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

Appendix B – What project sponsors don't do

Projects are more successful when the project sponsor actively fulfills their role, as described above. Because fulfilling this role is an added responsibility for most project sponsors, they do not take on additional work related to the project[1]. That's helpful for the project.

Projects experience turmoil when project sponsors engage with the project beyond their role, as described below.

Do not micromanage the project manager

A project sponsor does not micromanage the project manager. Project sponsors should not have time for micromanaging, which irritates the project manager.

If the project sponsor loses confidence in the project manager to the point where more direct supervision is being contemplated, it's time to replace the project manager.

Do not fulfill the role for multiple projects

A project sponsor should not be assigned to concurrently fulfill the role for multiple projects. Given that all project sponsors hold full-time positions within the organization, this idea sets up the project sponsor and their assigned projects for failure. The premise of our book is that project

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[1] More specifically, the project sponsor is not a member of the project team and is not assigned project tasks.

sponsors struggle to fulfill their role reasonably completely on one project. We want to support them with practical, targeted, time-efficient guidance.

Do not distance themselves from the project

In conversations with others, a project sponsor does not minimize their role or claim not to be involved.

If the project sponsor is uncomfortable in the role, it may be time to recruit another project sponsor. The discomfort may also signify that the project is unlikely to complete successfully and should be cancelled.

Do not coach the project manager

A project sponsor does not coach the project manager about project management. If such guidance appears useful, it usually indicates a lack of project manager experience that must be addressed. This situation may also suggest that the project manager needs to be replaced with someone more senior.

Do not coach the project team

A project sponsor does not coach members of the project team. Even though the coaching is well-intentioned, it will be frustrating and tiresome for the project sponsor. It will also be viewed strangely by the person being coached and the rest of the team.

Coaching is part of the role of the project manager. Let that person perform their function.

Do not criticize the team publicly

A project sponsor never criticizes the team publicly. That criticism undermines team and organization confidence in the project.

If criticism is warranted, the project sponsor collaborates with the project manager privately. The project manager then takes corrective action. If that action fails, removing a team member, terminating a vendor, or even replacing the project manager will become necessary.

Do not provide guidance on work

A project sponsor refrains from guiding the team as it works to complete deliverables. If such guidance appears useful, it usually points to a lack of skills and expertise in the team that needs to be corrected.

In some circumstances, it may be helpful for the project sponsor to participate in the quality assurance task when the team reviews deliverables.

The CIO and IT managers should not act as the project sponsor for business projects. While these individuals are always well-meaning in offering to act as project sponsors, they will not attract enough support to succeed in the role. As a result, the project is unlikely to be successful.

The CIO or IT managers act as project sponsors for IT infrastructure upgrade projects.