The Puffin's Voice

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In This Edition

In a recent blog posted on our corporate web-site - Oldsam.ca - I talked about the criticality of a project having an executive sponsor who is committed to the project. (See 'Should Your Project Executive Be a Chicken or a Pig'). However, I pointed out that sometimes project executives don't exhibit the necessary level of commitment because they simply don't know what is expected of them. The focus of this edition of The Puffin's Voice is to provide information to Project Executives and Project Managers which clarifies the role of the Project Executive and illustrates the kind of actions which demonstrate executive commitment to a project.

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The Project Executive – Role and Responsibilities

BY PROJECT-MANAGEMENT.COM · PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2, 2018 · UPDATED

The Project Executive would normally come from the senior management of the customer organisation – that is the organisation who are to directly use the

output of the project: the new object, system, process or structure. The Executive has ultimate responsibility for the project and 'owns' the Business Case throughout the life of the project. He or she has the following specific responsibilities:

- Oversee the development of the Project Brief and Business Case
- Authorise expenditure levels, set stage tolerances and ensure the funding for agreed expenditure is available
- Authorise or reject proposed changes to scope, cost or timescale beyond tolerance levels, ensuring that impacts on the business case are understood
- Ensure Risks and Issues are being tracked and mitigated/resolved
- Liaise with Programme or Corporate Management on progress
- Chair meetings of the Project Board
- Authorise the project's continuance or early closure at stage review meetings of the Project Board
- Authorise formal closure of the project
- Hold a Post-Project Review to ensure benefits are realised

5 Key Attributes of an Effective Sponsor

(From a September 6, 2018 post by Martin Samphire on the website of the Association for Project Management (APM))

We all know that having an engaged and effective sponsor is the key success factor to the successful outcome of a project or programme. If you are a project or programme manager how do you know if you have a good sponsor? If you are unclear who is your sponsor, how do you spot him or her? If you are a board member (and ultimately responsible for the overall portfolio of change) and holding project/programme sponsors to account, how do you judge their performance?

The recently published second edition of the APM guide *Sponsoring Change* states:

'Programme or project sponsors are accountable for the realisation of desired outcomes and benefits from any investment. They provide the governance link between the organisation's senior executives (the board) and the management of each project'.

So, unless there is true budget and business accountability for outcomes, can a person really be held accountable as the sponsor? Just because it walks and talks like a duck, is it still a duck?

But good sponsorship is not just about 'having the money'. Sponsors need to be 'on the ball' and intrinsically linked into the organisation's strategy and objectives so that decisions on the programme or project are tightly aligned to business direction subtleties – the crucial 'context' into which the programme or project manager is delivering. And when business direction changes, or challenges or crises occur on the project, the sponsor needs to be able to respond with clarity and confidence, not behave like a 'rabbit caught in the headlights' and causing panic in the delivery team through indecision or lack of feel for the issue.
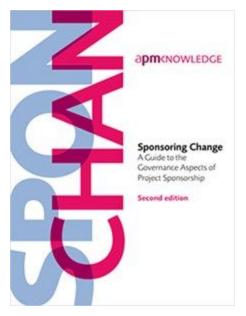
How many times do you hear that the sponsor was 'too busy' to attend the steering group or programme board? The sponsor needs to give enough time, not to necessarily understand the minutiae of the project solution but to assessing the impact on the business-as-usual (BAU) organisation and benefits. A standard question in the sponsor's armoury should be "so what is the impact of ……?". In a similar light, the

standard question in the project manager's armoury should be "why….". And the sponsor needs to be able to provide a clear and concise response in business/benefit/outcome/impact terms rather than in solution terms.

As an organisational board member, I would want to hear an update from the sponsor on the progress of their project or programme in business, benefits, outcome and impact terms. If they cannot do that then alarm bells start to ring and I question how much they really understand the impact of their initiative on the business strategy and performance and how involved they are in the initiative's governance. Also, how well are they providing leadership, clarity and passion to the delivery team?

How much governance and involvement of the sponsor is enough? Too little and alignment to organisational strategy and direction may be weak and the delivery team may go astray – on the other hand too much of the wrong type of governance and behaviour from the sponsor and the project team might feel aggrieved.

The five key attributes of an effective sponsor are given in the latest edition of APM's Sponsoring Change guide:

- Understanding: the sponsor must understand the role, its significance and the project context, risks, etc.
- Competence: the sponsor must have the knowledge, and skills to fulfil the role. For example, suitable characteristics include strategic view, leadership, collaborative champion, and an understanding of the business case and the needs of the project's

client(s).

- Credibility: the sponsor must be accepted by stakeholders as suitable for the role via demonstrable experience in the field of the project area.
- Commitment: the sponsor must be able to give the role the personal time and priority necessary to fulfil the duties and responsibilities.
- Engagement: the sponsor must be willing to take personal ownership of the project, ensure that effective communications are in place, and be able to influence people toward a successful outcome irrespective of organisation unit.

Additionally, Sponsoring Change describes how the 'sponsor provides accountability, confidence, transparency and understanding to the business' and also describes 'how the sponsor provides leadership to the project and project manager and creates the conditions for the project manager and the project team to succeed'.
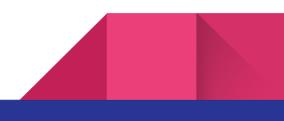
So, as a project manager or board member, it's worth reflecting on how good your sponsor is – added value or a 'waste of space'?

(Sponsoring Change 2nd edition, published by APM, is available to buy from the APM Bookshop. APM members can claim 10% discount on the list price.)

The First Three Project Roles To Appoint

(From Barry Hodge's website Project News Today)

[Editor's Note: Thus far, we have been focused on the role of the Project Sponsor/Executive in a project. However, it may be beneficial to also appoint a Business Lead - sometimes called a Project Owner - to a project. This article illustrates the basic differences between the role of the Project Sponsor/Executive, the Business Lead/Project Owner and the Project Manager.]

There are many project roles, with some having a greater involvement as the project progresses. However there are 3 key project roles that need to be appointed early. In this post I will outline the 3 project roles and the differences between each role.

3 Project Roles to be Assigned Early

- Project Sponsor
- Business Lead
- Project Manager

Project Sponsor

The Sponsor should be a Director of the organisation. They need to be someone with financial authority and who are able to allocate extra resources to the project. The Sponsor should have a vested interest in the successful outcome of the project.

Role of The Sponsor

- Responsible To The Board For Delivery
- Owns The Project Budget
- Responsible For Benefits Realisation
- Authorises Project Scope
- Approves Project Documents
- Authorises Project Changes

Business Lead

The Business Lead will be more junior in the organisation than the Sponsor. They will need to have significant experience, as their role will be to implement the project on behalf of the Sponsor. The main difference between the Sponsor and the Business Lead is the Sponsor will have financial approval and not be involved on the project everyday.

Role of The Business Lead

- Responsible To The Sponsor
- Has Vested Interest In Success
- Can Answer Queries
- Shapes The Solution
- Works With The Project Manager
- Has Day To Day Involvement In The Project

Project Manager

The Project Manager will work day to day with the Business Lead on the delivery of the project. The main difference between the Business Lead and the Project Manager is the project manager will handle the day to day completion of tasks. The Business Lead is the subject matter expert who can answer queries on Operational process and how the end product should look and feel.

Role of The Project Manager

- Responsible For Day To Day Delivery
- Captures and Mitigates Risk
- Records and Ensures Issues Are Resolved
- Produces and Manages The Schedule
- Ensures Tasks Are Completed
- Keeps Project Within Agreed Time, Cost, Quality and Scope
- Updates Project Stakeholders