

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

Warp-speed project assessment

Introduction

We recommend completing the warp-speed project assessment in its entirety before you take any action. You may already know exactly where your problem lies and want to read the topic specifically devoted to this problem. While this might seem like a faster way to solve your immediate issue, the root cause of the problem you are currently experiencing might have occurred earlier in the project. You may miss the root cause of your problem by not completing the assessment in its entirety. Many issues that arise when deploying stem from improperly executing the planning or design phase. Proceed at your own risk.

Read each topic project assessment and consider the observations' accuracy in your project's context. Then, circle the observation statements you believe are most accurate for your project.

If you cannot circle an observation quickly, it often means your project is in a high-risk situation.

1.1 Feasibility

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project sponsor	I am the senior executive appointed to the role of the project sponsor. I'm confident in my ability to fulfill the position.	No one has been appointed the project sponsor. Multiple individuals share the position. The President is the project sponsor.
Project manager	A full-time project manager, who has my confidence, is in place. The project manager has the appropriate experience.	The project manager has other competing responsibilities. Multiple individuals share the project management role.
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.

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project goal	I've seen a crisp, sensible one-sentence statement of the project goal.	The project goal statement is a long paragraph. I've heard a lot of debate about goals and various conflicting statements.
Project objectives	I've seen short statements of project objectives. The project objectives support the project goal.	I've heard a lot of debates about objectives and various conflicting statements. I've heard no discussion about project objectives.
Scope statements	A comprehensive set of scope statements exist. The scope statements clearly state what is in-scope and out-of-scope for this project.	There is no scope statement. The scope statements are vague and incomplete. My team is unclear about what is in and out of this project's scope.
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.
Project benefits	I can articulate the project benefits. I view the estimates of tangible benefits as reasonable.	I observe varying perceptions about the reality of project benefits. No one has had time to estimate benefits. Most of the benefits are intangible.
Project budget	I've seen the budget, and the principal line item amounts look reasonable.	I've not reviewed or approved a project budget. The budget line item amounts change over time. The budget I've seen shows a much lower total dollar amount than expected.

1.2 Planning

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.
Project sponsor / Project manager relationship	The project manager and I understand one another's work styles. I am consulted on important issues that the team is facing at suitable intervals. The project manager and I communicate in person or over video chat regularly. I am comfortable initiating informal discussions with the project manager to keep myself well-informed.	The project manager and I experience constant misunderstandings. I am consulted too much or too little about issues related to the project. The project manager and I communicate infrequently. Informal discussions with the project manager are rare and feel awkward.
Project resources	The team members I've met appear to have the requisite skills and experience. The team has acquired or contracted other resources.	Multiple individuals on the team I've met appear not to have sufficient skills and experience or exhibit a good work ethic. The team has not acquired or only partially contracted for other resources.
Team organization	I've seen a reasonably clear organization chart with mostly full-time employees and only a few empty boxes.	I've seen an organization chart with too many contractors, multiple empty boxes or too many lines.
Project technology	The team consistently uses a shortlist of technologies. I can conceptually describe the technologies.	The team uses an extensive and changing list of technologies. New technology buzzwords abound in discussions.

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project schedule	<p>I've seen a comprehensive project schedule visualized as a Gantt chart.</p> <p>The schedule is available and understood by the team.</p>	<p>I haven't seen a comprehensive project schedule.</p> <p>The team doesn't appear to understand the project schedule.</p> <p>The Gantt chart of the project schedule changes materially from one report to the next.</p>
Effort estimates	<p>I've seen effort estimates for tasks and believe them to be reasonable.</p>	<p>I've not seen many effort estimates for tasks.</p> <p>I'm concerned that available estimates tend to be duration estimates.</p>
Risk identification	<p>I've observed that the team has identified potential risks in a risk register. The work looks comprehensive to me.</p>	<p>I've not observed the team performing risk identification.</p> <p>The risk register looks incomplete to me.</p>
Project steering committee	<p>The key business areas that will be affected by the project are represented.</p> <p>The committee meets every 4 to 6 weeks.</p>	<p>I don't know if a steering committee exists.</p> <p>Membership is unclear.</p> <p>Meetings are sporadic or offer little content.</p>
Project consensus	<p>Project team members, departments directly involved, and other stakeholders have agreed to the goal and objectives.</p>	<p>Whenever I speak to team members, departments directly involved, and other stakeholders, I hear substantial variations on the goal and objectives.</p>
Long lead-time items	<p>I've seen a list of long lead-time items.</p> <p>I'm aware of the dialogue between the team and a few potential vendors, even though a detailed design is not ready.</p>	<p>I've not seen a list of long lead-time items.</p> <p>The team knows some long lead-time items will be required but has not taken specific planning action.</p>

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Physical space	<p>My team occupies a suitable physical space to conduct the project.</p> <p>My team has the needed desks, offices, computers, phones, and conference rooms.</p> <p>They have the space to store project materials when necessary.</p>	<p>My team is scattered throughout the building, even though working in proximity would be most efficient.</p> <p>Team members complain that they squeeze into a small conference room that they can only book sometimes.</p> <p>Insufficient warehouse space is creating logistics problems.</p>

1.3 Design

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project requirements	<p>I've seen a detailed report of functional and non-functional requirements.</p>	<p>The report of project requirements I've seen is too high-level or uneven in detail.</p> <p>The team has not achieved a consensus on the requirements.</p> <p>The report of project requirements is incredibly detailed and sounds more like a design document.</p>
Client engagement	<p>The client consistently provides the necessary resources, such as business staff and systems, to make the project successful.</p>	<p>I'm aware that the team can't access the resources required to make the project successful, such as business staff, login credentials, and company policies.</p>
Internal politics	<p>I've heard stakeholders make supportive comments about the project.</p> <p>When I enlisted the help of stakeholders, they completed the agreed actions.</p>	<p>I've heard stakeholders make critical comments about the project.</p> <p>I've heard derisive comments about the project manager and individual team members.</p> <p>When I enlisted the help of stakeholders, they listened politely but didn't agree to take action.</p>

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Stakeholder engagement	I know that affected stakeholders know our project is actively underway. I've seen a list of the affected stakeholder groups with the current contact.	I'm aware that affected stakeholders don't know who the project manager is or that a project affecting their work is underway. The list of the affected stakeholder groups is incomplete.
Risk monitoring	I know that the team reviews project risks and regularly updates related mitigations.	I am aware that the team reviews project risks rarely or never.
Product and service procurement	I'm aware of a reasonably rigorous process for procuring products and services.	I'm aware of an arduous and excessively rigorous process for procuring products and services. I've observed that the team procures products and services based on personal relationships.
Vendor contracting	I'm aware of a reasonably structured process for contracting with vendors.	I'm aware of a horrendously complex process for contracting with vendors that consumes significant team effort.
Vendor performance	I've seen information about the vendors' timeliness and quality of deliverables that I assess as acceptable.	I've seen information about the unacceptable quality of the vendor deliverables. I've not seen information about the quality of the vendor deliverables.
Meeting management	I've seen project meeting agendas. I can find the meeting minutes.	I haven't seen meeting agendas. I can't find minutes from previous meetings, or the minutes are incomplete.

1.4 Build

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Product design	I've seen complete detailed designs for the project deliverables.	The designs I've seen are too high-level or uneven in detail. The team has not achieved a consensus on the design of some deliverables.

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project change management	<p>I've seen a significant list of possible scope additions. But they remain on the list and have not been adopted into the project scope.</p> <p>The project manager rarely recommends scope changes to the project steering committee and me.</p>	<p>I've seen the project manager frequently discuss good ideas that the team adds to the project scope.</p> <p>On multiple occasions, the project manager has recommended scope changes to the project steering committee and me.</p>
Team allocation	<p>I've seen the team assignments to tasks and believe them reasonable.</p>	<p>I've not seen the team assignments to tasks.</p> <p>I'm concerned that some team members are over-allocated and some are under-allocated.</p>
Project progress	<p>I've seen the same summary Gantt chart illustrating reasonable project progress on multiple occasions.</p> <p>I've seen metrics such as percent complete, effort-to-date or effort remaining to know which deliverables are underway.</p> <p>Deliverables are completed on time more often than not.</p>	<p>I've never seen a Gantt chart.</p> <p>Successive Gantt charts show little or no progress.</p> <p>I'm simply <i>hoping</i> to see a completed deliverable by the due date.</p> <p>I've not seen metrics.</p> <p>Deliverables are often late.</p> <p>My team feels frazzled.</p>
Percent complete	<p>Percent complete is one of multiple metrics reported to me and used to determine that my project is on schedule.</p>	<p>I observe percent complete is often optimistically overstated.</p> <p>Percent complete is the only metric reported to me to determine if my project is on schedule.</p>
Risk mitigation	<p>I've seen risk mitigation tasks that appear comprehensive.</p> <p>I've observed the team performing risk mitigation tasks.</p>	<p>I've not seen the team planning risk mitigation tasks.</p> <p>The team is not performing risk mitigation tasks.</p>
Project milestones	<p>The project schedule includes essential milestones.</p> <p>The milestone dates I've seen seem realistic and are met more often than not.</p>	<p>The project schedule includes a few milestones.</p> <p>The milestone dates I've seen are often padded, infrequently met or unknown to the team.</p>

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project communication	<p>I've seen a communication plan.</p> <p>I know who is responsible for project communication with stakeholders and team members.</p> <p>I've seen well-designed communication artifacts.</p> <p>I've seen communication occurring.</p>	<p>I haven't seen a communication plan.</p> <p>I don't know who is responsible for project communication.</p> <p>Communication happens ad hoc and typically in response to stakeholder requests for a status update.</p> <p>Communication artifacts contain contradictory information.</p>
Project expenditures	<p>I receive regular updates on project expenditures.</p> <p>The cumulative expenditure amounts by line item seem plausible to me.</p>	<p>I rarely receive updates on project expenditures.</p> <p>The cumulative expenditure amounts by line item I see vary significantly over time.</p>
Project expenditure forecast	<p>I receive regular project expenditure forecasts.</p> <p>The expenditure forecast amounts by line item seem plausible to me.</p>	<p>I don't receive expenditure forecasts.</p> <p>The expenditure forecast amounts I see vary considerably from one reporting period to the next.</p>
Team environment	<p>I've observed the team interacting respectfully and collaborating well.</p>	<p>I've observed tensions in team conversations.</p> <p>I've observed the project manager treating some team members better than others.</p> <p>I've observed conflict and arguments among team members.</p>

1.5 Test

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Acceptance criteria	<p>I've seen a reasonable list of essential criteria that must be met to ensure deliverable acceptance.</p> <p>Most of the acceptance criteria include numeric values.</p>	<p>Various descriptions with no numeric criteria define the deliverable acceptance criteria I've seen.</p> <p>Deliverable acceptance is based on someone's gut feeling.</p> <p>Deliverable acceptance is based on the opinion of the person assigned to complete the deliverable.</p>

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Quality control (QC)	I've seen a satisfactory quality control plan for the project. I've seen evidence of quality control work.	I'm not aware of any quality control plan for the project. I haven't seen evidence of quality control work.
Quality assurance (QA)	I've seen a suitable quality assurance plan for the project. I've seen quality assurance reports for our project deliverables.	I'm not aware of any quality assurance plan for the project. I haven't seen quality assurance reports for our project deliverables. The quality assurance reports I've seen for our project deliverables appeared incomplete.
Team turnover	Team turnover is low. The team appears happy to be on the project.	Team turnover is surprisingly high. Project morale varies significantly over time.

1.6 Deploy

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
People change management	The project management plan I've seen includes tasks for people change management. Related work is evident.	I haven't seen people change management referenced in the project management plan. People change management work is informal and sporadic. Related work is not evident.
Data quality	I've seen a data quality evaluation plan, and it's being followed. I've observed data quality improvement work. The supporting data quality standards document looks reasonable.	I've not observed data quality evaluation work. The data quality evaluation I've observed appears rushed and uneven to meet project milestones. I've observed no data quality improvement work. The data quality standards document doesn't exist or looks incomplete.
Operations plan	I've seen an operations plan that looks reasonably complete.	I've not seen an operations plan. The operations plan that I've seen is incomplete.

1.7 Close

Topic	Low-risk observations	High-risk observations
Project acceptance	I know who is responsible for accepting the project as complete. <i>It's very likely you!</i>	I don't know who is responsible for accepting the project as complete. I can identify multiple people responsible for accepting the project as complete.
Lessons learned	I've reviewed lessons learned being created by my team and believe they will be helpful for subsequent projects. I've reviewed lessons learned from previous projects.	I haven't seen a lessons learned register. We've faced similar issues in other projects but can't remember how they were handled or those solutions' outcomes. The lessons learned register looks incomplete.

The book expands on all the topics you've just assessed. Most importantly, we describe actions to address the high-risk observations. At a minimum, completing these actions will reduce project risk. Typically, completing these actions positions the project for successful completion.