# A Project Sponsor's Warp-Speed Guide:
## Improving project performance

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### Glossary for projects

**Acceptance criteria**: A list of conditions that must be satisfied before a deliverable can be accepted or viewed as complete.

**Activity:** A term that describes vaguely defined work unrelated to any planned deliverable. This term is deliberately minimized in this book. To overcome vagueness, improve the definition of the work, define a task, and link it to a planned deliverable. Often, vaguely defined work suggests that the project plan is missing an entire deliverable and should recognize it.

**Allowance for change orders:** An amount in the project budget to recognize that the approval of some change orders is unavoidable.

**Bias for action:** A leadership behaviour that encourages making decisions and taking action, even when faced with uncertainty. Project success improves when the project sponsor and project manager exhibit this leadership behaviour. Some individuals exhibit the opposite behaviour: they freeze and can't decide for fear of getting it wrong and being held accountable for poor decisions. Organizational culture tends to encourage one behaviour or the other.

**Business case:** A justification for undertaking a project. It evaluates the benefits or value, costs and risks of alternative actions. It concludes with a rationale for the recommended project. The evaluation includes tangible and intangible benefits but gives the most weight to tangible benefits.

**Business policy:** An approved or widely accepted policy or rule that often determines the description of related Business procedures and Business processes.

**Business procedure:** A business procedure description describes the details of how the business process is being performed or will be performed.

Projects avoid documenting current or proposed business procedures. There are important exceptions to this guidance, such as:

1. When the stakeholders cannot achieve a consensus on the future-state business process description, it becomes useful or necessary to work out the associated procedural details.
2. When designing how systems will be used or designing detailed manufacturing steps.

Also, see Business process.

**Business process:** Business process descriptions:

1. Describe what work is currently being performed or will be performed in some aspect of the business within the project's scope.
2. Form much of the content of the business requirements deliverable.

A process description focuses on what is to be done. A business process description avoids describing how the work is to be performed. See Business procedure.

On projects, business process descriptions with supporting swim-lane diagrams are essential to:

1. Clarifying business requirements.
2. Achieving a consensus on business requirements within the team and with project stakeholders.

3. Describing the future state of the business once the project is complete.
4. Laying a foundation for design deliverables.

Also, see Business procedure.

**Change request:** A document describing a request to change the project's scope. When project managers minimize change-request approvals, they increase the likelihood of on-schedule project completion. Use change requests as the basis for defining the scope of the follow-on project.

**Contingency reserve:** An amount in the project budget to cover the following:

a. Cost of underestimated task effort.
b. Cost for missed items[1].
c. Cost of mitigating high-likelihood and high-impact risks.

**Decision record:** A written record of a project decision. These records are valuable for building and maintaining project and organizational memory. Revising a decision record later in a project almost always triggers a change request. Decision records help the team:

1. Clarify the meaning of the project goal and related objectives.
2. Set priorities when competing requirements from different stakeholders arise.
3. Define the content and scope of deliverables in more detail as requirements work progresses.
4. Defend against those who later claim a decision was not made or concluded differently.

[1] It's impossible to avoid missing some costs during the budgeting process.

5. Avoid having to review many minutes of meetings to recollect decisions.

**Deliverable**: A product component or piece of the overall project.

**Internal politics:** Politics arise from divergent interests, ambition, and the reality of limited resources. Positive politics are behaviours that influence others to advance the project's goal while advancing the individual's standing. Negative politics are behaviours that achieve personal gain at the project's expense and at others'. Examples of political behaviour that is unhelpful to project progress and morale include:

1. Assigning blame for project near-misses and failures.
2. Claiming credit for project successes without actually being involved.
3. Arguing among stakeholders about priorities.

**Key Performance Indicator (KPI):** A quantifiable rate used to evaluate the work's progress toward completing a deliverable. An example is percent complete.

**KPI:** See Key Performance Indicator.

**Lessons learned register**: A running list of the knowledge gained during the project.

**Management reserve:** An amount in the project budget to cover unanticipated costs such as strikes, weather or material shortages.

**Measure:** See Metric**.**

**Metric:** A standard unit of measure used to express the size or amount of a resource used to advance work on a deliverable. Project management deals with units such as effort, dollars, and machine hours.

**Milestone**: A significant moment in the project schedule. Typically, the completion of a critical deliverable or phase.

**People change management:** A structured process and supporting tools for leading people through the change required to achieve the desired outcome. Implementing people change is often critical to project success.

**PMBOK® Guide:** *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (PMBOK® Guide), published by the Project Management Institute.

**PMO:** See Project Management Office.

**Politics:** See Internal politics.

**Product:** An item that is either a component of the project or the project's main deliverable.

**Program**: A group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually. PMI, 2009.

**Project**: A time-limited endeavour that produces a new process, product, or service.

**Project - research and development:** A project that produces research and development deliverables that are often reports. The project does not place any products into production for routine operation.

**Project budget**: The financial resources allocated to the project.

**Project charter:** See Appendix F – Project charter table of contents for an extended description.

**Project management:** The application of methods, skills, knowledge, experience, tools and techniques to achieve a specific project goal and supporting objectives. See Appendix D – Value of competent project management for a more extensive discussion.

**Project Management Office (PMO):** An organizational group that standardizes project-related governance processes and facilitates sharing resources, methodologies, tools, and techniques. The responsibilities of a PMO can range from providing project management support functions to the direct management of one or more projects.

**Project management plan:** See Appendix G – Project management plan table of contents for an extended description.

**Project manager**: The person responsible for directing the project work to completion. See Appendix C – Characteristics of a successful project manager for a more detailed discussion.

**Project phase:** A collection of logically related deliverables within a project. Each phase advances the project and ends at a milestone. Every phase will contain both product and project management deliverables. The typical project phases are further described in Appendix E – Phases of projects.

**Project schedule**: A detailed description of the timeframe of the project. Typically includes the sequences of work, important milestones, and what resources are required when.

**Project scope**: The work on deliverables that needs to be completed to meet the project goal and objectives.

**Project sponsor**: Look in the mirror. The person is typically a senior manager or executive with overall accountability for the project. See Appendix A – Role of project sponsors for a more detailed discussion.

**Project Steering Committee**: A group of senior employees who are stakeholders that provide direction to the project team.

**Quality Assurance (QA):** An after-the-fact assurance process that provides confidence that quality requirements defined for the deliverable have been fulfilled.

**Quality Control (QC):** A quality process performed as the deliverable is being produced to maintain quality.

**Requirements – functional:** Describe what the product must do. These requirements consist of product features.

**Requirements – non-functional:** Describe how the product will be implemented, must perform, and its planned life. These requirements consist of product properties, especially quality.

**Risk**: Positive and negative events that can occur during the project that will affect its success. Please read Appendix H – Severe project risk situations for a more detailed discussion of project risk.

**Risk register:** A list of project risks that the team has identified. A risk register contains the following:

1. A detailed description of each risk.
2. A likelihood and impact judgment for each risk.

3. A mitigation plan for high-likelihood and high-impact risks.
4. The name of a single team member who is assigned to each risk.

**Root cause analysis**: The process of determining the point of failure. Most often, one apparent discovery contributes most significantly to the failure. Other events also contribute to the failure.

**Scope:** A list of features and functions of the product that the project is expected to deliver. Requirements are more detailed descriptions that elaborate on the project scope.

**Scope creep**: Aka project death. Scope creep occurs when items are repeatedly added to the project scope.

**SME:** See Subject Matter Expert.

**Stakeholder**: Anybody or any group affected by the project. Stakeholder management is essential to practical project scoping and management because stakeholders can undermine project completion through neglect or active opposition.

For most projects, the stakeholders are workgroups and departments within the organization. On larger projects, stakeholders can include suppliers, customers, and even the general public.

**Subject Matter Expert (SME)**: An expert in a specific domain of knowledge who plays a vital role on many projects by ensuring project deliverables align with known technical knowledge.

**Task:** A single unit of work that contributes to advancing the completion of a deliverable.

**Triple constraint:** Time, scope, and cost that every project must manage to ensure success. Read Appendix I – Triple constraint for a more detailed discussion.

**Warp-speed:** Warp-speed is the rapid speed at which most project sponsors want to learn their role. Warp-speed is also the speed at which most organizations want their projects to proceed. Warp-speed is many orders of magnitude faster than the speed of light. Warp drive is a science fiction propulsion system that enables a spacecraft to travel at warp-speed.

**Warp-speed project assessment:** An assessment that contains a series of observations for common project topics to assess project risk. Project sponsors complete the assessment to focus their understanding of project risk in preparation for actions to reduce the risk. The warp-speed project assessment is located in chapter 4 above.

**WBS:** See Work breakdown structure.

**Work breakdown structure (WBS):** A deliverable-oriented hierarchical decomposition of the project team's work. Read Appendix J – Work breakdown structure (WBS) for a more extensive discussion.

## Glossary for AI

**Agentic AI:** AI systems designed to act autonomously, perceiving their environment, making decisions, and taking actions to achieve specific goals. These systems often include adaptability, goal orientation, and the ability to interact with dynamic environments.

**AI agent:** An autonomous software system that uses an artificial intelligence model to plan, use tools, and execute multi-step tasks to achieve a specific goal.

Common uses include qualifying inbound leads, resolving complex issues, matching invoices against purchase orders, and flagging exceptions.

**AI application:** A software system that uses artificial intelligence technologies like machine learning, natural language processing, and computer vision to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence.

Unlike traditional software that follows rigid rules, an AI application learns from data, adapts to new inputs, and improves its performance over time.

Common uses include real-time traffic routing, personalized media recommendations, and instant fraud detection.

**AI assistant:** A software system powered by artificial intelligence that understands natural language and performs tasks or answers questions on request.

Common uses include drafting text, summarizing notes, searching for information, and setting reminders.

**AI readiness:** An organization's capacity to adopt and scale artificial intelligence applications effectively across its operations.

**AI Readiness Assessment:** A process for determining how prepared an organization is to select, implement, govern, scale, and derive measurable business value from AI applications.

It should cover more than data and technology. Each assessment element is equally important.

**AI software engineering:** Connects pre-built artificial intelligence models, usually from SaaS vendors, into working AI applications instead of building models from scratch.

**Artificial intelligence (AI):** The capability of computational systems to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and decision-making.

**Context window:** Defines the maximum number of tokens a model can read and process at a single time. A context window length is the maximum number of characters in a prompt.

**Deep learning:** An advanced form of machine learning using multi-layered artificial neural networks to analyze complex data patterns.

**DevOps:** A set of cultural philosophies, practices, and tools that combine software development (Dev) and IT operations (Ops) to build, test, and release custom software faster, with less effort and more reliably.

**Fine-Tuning:** The process of adapting a pre-trained base model by training it further on a specific dataset for a specialized task.

**Foundation model:** A large-scale artificial intelligence system trained on massive, diverse datasets that serves as a versatile base layer for a wide variety of downstream tasks.

Large, often publicly traded, AI companies build, maintain, and operate foundation models. Most organizations do not deal with foundation models.

**General AI (AGI)**: AI systems with human-like versatility, capable of performing a wide range of tasks across various domains with adaptability and reasoning.

**Generative AI**: A type of AI that creates new content, such as text, images, video, audio, or computer code, in response to end-user requests, called prompts.

**Hallucination:** An error in which an AI model generates false, fabricated, or nonsensical information and presents it as fact.

**Large language model (LLM):** An AI system, often a deep learning system, trained on massive amounts of text, usually sourced from the World Wide Web, to understand, summarize, translate, and generate human-like language. An LLM can respond to an almost infinite variety of prompts.

**Machine learning (ML):** A subset of AI that trains systems to recognize patterns in data and make decisions without explicit procedural instructions.

**Neural network:** A computing system inspired by the human brain, made of interconnected nodes that process information.

**Prompt engineering:** The practice of designing, refining, and structuring text inputs (prompts) to guide artificial intelligence models, especially large language models, toward generating accurate, relevant, and useful responses.

**Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG):** A technique that improves AI responses by letting an LLM also search internal data and combining results from both sources before answering.

**Small language model (SLM):** A compact AI system trained on small amounts of curated text, usually from the organization's internal data, to understand, summarize, translate, and generate human-like language. An SLM uses far fewer parameters and less memory than an LLM. An SLM offers faster performance, lower resource consumption and lower risk of hallucinations. An SLM can only respond to domain-specific prompts.

**Supervised Learning:** A machine learning approach in which models are trained on labelled datasets, with each input paired with a corresponding output. The model learns to map inputs to outputs by minimizing prediction errors on the labelled data.

**Token:** The smallest unit of text an LLM processes. It's roughly equivalent to about 4 characters or 0.75 words.

**Transformer:** A neural network architecture designed to process sequential data, such as words in a sentence, by tracking relationships across the entire input or prompt.

**Unsupervised Learning:** A machine learning approach where models are trained on unlabeled data to identify patterns, structures, or groupings without predefined outputs.