recognize poor project sponsorship through one or more of the following behaviours:

- Distancing themselves from the project.
- Micromanaging the project manager.
- Coaching the project manager about project management.
- Coaching the project team.

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- Criticizing the project team publicly.

Unless senior stakeholders intervene, the problem will likely continue and worsen. Project managers, who are typically much junior than their project sponsors, are only rarely able to coach sponsors. The best action in this situation consists of taking as many of these steps as necessary:

- Have senior stakeholders remind project sponsors of their roles and responsibilities.
- Involve the project management office in coaching project sponsors.
- Replace project sponsors if necessary.
- Cancel projects if no suitable candidates are available to assume the role of project sponsor.

## **Excellent project outcome**

Effective project management and effective project sponsorship together will produce excellent project outcomes. Stakeholders observe effective collaboration between the project manager and the project sponsor through the following behaviours:

- Respect for their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Excellent, proactive communication with stakeholders.
- Collaborative issue resolution.
- Public expressions of support for the projects and their teams.
- Encouraging project progress.

The best action in this situation is to leave the project manager and the project sponsor alone.

## **Project disaster**

Poor project management and inadequate or ineffective project sponsorship will result in project disasters. Stakeholders, who are members of the project steering committee or the senior management team, are likely to observe the associated dysfunctional behaviours, including:

- No or infrequent tense meetings between project managers and project sponsors.
- Critical comments about the contributions or shortcomings of the other person.
- Low team morale.
- Slow project progress.

Until someone addresses the problem, the money being spent on the projects is likely wasted because the projects will be cancelled.

The best action in this situation consists of taking as many of these steps as necessary:

- Remind project managers and the project sponsors of their respective roles and responsibilities.
- Involve the project management office in coaching both.
- Accept that irreconcilable personality conflicts exist.
- Replace project managers because the related project sponsors are typically a senior executive who excels in other aspects of their positions.

## **Project manager replaced**

Poor project management combined with effective project sponsorship will result in the project managers being fired and replaced. Project sponsors observe poor project management, consisting of:

- A reluctance to meet regularly with their project sponsors.
- Cursory or incomplete status reporting.
- Tension between project managers and their project teams.
- Project managers acting in a dictatorial rather than collaborative manner.
- Slow project progress.

Until project sponsors address the problem, the poor project performance will continue. The best action in this situation consists of taking as many of these steps as necessary:

- Have the project sponsors remind their project managers of their roles and responsibilities.
- Involve the project management office in coaching project managers.
- Have project sponsors closely monitor their project managers' work to ensure effective project management.
- If no material improvement can be observed, replace the project managers.

## **Conclusion**

Consider the recommendations to move projects away from disaster and toward successful outcomes when project managers' relationships with their project sponsors are deteriorating.

## About the Author



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**Yogi Schulz** has over 40 years of experience in Information Technology across various industries. Yogi works extensively in the petroleum industry, selecting and implementing financial, production revenue accounting, land & contracts, and geotechnical systems. He manages projects arising from changes in business requirements, leveraging technology opportunities, and mergers and acquisitions. 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 [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](mailto:yogischulz@corvelle.com)

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