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What should the project sponsor actually do?

The role of project sponsor is key to the success of a project or projects. But, there is little written about what they should *actually* be doing to ensure they play their role effectively.

The next few pages give you that insight.

The original work was developed in the researches for a book Strategies for Project Sponsorship which I co-wrote in 2013. Since then the original list has been built on and modified to take account of comments from individuals on workshops and speaking engagements.

In reading this, you should bear in mind the project management maturity you have in your company. Some of you for example may need to adapt the checklist others will possibly need to add to it. Treat it as a starter for the journey.

Pages 3 and 4 go into further explanation of the roles.

I always welcome feedback so please feel to comment on the role as described.

Ron Rosenhead January 2015

What Does The Active Project Sponsor Do?

1. Provides direction and guidance for strategies and initiatives
2. Works with the project manager to develop the Project Charter/PID
3. Checks that business benefits are identified and being achieved
4. Makes go/no-go decisions
5. Evaluates the project's success upon completion
6. Negotiates funding for the project
7. Actively participates in the initial project planning
8. Reviews and approves changes to plans, priorities, deliverables, schedule, and more
9. Identifies, appoints project board members (when required) and ensures they are trained to carry out their role effectively
10. Gains agreement among stakeholders when differences of opinion occur
11. Assists the project when required (especially in an out-of-control situation) by exerting organisational authority and the ability to influence
12. Helps resolve inter project boundary issues
13. Helps the project manager in conflict resolution
14. Advises the project manager of protocols, political issues, and potential sensitivities
15. Makes the project visible within the organisation
16. Encourages stakeholder involvement and builds and maintains their ongoing commitment through effective communication strategies
17. Chief risk taker

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What does the project sponsor do?

1. Provides direction and guidance for strategies and initiatives	All projects need to fit into the overall company strategy. If there is no link the sponsor should say no. If the idea originates from the sponsor the project manager should point out the lack of any link! priorities. .
2. Works with the project manager to develop the project charter/PID	The business case (BC) helps decide whether the project is worth doing. The project charter (or PID) is the document that builds on the BC The Sponsor briefs the project manager on possible content with the project manager writing it. The sponsor approves (or not) the charter.
3. Checks that business benefits have been identified and are being achieved	<p>The sponsor needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure there are clear business benefits identified for all projects • ensure the client/stakeholder have agreed to the business benefits • monitors that business benefits are not just being delivered and but are achieving what was set out <p>The sponsor is the <i>owner</i> of the delivery of the business benefits and takes full responsibility for their delivery.</p>
4. Makes go/no-go decisions	The sponsor signs off all documents (effectively go/no go decisions).
5. Evaluates the project's success upon completion	<p>Once the project is completed, the sponsor should ensure a review is held of the project and lessons are actually identified and used by others in the business. (Lessons learned should be identified throughout the project not simply at the end.)</p> <p>The sponsor may bring someone to facilitate the review</p>
6. Negotiates funding for the project	Projects usually cost money and the sponsor is usually the person who negotiates for this – once the project manager has made some estimates of cost and time to deliver.
7. Actively participates in the initial project planning	The sponsor is the person who encourages the project manager and team (if there is one) to carry out in depth planning for the project. The sponsor ensures the project manager discusses the plan and where appropriate takes the plan to stakeholders
8. Reviews and approves changes to plans, priorities, deliverables, schedule, and more	Projects need to be reviewed – by the sponsor. They approve any changes to scope or budget and signs off any change requests
9. Identifies project board members	Where a project board is needed, the sponsor is the person who selects and invites people to be member of the board. The sponsor also selects the project manager and ensures that all project board members are trained about the role they play. The sponsor chairs the project board.

10. Gains agreement among stakeholders when differences of opinion occur	The sponsor needs to engage with stakeholders and where differences do occur; working with them and the project manager and team obtain agreement to the way forward. In some cases; this will involve making go/no go decisions.
11. Assists the project when required (especially in an out-of-control situation) by exerting organisational authority and the ability to influence	This is a time where leadership from the sponsor comes to the fore. Often there is a need for the sponsor to influence others and take the lead supporting the project manager and team. This role becomes an important one especially where there is a need to influence upwards to senior managers by the project manager. The sponsor should take the lead role here
12. Helps resolve interproject boundary issues	Projects frequently cross boundaries – these can be interdepartmental, intercompany, inter-partner. The sponsor is the person who should be working with the project manager and team to lead and deal with these
13. Supports the project manager in conflict resolution	The sponsor needs to help the project manager to resolve conflict. Note; the sponsor does not necessarily do this themselves but does it through the support of the project manager
14. Advises the project manager of protocols, political issues, and potential sensitivities	There are many issues the project manager may not be aware of. The sponsor should be briefing the project manager on these issues.
15. Makes the project visible within the organisation	Marketing, communicating, briefing; the actual methods are less important than the need for the sponsor to actually make the project more visible within the organisation especial to senior managers within the business
16. Encourages stakeholder involvement and builds and maintains their ongoing commitment through effective communication strategies	A key aspect of projects; especially change projects is the need to communicate to a wide range of stakeholders. There is often a need for getting buy in and commitment and the sponsor takes an active part in ensuring this is done
17. Chief risk taker	Risks are owned by the sponsor. This means the sponsor should ensure risks are regularly identified and managed effectively throughout the project.