

PREFACE

The CHAOS Manifesto 2012: The Year of the Executive Sponsor is based on four Standish services: CHAOS Knowledge Center (CKC), DARTS (Demand Assessment Requirements Tracking Survey), executive sponsor workshops, and executive interviews. The online CHAOS Chronicles contains 100 Best Practice Points. CHAOS Chronicles is a work in progress; new research is added and updated every month along with other supporting features. Currently, there are more than 800 charts in the CKC. DARTS is an online research instrument. Each month The Standish Group asks 300 CIOs their opinion on a variety of topics, including quality, project management, and service delivery. The monthly survey is 20 to 25 multipart questions. Currently in the Standish DARTS database there are tens of thousands of data points. We ran a number of DARTS surveys focusing on executive sponsorship, including importance of traits, skill levels, difficulty of improvement, and IT assistance.

Throughout the last 20 years we have recognized the importance of the executive sponsor in the health and well-being of project success and have published many article and stories on the subject. It has only been in the last five years that we have had a focus on it, running workshops and classes on executive sponsorship. CHAOS University alone had three events that focused on executive sponsorship. These events helped us develop the framework for what makes a good executive sponsor. Our focus now is to interview well-known executives on being a good executive sponsor. Our goal is to complete 50 executive sponsor interviews, and as of this report we have completed about half of them. Each of the completed interviews can be found in the classic report section of our website.

This focused research on how to be a good executive sponsor is in addition to the normal CHAOS research examining why projects fail. This research led us to the belief that the number one reason for project failure is poor executive leadership and an unhealthy project environment, which is the responsibility of the executive team. CHAOS research is based on the collection of project case information on real-life IT environments and software projects. Eight different instruments were used in the collection of this information, which includes project profiles, project tracking, individual project surveys, case interviews, general surveys, project post-mortems, and other instruments. CHAOS research encompasses 18 years of data on why projects succeed or fail, representing more than 80,000 completed IT projects. Through Standish Group's CHAOS University, we have hosted more than 500 workshops, as well as many focus groups, project "group therapy" sessions, and executive retreats that focus on particular issues of project management.

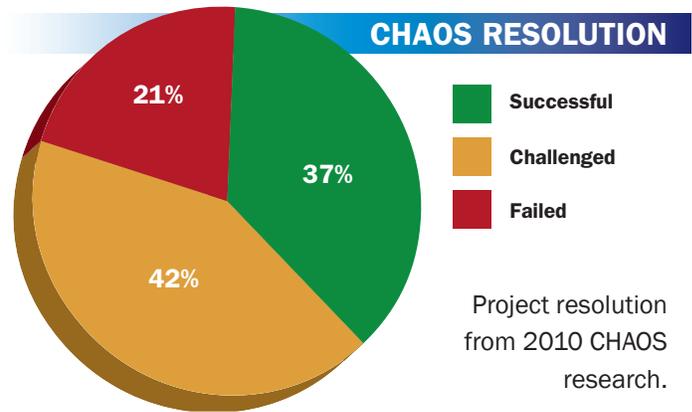


CHAOS DEMOGRAPHICS:

CHAOS results provide a global view of project statistics but do tend to have a heavier concentration on the United States and Europe. For each study period, about 60% of projects are U.S. based, 25% are European, and the remaining 15% represent the rest of the world. Half of the companies are considered Fortune 1000-type companies; another 30% are midrange; and 20% are in the small-range category. They span a diverse number of vertical industries and organizations. Participants are made up of a variety of CIOs, VPs, directors, and PMO project managers.

Introduction

The latest CHAOS results show a major increase in project success rates, with 37% of all projects succeeding (delivered on time, on budget, with required features and functions); 42% were challenged (late, over budget, and/or with less than the required features and functions); and 21% failed (cancelled prior to completion or delivered and never used). These numbers represent an uptick in the success rates from the previous study. Looking at the differences between successful projects and unsuccessful projects we observed that the successful projects either had a skilled executive sponsor or did not need a strong executive sponsor since they were more mechanical projects.



It is this observation that led us to create this special *CHAOS Manifesto*. However, if you are looking for the traditional *CHAOS Manifesto* with the 100 best practices, please see *CHAOS Manifesto 2011*. We believe improvement in the skills of the executive sponsor is the single most important factor that will increase project success. Sixty-six percent of executive sponsors do a poor job and shirk their responsibilities. However, it is not their fault, because no one has educated them about their roles and responsibilities. The Standish Group has identified the 50 skills needed to be a good executive sponsor and has the ability to test executive sponsors on these skills.

The first thing necessary is to define the role of the executive sponsor. In our opinion, the executive sponsor is the owner of the project. As owner of the project, the full weight and responsibilities of its success or failure fall squarely on his or her shoulders. As Harry Truman adeptly stated, “The buck stops here.” This has never been truer for the executive sponsor of a project. It is unfortunate the word “sponsor” denotes a rather hands-off approach or being distanced from the actual hand-to-hand combat needed to bring a project to a successful resolution. There can be no distance between the project resolution and the sponsor.

In many of the Agile methodologies the word “owner” or “product owner” is used in place of or in conjunction with executive sponsor. The words “owner,” “customer,” or “captain” might be more appropriate. In the Project Management Institute’s book *Situational Sponsorship of Projects and Programs: An Empirical Review*, the authors suggest dropping “executive” and just using “sponsor.” The rationale is that the sponsor does not need to be an executive. While this is true, it makes the problem worse. The sponsor may not be an executive of the organization, but he or she is the chief executive of the project. The word “executive” symbolizes a higher level of responsibility than just “sponsor.” The executive sponsor, for better or worse, owns the outcome.

RESOLUTION

	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
Successful	34%	29%	35%	32%	37%
Challenged	51%	53%	46%	44%	42%
Failed	15%	18%	19%	24%	21%

Project resolution results from CHAOS research for years 2002 to 2010.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The 2012 Factors of Success show executive sponsorship as the number one factor.

Executive Management Support: The most important person in the project is the executive sponsor. The executive sponsor is ultimately responsible for the success and failure of the project. We give executive sponsorship 19 success points.

User Involvement: CHAOS research clearly shows that projects that lack user involvement perform poorly. User participation has a major effect on project resolution; in fact, we give it 18 of our success points.

Clear Business Objectives: The most important ingredient in the project is the business objectives. The project must align the organization's goals and strategy, which is why business objectives get 15 of the success points.

Emotional Maturity: This refers to the emotional state of the project environment. Projects get resolved within the ecosystem; a healthy ecosystem produces more successful projects. Emotional maturity accounts for 12 success points.

Optimization: The most important thing an organization can do is maximize efficiency by making all aspects of the project optimal. This includes scope, team size, sponsorship, and process. Optimization gets 11 success points.

Agile Process: The first of the mechanical success factors, the Agile process directly addresses user involvement and executive support success factors. We give it 9 success points.

Project Management Expertise: This is essential to controlling the progression of the project and the collaboration of the stakeholders and team members. Project management expertise accounts for 6 success points out of 100.

Skilled Resources: In the eighth position and with only 5 success points, it may seem that skilled resources gets no respect, but that is not true. A project is made up of people, and success is on their shoulders.

Execution: This encompasses process and governance controls. If done right they can help with success, but all too often organizations put too much reliance on them and lose sight of the goal. We give execution 4 points.

Tools and Infrastructure: They can help a project succeed, but like any tool they can also hurt. Organizations must be extremely careful not to rely too much on tools for a project's success. We give this factor only 1 point.

FACTORS OF SUCCESS	POINTS
Executive Management Support	19
User Involvement	18
Clear Business Objectives	15
Emotional Maturity	12
Optimization	11
Agile Process	9
Project Management Expertise	6
Skilled Resources	5
Execution	4
Tools and Infrastructure	1

MATCHING THE EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

Using Standish Group’s Executive Sponsor Assessment (<http://esa.standishgroup.com/>) and the Size-Complexity Matrix (SCM) you can match the executive sponsor’s skill level with the project’s characteristics. The Executive Sponsor Assessment will provide you with a total score for the executive sponsor, from 100 to 1,000. The SCM also provides a score from 100 to 1,000. Using this, the executive should avoid sponsoring projects with a higher score than his or her individual score.

The Size-Complexity Matrix provides a guideline for categorizing a project in order to assess if an executive sponsor can take on the project or an additional project. The SCM uses a 5-point scale for both size and complexity. The lowest-point project is a simple, small project and would be represented as a C1S1 and have 100 points. The largest and most complex project would be a C5S5 and have 1,000 points.

The size component is a item selection that has two tables. The top table uses labor cost. Standish only uses labor content to measure size, therefore when selecting the project size in the table use normal U.S. labor rates. The bottom table uses team size. The user can take the average of both tables or select the highest or lowest table. Remember these are guidelines, not rules.

The complexity component is an addition function. The user adds up the points based on the attributes of the project. There are five attributes in each table. The user can use the average of both tables or select the highest or lowest table. Complexity can add up to more than 5 points, but it defaults back to 5 as the maximum complexity.

Once you have calculated the size and complexity, the Size-Complexity Matrix can be used to assign work, risk, or even to move forward with the project.

Size	Select Points
Under \$1 million labor	1
\$1 million to \$3 million	2
\$3 million to \$6 million	3
\$6 million to \$10 million	4
Over \$10 million	5
Team Size	
6 or fewer team members/ months	1
6 to 12 team members/months	2
12 to 24 team members/months	3
24 to 50 team members/months	4
Over 50 team members/months	5

Complexity	Add Points
Base	1
Breaking new ground	1
Fuzzy undefined requirements	1
Multiple team locations	1
Multiple stakeholder locations	1
Stakeholder Complexity	
Base	1
Breaking new ground	1
Diverse user objectives	1
Uncooperative peers	2
Uncooperative stakeholders	3

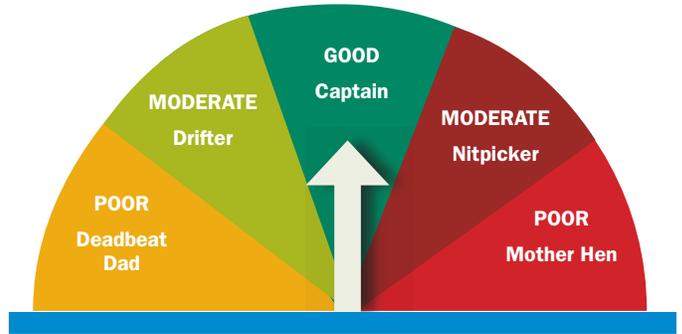
SIZE-COMPLEXITY MATRIX (SCM) FOR EXECUTIVE SPONSORS

This matrix provides a general guideline as to how much burden the senior executive sponsor can manage. An average senior executive sponsor can only manage a total of 325 (SCM) points at any one time, or the green zone. For the yellow zone, a good and effective executive sponsor is required. The red zone should be avoided and broken into manageable projects over multiple executive sponsors.

		COMPLEXITY				
		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
SIZE	S1	100	250	400	550	700
	S2	175	325	475	625	775
	S3	250	400	550	700	850
	S4	325	475	625	775	925
	S5	400	550	700	850	1000

GENERAL EXECUTIVE SPONSOR PERSONALITIES

“There are different types of executive sponsors. There are those who really want to get the project done for the good of the organization. And ultimately, it should help him or her in their career. The other type, while not outwardly trying to avoid the project, inwardly—for a variety of reasons—wishes the project did not happen,” said Robert Kelley, CIO and FDA compliance consultant. “In most of these cases we see the project has been delegated down from a higher level to this person; for example, from a senior vice president to a vice president or director. This person may feel the project has no value or does not see the value in the project but is stuck with it.”

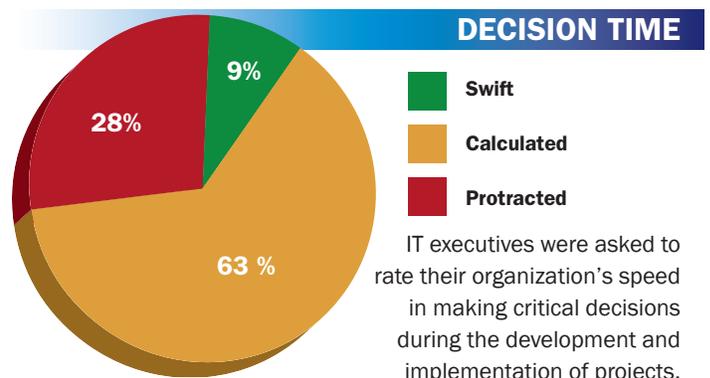


In our CHAOS University workshop our participants came up with five different personalities that we call the Captain Scale. A good-quality to excellent executive sponsor sits squarely in the middle of the personality spectrum, and is like a ship’s captain who keeps the ship going in the right direction. The captain is active in the project, but not too active. He or she attends status meetings and demand briefings. During the voyage the captain makes course corrections and decides on major issues. The captain delegates most decisions and responsibilities to crew members who have the roles of performing the activities needed to sail the ship.

There are two types of poor-quality executive sponsor at the extreme ends of the personality spectrum, characterized as either a deadbeat dad or a mother hen. The deadbeat dad type has little involvement; he shows up at the kick-off meeting and at the end of the project when it fails. The person makes no decisions, ignores e-mails, and never shows up for status meetings or project briefings. At the other end of the spectrum, the mother hen is too involved. She is in constant contact, questions every detail, comes to every meeting invited or not, and hovers over the project team. This person makes all the decisions whether or not it is in his or her area of expertise. Often, the mother hen is very indecisive and decisions are painful and protracted.

The average or mediocre executive sponsor fits in between the deadbeat dad and the captain, or the captain and the mother hen. The executive sponsor who fits between the deadbeat dad and the captain is characterized as the drifter. That person comes in and out of the project, but is rarely there during crucial events. The drifter attends some meetings and misses others, but rarely mentally or verbally participates when in attendance. Sometimes the person answers e-mail; other times not. If answered, it is with few words with no meaning.

The executive sponsor who fits between the mother hen and the captain is characterized as the nitpicker. The nitpicker is always watching, so the team is sensitive to his or her presence but the nitpicker does not add a lot of value. The nitpicker is more likely to find fault with insignificant details and make unjustified criticisms. In both cases of mediocre executive sponsor, the drifter and the nitpicker, decisions are often protracted and difficult.



EXECUTIVE SPONSOR ASSESSMENT

“The organization really needs to understand which type of executive sponsor is running the project. All project sponsors project an image and style of positive or negative. The professionalism and attitude of the executive sponsor will be transferred to other members of the team, resulting in either a motivated-for-success team or an infected group doomed for failure,” said CIO and FDA compliance consultant Kelley. That is why we created the Executive Sponsor Assessment. The Executive Sponsor Assessment is a self-administered examination and is confidential to you, the executive sponsor participant. The Executive Sponsor Assessment is broken into three distinct areas: personality, experience, and skills.

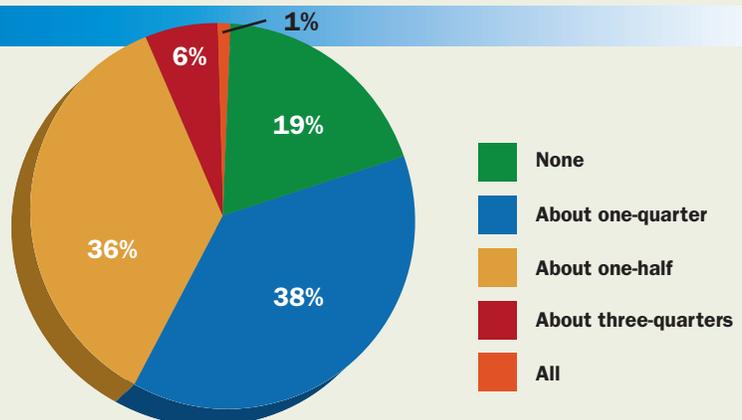
The first area looks at your DNA, or personality, to be an executive sponsor and what type of executive sponsor using the Captain Scale. “I think the difference between a good executive sponsor and a poor executive sponsor comes down to the degree of enthusiasm. The successful projects that I have seen all had an enthusiastic executive sponsor. Those sponsors wanted the project, wanted to see it succeed, and worked to have it succeed. Executive sponsors whose boss suggested they sponsor the project tend to not be successful,” said Bill Niemi, vice president at Fidelity Investments.

The second part of the test looks at your experiences. This includes projects you worked on as an executive sponsor and other attributes around your experiences. “I have been on many project teams. I have seen a range of executive sponsor competency levels, from the very bad to the very good,” said Larry Fleming, IT senior manager. “On the extreme bad side senior management has a vague idea of what they want. They approach IT with their idea and say ‘We need this solution, so see what you can do and let us know.’ Then they walk away and you never hear from them again, but they give you six months or some unreasonable time frame to complete the project.”

The third area of the assessment provides the 50 secrets to being a good executive sponsor. “I found that most executives just do not know how to be an effective executive sponsor. They all have deficiencies that have negative effects on the projects, whether it be political, organizational, or simply from a project perspective,” said Jim Kneeland, CIO, PMO director, and deputy registrar of Motor Vehicles for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The following 50 secrets were developed from the 20 years of CHAOS research, but the order of importance was developed from the DARTS survey. The following are the 50 secrets to being an executive sponsor in rank order of importance.

GOOD EXECUTIVE SPONSORS

IT executives were asked what percentage of their projects’ executive sponsors know how to be good executive sponsors. Their answers indicate that only 33% of executive sponsors are considered good; therefore, 67% are not good executive sponsors.



50 Secrets To Being A Good Executive Sponsor

SECRET 1: INSPIRE

You, as executive sponsor, need to provide inspiration to the project team and stakeholders. You are in a position to offer divine influence and take action to move the team forward to the ultimate project goals. Your inspiration will be infectious, and showing enthusiasm will inspire your team. You need to inspire your team by finding out what will motivate them and go beyond just putting in the time. You need to tap into their creative minds and get them to think positively about the project and the goals of the project. So, the question is simple. How skilled are you at gaining an understanding of what inspires your project team?

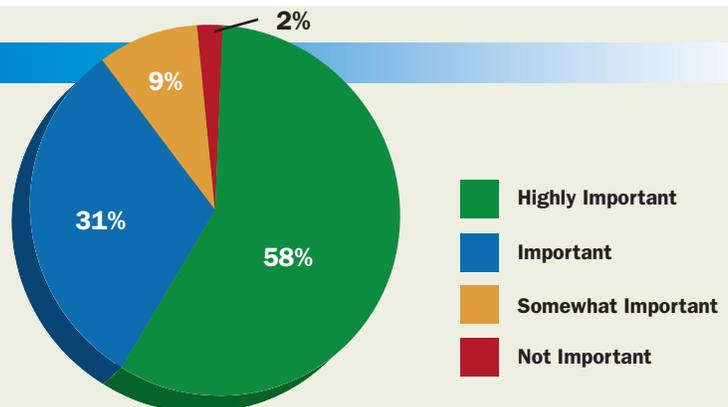
Sometimes finding out what inspires a project team is not easy. “People ask me, ‘How do you motivate the stakeholders?’ That is exactly backward. The question should be, ‘How do you understand what motivates stakeholders?’ That one took me a long time to learn. I am sure you have seen the studies that show money does not always motivate. As an executive sponsor, you need to take the time to find out what motivates your stakeholders and team members. Then you gear the project to take advantage of those motivations,” said Richard Mark Soley, chairman and CEO of the Object Management Group.

The executive sponsor has to have a deep belief in and conviction for the goals of the project. “Passion is key for being a successful executive sponsor. The way the executive sponsor is perceived will carry over to the team and the rest of the stakeholders. The executive sponsor has to firmly believe in the program. Passion is infectious and translates directly to the team and stakeholders. The executive sponsor needs to constantly motivate the team. People look to him or her to get the programming and funding going and run interference when there are problems,” said Mike Sledge, CEO of Robbins-Gioia.

Soley points out that motivation can often be orthogonal and suggests making sure that the stakeholders get out of it what they need to get out of it. “You know some teams in the software industry just want to have a product that works. Other teams want to get the software shipped by a ship date. The quality difference between those two teams is exceptionally different,” said Soley. On the other hand, Sledge said if the team senses that the executive sponsor is just going through the motions, it has a major negative impact on the project. If the executive sponsor is not seen as really caring about the project, the team and stakeholders will conclude that they don’t really need to care either.

IMPORTANCE OF INSPIRING THE TEAM

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master an understanding of what inspires the project team.



SECRET 2: KNOW HOW THE SOLUTION WILL BE USED

You, the executive sponsor, need to focus on the real user needs. This is one of the most important factors in the overall success of a project. As the executive sponsor, you have to ensure the project team does not lose sight of why they are developing the application and/or system. The team is developing the system to be used by users. If you are tuned into the real users' needs, you are aware of them, you understand them, and you make sure the team concentrates on them. How skilled are you at knowing and gaining an understanding of how the users will use the project's solution?

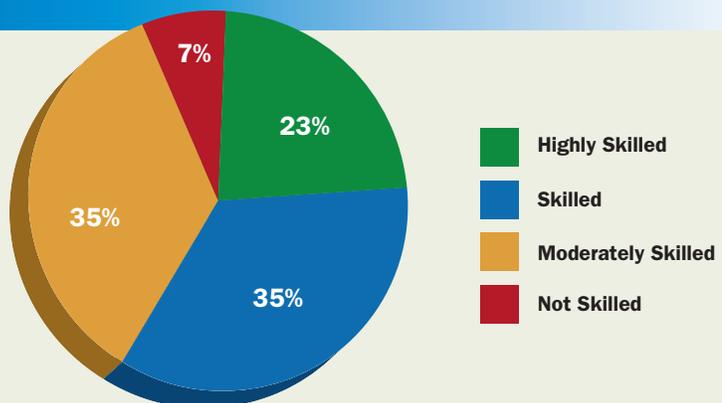
Empathy, the ability to understand stakeholders' emotions and feelings, is key to understanding how users will use the solution. Project teams that not only can walk in the users' shoes, but also feel the ground beneath their feet will be tuned in. Project teams that have empathetic maturity arrange for cognitive structural development to address how to conceive or understand their users' real needs. Cognitive structural development starts with finding the right users, gaining consensus, and performing primary research. However, this is just the beginning, not the end. Since you are building a new system, the empathy is on how the users will adapt and accept a new system that they have not seen.

"When I first became the deputy registrar we had lines out the door for people to apply for and renew their driver's license and vehicle registration. I decided we needed to improve service and, hopefully, reduce costs at the same time. Although I had many years as a customer, I had very little understanding of what the clerks did behind the counter, so practicing empathetic management, I decided to go undercover as a new clerk to find out firsthand what it took to do their job. I spent a couple of weeks behind the counter learning the ropes on new registrations, renewals, licensing, and suspensions," said the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Kneeland.

In their book *Tuned In*, authors Craig Stull, Phil Myers, and David Meerman Scott suggest you create a "buyer persona," which you could translate into a "user persona." Having a user persona would help you understand the true needs of the different stakeholders in order to address their requirements more effectively. Kneeland said he learned how to deal with learner permits and tickets. Looking from the counter outward you get an entirely different perspective trying to deal with the frustrations of the customer. An executive sponsor needs to understand the process of how things really get done in order to make viable changes.

SOLUTION USE SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in understanding how the user will use the solution.



SECRET 3: UNDERSTAND THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

You, as the executive sponsor, do not need to have a deep understanding of the project management methodologies, but you should have basic familiarity with your organization's project management process. For example, you should know if the project or projects you are sponsoring will be developed and executed under the waterfall method or the Agile process. If your organization is using the Scrum technique you might want to understand lean methods. You might want to probe why projects are being done using these methods and what the success rates are for similar projects. How skilled are you at knowing and gaining an understanding of your project management process?

"Scott McNealy, president of Sun Microsystems, had just reorganized Sun from products into functions, and I ended up with all six software divisions. The Solaris project was to involve 800 people and take two and a half years. That project was a hallmark for me in what we actually had to do. Before then, software had reported to hardware and we had six versions of the SunOS, one for every hardware type. Every engineer in the company thought they could make changes to the operating system without formal testing. Sun, like Google today, equated process with bureaucracy and wanted no part of it," said Bill Coleman, founder and president of BEA Systems and a venture angel.

"My feeling is bureaucracy is reaction when the organization does not know how to get things done. So my first task as owner of the new software division was to create the software development framework [SDF], which was really a group of processes, but we kept that a secret. SDF was used until Oracle took over the company. It allowed us to build software, which led the UNIX industry in functionality, quality, and performance," said Coleman. However, not all project management methodologies have to be secret. The Office of Government Commerce (OGC) was established in 2001 to improve procurement and project success within the British central government.

A keystone program within the OGC is the Gateway Process. A key part of the gateway process is peer reviews. The OGC's Gateway Review Process has six gates. This was later developed and evolved into Prince2. Many organizations adapt an Agile methodology by considering how it fits into their organization or project types. The three most popular Agile process methodologies by their style are: Extreme Programming, which is socially centric; Scrum, which is engineering centric; and RUP, which is tool and management centric. While a basic understanding of the project management process is important for executive sponsors, it is more important that you do not take on the role and responsibilities of the project manager.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROCESS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding the project management process.



SECRET 4: SET GOALS

You, as the executive sponsor, set the goals. You also need to be goal-focused, which means having a central point of attention on a clear objective. A project should be an endeavor that has a concrete objective or objectives. The executive sponsor, the project team, and all the stakeholders should have a central point of attention on a clear and understandable goal. You should also make sure that the project goals are aligned with the corporate goals. Executive sponsors who have supported projects that were not aligned have found themselves in precarious situations. How skilled are you at setting goals?

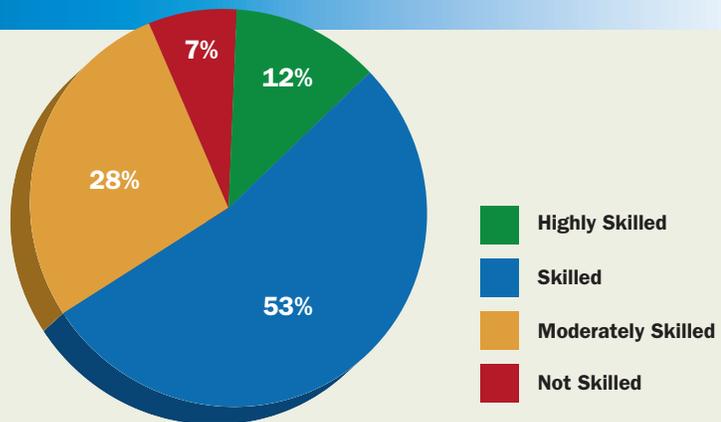
“As project mentor, the worst thing you can do is tell the team how to solve their problems. The best thing to do is help them identify that they have problems and issues. You can help develop solutions for these issues, but it really has to be their resolution, because they have to own it and make it work. If they think it is your solution they can blame you if it does not work. As the executive sponsor, you want the team to own the solution. You cannot manage these people; you have to coach and guide them. These people are professionals. You need to put together a team and delegate responsibility and authority. The only thing I can manage is my time; otherwise I am micromanaging,” said venture angel Coleman.

It is imperative that an executive sponsor get everyone to have the same understanding of the project’s business objectives and goals. Each stakeholder will have his or her own thoughts and new ideas about the project. However, it is imperative that everyone be on the same page. Divergent goals can cause the project to overrun its budget and schedule or even prevent completion.

One of the ways to get everyone on the same page and have a shared business understanding is to envision the business benefits if the project were realized. The project team should have an understanding of how the project would change the business process, workflow, and customer experience. Many projects lose their way in terms of business benefits and never get back on track. Every project should have a sound business plan and stakeholders should have a joint buy-in of this business plan. Each of the stakeholders needs to have a shared business understanding, and that business understanding must support the organization’s corporate vision.

IT INFLUENCE IN SETTING GOALS

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in setting goals.



SECRET 5: GET THE RIGHT PROJECT RESOURCES

As the executive sponsor, you have the ultimate responsibility for assembling the right people, for the right work, at the right time. Skills planning is an approach in which tasks are broken down into the activities that must be done at a particular resource skill level, but often the project manager cannot get the required resources. The problem is there is often a mismatch between the available skills and the skills needed to complete a project. The ability to manage resources at the skill level at any time to identify resource conflicts and make adjustments can be very helpful in decision-making regarding resource allocation. How skilled are you at getting the needed project resources?

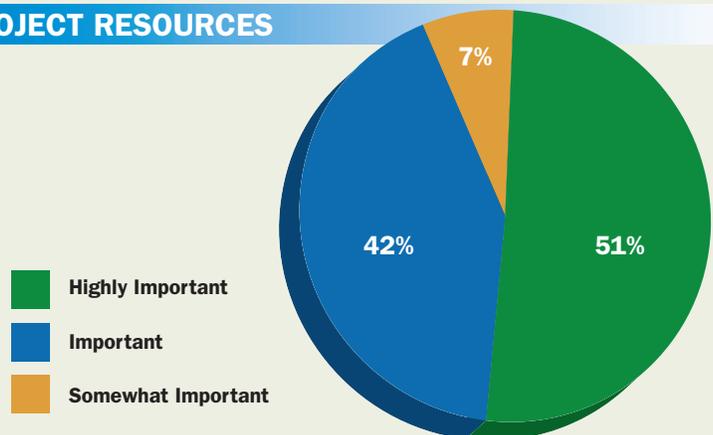
Successful projects need smart, trained people. The human resources component of “Management 101” emphasizes that the staff is your most valuable asset. Not surprisingly, one of the key project success factors identified in Standish Group’s CHAOS research is a competent staff. There are five key fundamentals to ensure staff competency. First, identify the required competencies and alternative skills. Second, provide a good, continuous training program to enhance the staff skills. Third, recruit both internally and externally to provide a balance of experiences. Fourth, provide the right incentive to motivate the staff. Finally, ensure the staff is project-focused.

“The executive sponsor has great leverage. For example, if IT is implementing a CRM and tries to tell the sales group they need to book the order through the new CRM, the salesperson will come back and say, ‘Hey, what do you want me to do, sell or play computer operator?’ The VP of sales, as executive sponsor, can tell the salesperson he or she needs to do both. The VP of sales can tell the salesperson that if he or she does not book the sale through the new CRM system it will not be recognized for commission. That is something an IT person or project manager cannot do. Such an example is a common event in the cycle of a project,” said B. Lee Jones, an experienced and seasoned CIO.

The executive sponsor should help ensure the skills of the team match the needs of the project. To ensure a competent staff, the project manager must understand the project, with guidance from the executive sponsor. The project manager should know the range of activities to be undertaken in the project and be able to match skills with those activities. Certainly the project will need a variety of resources, possibly a project executive, an administrator, technical resources, and testers. The challenge consists of properly identifying the required competencies, the required level of experience, and the expertise needed for each identifiable task.

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT RESOURCES

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding the needed project resources.



SECRET 6: PROMOTE EXCELLENCE

You, as the executive sponsor, are responsible for driving to a high-quality outcome. It is up to you to demand the most positive qualities and performance. It is up to you to instill a strong desire to execute the tasks and work within a project, program, or ecosystem to produce an excellent product or service. You must never settle for mediocrity. You must continually reinforce your commitment to quality and excellence. You must remove the phrase “It’s good enough” from the team and community vocabulary. It is never just good enough! In each and every meeting you need to stress a common message of excellence throughout the project community. How skilled are you at promoting excellence?

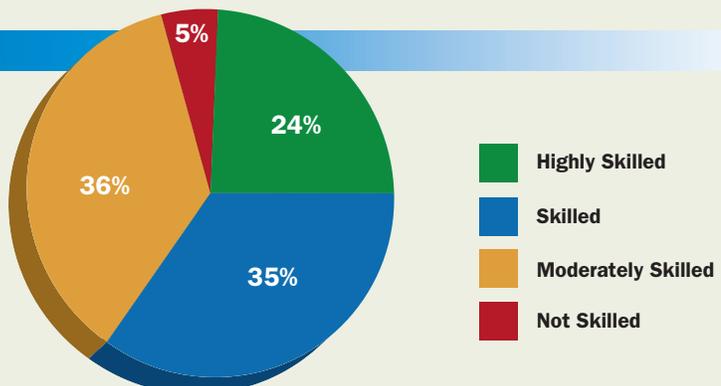
A superior executive sponsor is someone who has a great attitude with a strong desire to succeed, a profound sense of accomplishment, and the ability to produce a high-quality product for the organization. A superior executive sponsor exhibits the traits of self-pride, cares about the team, is concerned about the quality and value of the project, and is driven to produce a superior product that the community will readily accept. An additional element that promotes a superior outcome is the serious pursuit of perfection for the features, functions, programs, and timing of the ecosystem goals or objectives. It is recommended that you surround yourself with stakeholders and team members who are serious, concerned, and have a sense of accomplishment for the project or ecosystem. People who do not care will produce failure.

“In my experience, successful projects have an executive sponsor who knows how to help the team. There is a fine line between an executive sponsor who is focused on driving the value of the project and those who are focused on helping the team achieve success. If the executive sponsor only focuses on driving the benefit without helping the team, he or she could lose the team. You really need to do both. You should always focus on the team in a helpful way. For example, an executive sponsor could help keep the project in bite-size chunks. I think this is super-important. The executive sponsor should help the team by unblocking barriers, prioritizing issues, and making their life simpler,” said Bill Heil, chief bottle washer (CBW) at VMware.

One of the best ways to promote excellence is to clearly communicate the mission and objective. Reinforce your commitment to achieving a successful project outcome and adhering to excellence. Periodically, celebrate the successes. Establish definitions and schedules and report publicly on the metrics for excellence. The executive management needs to have and broadcast commitment to excellence as part of its culture. Focus on areas of excellence and track improvements.

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in promoting excellence.



SECRET 7: UNDERSTAND BUSINESS EVENTS

As the executive sponsor, you need to know that the longer a project is in development, the greater the likelihood that the business requirements will change. In most cases features and functions will not be used because the business environment has changed. For many years the IT industry has categorized requirements into three buckets: mandatory, must have, and nice to have. As the executive sponsor, you must have the team focus on the things you need now and deliver those as quickly as possible. It is also very possible that those features that were just built will be obsolete and will need to be reworked or discarded. So the question is, how skilled are you at understanding what business events affect the value of a project you are sponsoring?

“Sometimes you are in the middle of a project and the corporate strategy changes. This happened to me because of a merger, and the direction of the company changed overnight. So, we had to quit the project at a logical point and restart it in a different direction. There was some rework and additional cost, but we would have been worse off if we continued the project in the then-current direction. It takes a few beers and a couple of pizzas to get over the shock to the executive sponsor when his or her project is in conflict with the corporate goals. When things go south you stop it, fix it, and regroup as fast as you can,” said CIO Jones.

All requirements should be assigned a value, a yield number from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest value. Things that cause variation in value are items such as new sales, lower operational cost, and increase in customer satisfaction. Implementing requirements that support the current business case as rapidly as possible is a key to maximizing return on investment (ROI) and gaining feedback on feature relevance. Always remember the quicker the implementation, the greater the yield. So, you should keep this in mind when rating value.

“It is important to reset the perspective and get everyone back on the same page. This was a very hard conversation with the executive sponsor, and in this case the executive sponsor had to present it to the board. Sometimes you just need to fall on your sword,” said Jones.

The Standish Group’s OptiMix product helps with the rating of your requirements by their value. OptiMix will select the lower-risk item. The user of OptiMix can play what-if games to devise a final plan for execution. Our OptiMix tool will minimize risk through the absolute highest value. For example, if one item has the same yield profile, but has a lower risk as another item OptiMix will recommend the lower-risk item.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS EVENTS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding what business events affect the value.



SECRET 8: COMMUNICATE THE FACTS

In order to do your job as executive sponsor you need to obtain and communicate the facts of the project. “A successful executive sponsor needs to be accessible, communicative up and down the organization, supporting the project manager in breaking down barriers, and getting the resources he or she needs,” said Eugene Bounds, senior vice president, Booz Allen Hamilton. “If the users, stakeholders, and peers have an easy and straightforward method of communication, the more apt they will be to use it. For example, Theodore Roosevelt had his bully pulpit to communicate his vision. How skilled are you in obtaining and communicating the facts?”

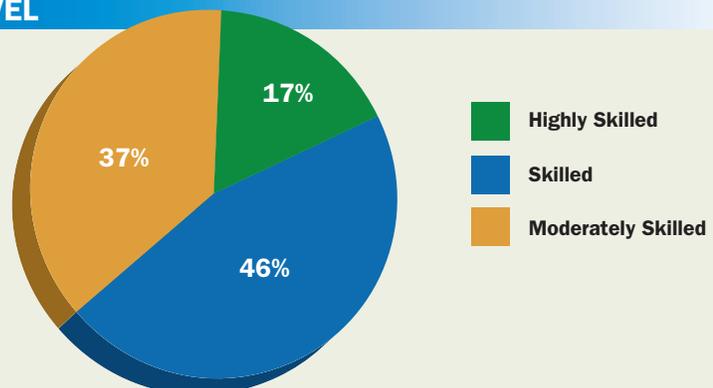
There are several ways to set up a user communication platform, and it has never been easier, cheaper, and quicker to do so. We have e-mail, instant messages, texting, cell phones, conference calls, beepers, WebEx, videoconferences, and the old-fashioned way—in person. Yet with all these communications channels available, projects still fail because of poor communication or no collaboration. In the spring of 2004, a major British government project failed because the project team decided not to involve the users since they were too diverse and geographically scattered. “The one most important investment an executive sponsor can make is to carry the message on the importance and the impact the project has on the organization’s strategic objectives,” said Bounds.

A bully pulpit is an advantageous position from which to express one’s views. President Theodore Roosevelt called the White House his bully pulpit. He used this bully pulpit to bring the Panama Canal issue to the forefront. Roosevelt felt that the United States needed a canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific to increase commerce to Asia and other parts of the world. Digging the canal shortened the distance and vastly improved the movement of goods throughout America. Before the canal, ships would have to travel all the way around South America to get to the Pacific Ocean. Using his bully pulpit, he was able to get the Panama Canal project funded and passed through the U.S. Congress.

Getting the project passed and funded through Congress was just the start of Roosevelt’s use of the bully pulpit. The Panama Canal was one of the greatest project management triumphs of all time. Construction on the canal began in 1904. The decade-long project was a massive undertaking. First, a railroad had to be built to haul equipment and material to the construction site. Second, terminals, wharves, coaling stations, dry docks, machine shops, and warehouses had to be built to support the construction. Third was the digging and construction of the canal itself. While Roosevelt left office in 1909, prior to the canal’s completion in 1914 he was there using his bully pulpit to support the project through many of the most critical issues and events.

COMMUNICATING THE FACTS SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors of obtaining and communicating the facts.



SECRET 9: REWARD OUTSTANDING EFFORT

As the executive sponsor, you need to both recognize and reward outstanding efforts made by your project team. You need to celebrate and praise widely. You also need to present a widespread and favorable public notice, as through intercompany communications, of outstanding efforts. You need to observe a time of thanks for the efforts and commitments of the project participants. It is your time to honor and glorify goals and accomplishments of the project, no matter how small. How skilled are you at rewarding someone for outstanding effort?

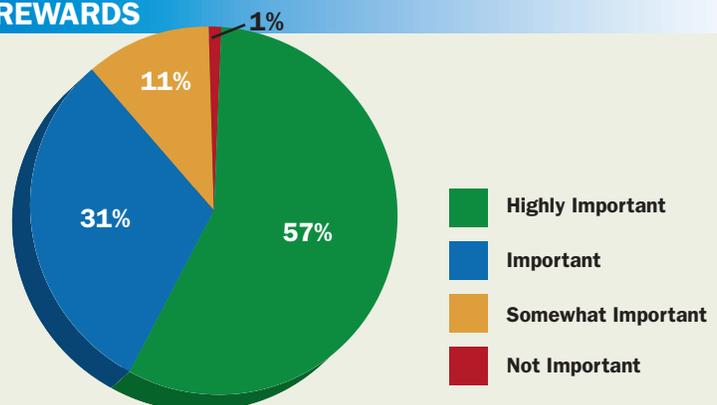
Rewards can come in many forms: a special lunch, a bonus, an extra day off, or pizza and beer on Friday afternoons, to name a few. Rewards can be for an individual or group. You may submit an individual or a group to a company reward system. It is critical that the reward be special. In this game not everyone gets a trophy. The spoils go to the winners, and winners are the people who earn their reward through talent and accomplishments, not for just showing up. Rewards should be handed out on special occasions, such as when a number of steppingstones have been crossed. If rewards become routine and commonplace they will lose their effectiveness. Rewards are also a time when team members who are not doing a good job get ignored.

Tom Kelley's book, *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, is a celebration of creative workers, team building, and an imaginative work environment. The 10 faces of innovation are presented as personas. We learn that it is through these combined personas, in-depth research, and the iterative process that great ideas emerge. Successful projects involve the application of the methodologies, work practices, human resource cultures, and physical infrastructures. Successful projects also include the celebration of accomplishments. The first two personas are: 1) the anthropologist, who observes human behavior and develops a deep understanding of how people interact physically and emotionally with their surroundings; and 2) the experimenter, who prototypes new ideas continually.

Personas three through 10 are: 3) the cross-pollinator, who explores other industries and cultures and connects seemingly unrelated ideas to form new ideas; 4) the hurdler, who develops a knack for overcoming roadblocks; 5) the collaborator, who helps bring eclectic groups together; 6) the director, who gathers talented people and ignites their creativity; 7) the experience architect, who designs compelling experiences; 8) the set designer, who transforms physical environments; 9) the caregiver, who delivers customer care; and 10) the storyteller, who builds internal morale and external awareness through compelling narratives. A perfect cross-functional team will have all of these personas.

IMPORTANCE OF OUTSTANDING EFFORT REWARDS

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master rewarding someone for outstanding effort.



SECRET 10: PROVIDE CLARITY OF PURPOSE

You, as the executive sponsor, need to provide clear purpose for the project. “Clearly, clearly, clearly define the goals and deliverables. The projects that I have seen that are less than successful are where the goals and deliverables are not clearly defined. The team gets confused and does not know how to work toward the goal. As executive sponsor, you need to set reasonable goals and make clear to the team the measurements for the team,” said Raj Nathan, chief marketing officer at Sybase. “Unity of purpose begins with a common understanding of the program benefits,” said Robbins-Gioia’s Sledge. How skilled are you at providing clarity of purpose?

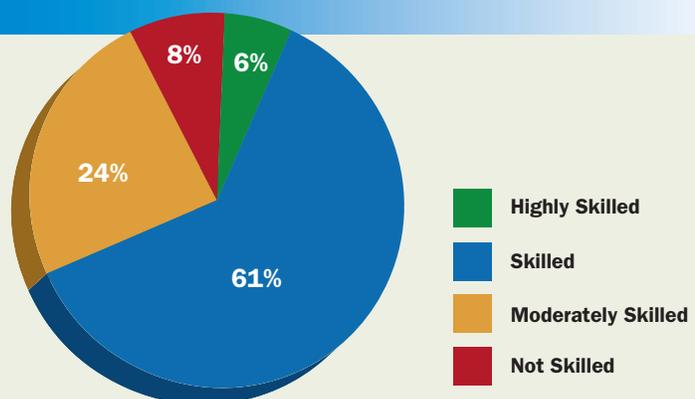
Clarity of purpose starts with simple vision. The simple vision should be concise and to the point. In written form, the simple vision should be clearly spelled out in short sentences and paragraphs. It should focus only on the purpose and objectives. In presentation form, vivid graphics and block diagrams work the best. As the project moves forward, the executive sponsor needs to recognize the stakeholders’ contribution and show how that contribution ties back to the simple vision. The executive sponsor needs to track the project vision and the corporate vision to realign them, as changes to both may occur over time.

If the project is diverging from the current corporate vision the executive sponsor needs to take corrective action. Simple vision should include a statement of participation and the roles of the stakeholders. If the project warrants, it could include a request for support and a commitment to contribution. A mistake many executive sponsors make is they do not articulate the vision. The executive sponsor needs to clearly communicate to the team what he or she wants to accomplish with the program. Executive sponsors need to have detailed information and measurements to know if they are getting the performance results that they want out of the program.

As executive sponsor, if you can state in a clear and simple manner your vision, the benefits and the goals, and how they match corporate strategy, you can usually win over the skeptics for support. Your vision must be presented in a manner that everyone can understand. It must align all the stars in order to match the process and the systems with the business goals. “You need to be able to link the program to the overall strategy of the organization and show it to the team. The program vision paints a picture of what the organization looks like after the program is completed—specifically, how the results have helped the organization,” said Sledge.

IT INFLUENCE IN CLARITY OF PURPOSE

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in providing clarity of purpose.



SECRET 11: RECOGNIZE TEAM MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

While you, the executive sponsor, are the driving force behind the project, no project can be completed without a team. It is important that you recognize team members' contributions. This is for both big items and the smallest detail. Celebrate the successes no matter how small. A good job and self-satisfaction is what most workers look for. But as the team progresses, sometimes extra benefits such as time off, bonuses, and free lunches revitalize the team with a true sense of appreciation for their efforts. So, how skilled are you at recognizing team member contributions, both big items and small details?

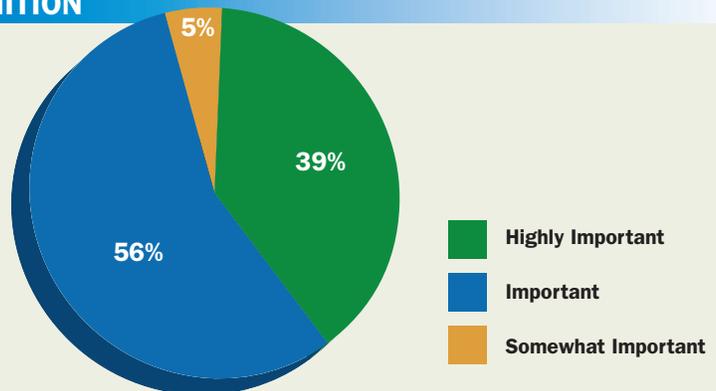
"An executive sponsor is a coach, not a manager. As coach, you want to be a sounding board to listen to the team's issues and problems. The first thing the team needs to do is to write down their goals and objectives. So they take this huge, fuzzy problem and deconstruct it into manageable chunks. However, they always have to come back to the vision. The vision has to be from the top down, because you always have to come back to the reason you are doing the project in the first place. This starts from first principles—the most important goals. These principles then turn to metrics and measurable items that turn into processes that can be predictive and quantified," said venture angel Coleman.

No executive sponsor can be successful without an organized, skilled, cooperative, and congenial team. A coach also needs a good quarterback. Like a quarterback in football, the project manager can do nothing without the front line for protection, a great running back to push through those holes in the defense, and great receivers to catch the play action pass or a long bomb. Each team member knows his or her role and responsibilities, takes on ownership, and is accountable for the final outcome to reach the goal line. It is your job to make sure you have a good team and the team knows their roles and responsibilities.

Show your appreciation and give praise to the team for their efforts. You will always have an individual who shines above the rest, but be careful not to over-praise that individual or overshadow the other team members. You do not want to alienate him/her from the rest of the team. Show your team that you are committed to providing your support and backing at all times. Become a buffer to prevent unnecessary distractions and annoyances. Promote the team on their accomplishments. The team must feel that the project is achievable and will benefit the organization. In order for them to commit as a team they must know there is full commitment from the executive sponsor and the rest of the organization.

IMPORTANCE OF TEAM MEMBER RECOGNITION

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master recognizing team members' contributions, big and small.



SECRET 12: OBTAIN DECISION ACCEPTANCE

Benjamin Franklin said, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” You, as the executive sponsor, will need to make hundreds of decisions in the course of an average-size project. The real concern is getting people to accept your decisions. If team members just go through the motions of acceptance, but they really do not believe in the decisions, then their compliance can impede the project’s progress. In order for a project to be successful you need team members to embrace your decisions. The question is, how skilled are you at getting people to accept your decisions?

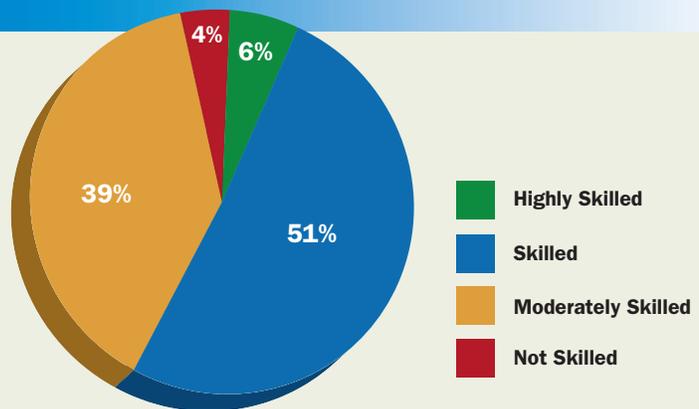
“The executive sponsor for the custom sales force automation system at this company did not dictate what he wanted and did not allow IT to tell them what they needed. He brought in the people from the field to tell real-life stories. So we created a wish list of what their real needs were and wrote the specifications around these stories. What he did was create user ownership of the project,” said CIO Kelley. “The executive sponsor made them feel like it was their project, and he supported them by being in every meeting, getting the funding, and removing any roadblocks that got in the way of progress.”

“To me, the difference between a coach and manager is very simple. Managing implies to me that you are telling somebody what to do: ‘You are going to stand at this place in this production line. You are then going to pick up the wrench, and when this part comes by you, turn the screw to the right until you see 4.4 pounds of pressure. You are then going to stop and wait for the next part to come down the belt.’ If you have managed everything about that job, you have paid not one cent for the intelligence of the individual,” said venture angel Coleman.

According to Kelley, the executive sponsor of the sales automation system would make decisions quickly. He insisted that everyone knew what was going on and that the minutes of every meeting were published in a timely manner. “One of the major success factors was his decisiveness in making a decision when one was required and not forming a team or leaving people hanging,” said Kelley. Such decisiveness helps executive sponsors gain acceptance of their decisions. As Coleman points out, “In the world we are in, you are hiring people for their knowledge and intelligence.” Therefore, smart people often do not take decisions at face value and you need to have talent for them to accept your decisions.

IT INFLUENCE IN DECISION ACCEPTANCE

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in getting people to accept their decisions.



SECRET 13: DEVELOP QUALITY USER RELATIONSHIPS

It is critical for you, as the executive sponsor, to develop and maintain a quality relationship with the user and user groups. Building and maintaining a rapport facilitates communications and understanding. Attendees of CHAOS University determined that the need to understand the user's business and to communicate effectively with the user are key to establishing user rapport. A quality relationship begins with creating a cooperative environment with mutually agreeable ground rules for effective teamwork. This environment should include negotiating and establishing formal or informal contracts and ensuring that the rules of interplay are clearly understood. How skilled are you at developing a quality relationship with users?

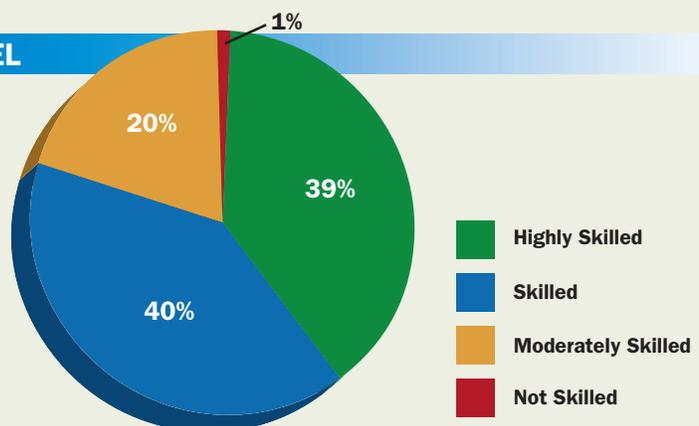
"I'm a lawyer who likes to negotiate, not litigate, outcomes, but I know I often talk too much, talking when I should be listening. The biggest lesson I learned from the convention center project is that you need to learn to really listen. Listening to others, including our neighbors, made our building of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center so much better, and it helped us build a good reputation with our neighbors and city leaders," said Gloria Cordes Larson, president of Bentley University and former chair of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority. You should hold regular progress meetings involving the user to test this quality relationship. If you determine that the relationship has deteriorated, immediate remedial action is required.

"For example," Larson continued, "the South Boston neighborhood was very concerned that this huge building would loom over their homes and cast shadows. So our architect revised the design of the portion of the building closest to the neighborhood to not go over the height of a typical Boston three-story row house, while the front of the building soared to a much greater height with a prominent canopy, appropriately announcing its singular design. We included more green space, we repositioned the building on our site to reduce the look of its massive size, and we located loading docks on the side farthest from the neighborhood to reduce noise," said Larson.

"We took a lot of feedback from local citizens and business people directly into consideration when designing and building the center. This requires the executive sponsor to do a lot more listening than talking, and I'm glad to say that our whole team did just that," said Larson. Once you have established a quality relationship, the next requirement is to maintain it by making it easy for users to be involved. The project executive sponsor should understand how the user likes to communicate, such as via text, instant messages, e-mail, WebEx, telephone, or in person. You should try to use the user's favorite method as much as possible.

QUALITY USER RELATIONSHIP SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in having a quality relationship with users.



SECRET 14: UNDERSTAND THE EXECUTIVE SPONSOR ROLE

In our opinion, the executive sponsor is the owner of the project. You, as owner of the project, have the full weight and responsibility for the success or failure of the project squarely on your shoulders. “I see the role of an executive sponsor not so much as a chief executive officer, but as more of a ‘chief enabling officer.’ As chief enabling officer, my job is to make sure I provide the support, resources, and guidance to allow our academic and administrative team to be successful,” said Larson of Bentley University. How skilled are you at understanding your role in the project?

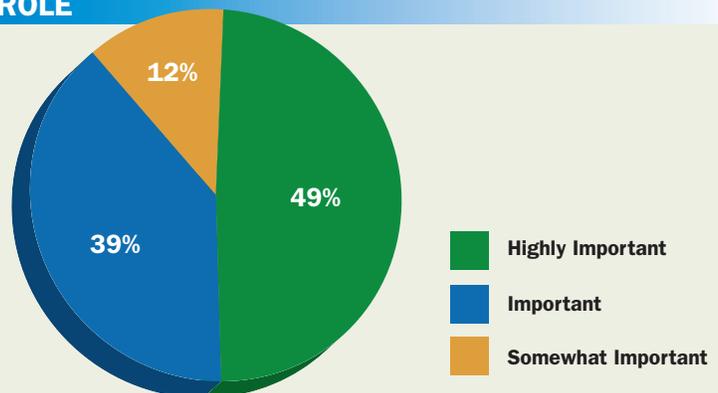
As the executive sponsor, you own the vision, direction, and the project’s mission. “The executive sponsor helps set the vision and the strategic direction to accomplish our mission. An equally important job of the chief enabling officer is communication around these things. I can say without hesitation that you can never have enough communication. And it’s not only important for the executive sponsor to communicate regularly with key audiences, but the entire leadership team needs to do so as well. Projects work best when you have a team of ‘evangelists’ spreading the word and reporting feedback from your stakeholders,” said Larson.

“I don’t think about being an executive sponsor as simply my ‘day job.’ I think about it as being my job. When I became president of Bentley, I decided that I would try to be both visible and accessible. I attend numerous meetings and functions on and off campus every week. I have parties at my home for students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni throughout the year. So when we’re in the middle of developing a program like the new MBA, I look for every chance I can to talk about our plans and get feedback. An executive sponsor should always be on the lookout for opportunities to help the team get more support,” said Larson.

Projects that have an active, responsive, and skilled executive sponsor fare better than those left to hang alone without a champion. An executive sponsor who is readily available to answer, suggest, influence, and resolve appeals indicates responsiveness. Executive responsiveness increases the chances of success. The executive sponsor needs to be personally accountable to ensure a successful outcome. The major skills needed include: vision, commitment, rapid decision-making, measurements, and celebrating. The greater the executive’s skills in managing and owning projects, the greater the chances of success. A nonresponsive executive, on the other hand, increases the chances that a project will experience overruns or failure. If you are a good executive sponsor you will make tough business decisions and reduce political conflicts.

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills in understanding their role in the project.



SECRET 15: UNDERSTAND RISK AND REWARD

The Standish Group characterizes projects or requirements that have both a high risk and a high yield as panda bears. The strange name came from our workshops that utilized a zoo scenario. We had participants weigh the risks and rewards of obtaining a panda bear versus bringing in other animals with less risk and/or less gain. The idea is that there are few real panda bears in projects, but when they do occur they need to be considered with great care. You, as the executive sponsor, need to decide whether to keep the panda bear or not. You need to consider cost, risk, and gain collectively in your decision-making. How skilled are you at understanding the project's risk and reward?

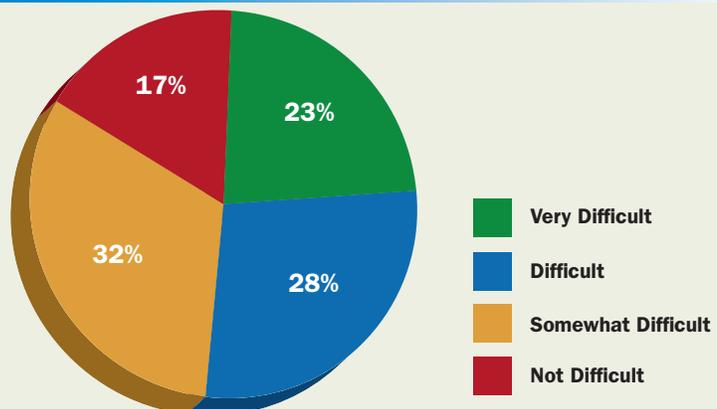
Everybody loves panda bears. It is proven that when you have one in a zoo it draws people; in turn, revenue yield or return goes up. Conversely, a panda bear can be expensive and may not adapt well to the environment—it can get sick and die, and therefore is a very high risk. When weighing features and functions within an application, the same thought process must be used. What has a high yield and what is the risk? Every requirement should be assigned values of cost, return rate, gain, and risk. Meet with all stakeholders to validate your assumptions.

Panda bears are rare, and most projects will not have them. It is also very unlikely that a project would have more than one. Be careful not to label features and functions as a “panda bear.” A panda bear should be clearly definable. When in doubt, leave it out. Once you have identified a feature or function as a panda bear you can suspend the not-doing-the-risky-things-first directive. Do the panda bear first. If it fails, you may want to try again or eliminate it altogether. Make everyone aware that the specific feature and/or function is a panda bear and that it is risky, but if completed it will have major benefits for the organization.

“What I have seen is projects with a very concrete set of success criteria always do much better than projects that are vague. The success criteria include hard, quantifiable numbers that the team can refer back to as they move the project forward. You can have a lot of high-level goals that are not measurable, but they do not help make critical decisions. You also will have problems and the team will need to optimize trade-offs, prioritize, and solve problems. It helps if you can refer back to the established first principles. First principles state that we are trying to solve these issues for our customers, partners, or company. In general, it has been my experience that projects with super-clear success criteria are more successful,” said VMware's Heil.

DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING RISK AND REWARD

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills in understanding the project's risk and reward.



SECRET 16: MAKE QUICK DECISIONS

You, as the executive sponsor, will be called on to make many decisions in the life cycle of a project. Standish Group research shows that latency between decisions is a major contributor to project delays and failures. There are literally thousands of decisions that have to be made during the life of a project. Standish Group research shows that for every \$1,000 in project cost, the organization will need to make 1.5 decisions. A \$1 million project will produce 1,500 decisions, while a \$5 million project will have 7,500 decisions. During a typical medium-size ERP system implementation the organization will have to make more than 10,000 decisions. So, how skilled are you at making quick decisions?

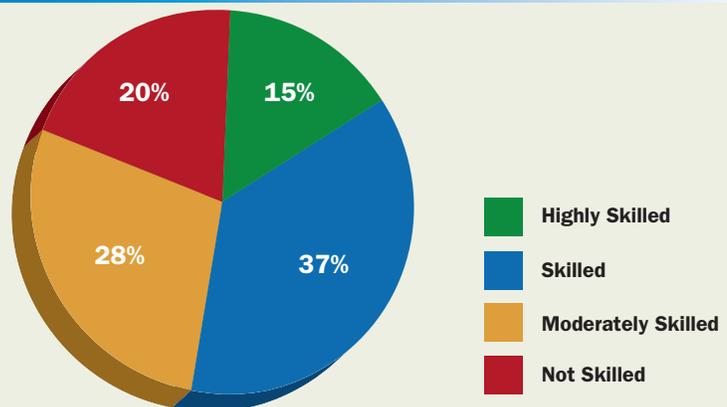
While the volume of decisions comprising a project can be concerning, it is the time that lapses from when an issue first arises until a decision is made that is the most problematic. For example, if the average issue decision latency is only one hour, then the added decision time to a \$1 million project is six months (1,500 decisions = 1,500 hours). On the other hand, if the project team can cut the latency time in half it adds only three months to the project time (1,500 decisions = 750 hours).

Let us take the case of two pharmaceutical companies in Chicago, or the tale of two CRMs. The companies are similar in size, number of accounts, and salespeople. They used the same software package. Both started to implement a CRM system about four years ago. One finished in six months; the other is still not finished. The key difference was the one that finished in six months had a hard stop and had set up a rapid decision process to reduce decision latency.

“The key reason for making fast decisions has nothing to do with always making right decisions. It has everything to do with being open to mistakes. I think we have built a business culture since the 1920s where we want to put our top managers on a pedestal and they make the right decision every time,” said the OMG’s Soley. “I think that is a very serious mistake. The fact is that if you are innovative it means you have failed a bunch of times. If you don’t try new things you are just not going to be successful. I think a good executive is quick to say ‘yes’ and also quick to say ‘we are done.’ A good executive sponsor has to be open to failure and recognize when a failure has occurred, and learn from that failure. You learn more from failure than from success.”

IT INFLUENCE IN MAKING QUICK DECISIONS

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in making quick decisions.



SECRET 17: DEMAND OBJECTIVITY AND TRANSPARENCY

As the executive sponsor, you must demand project transparency. Transparency starts with being objective. Being objective is expressing or dealing with facts or conditions of a project, program, or circumstances as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations. The major problem is everyone has their own version of reality and experiences. A solid solution is to make everything transparent and continuous. This starts at the top with executive leadership. The communication must be honest and frank. Last but not least is that anyone who is not honest or forthcoming is penalized. How skilled are you at demanding objectivity and transparency?

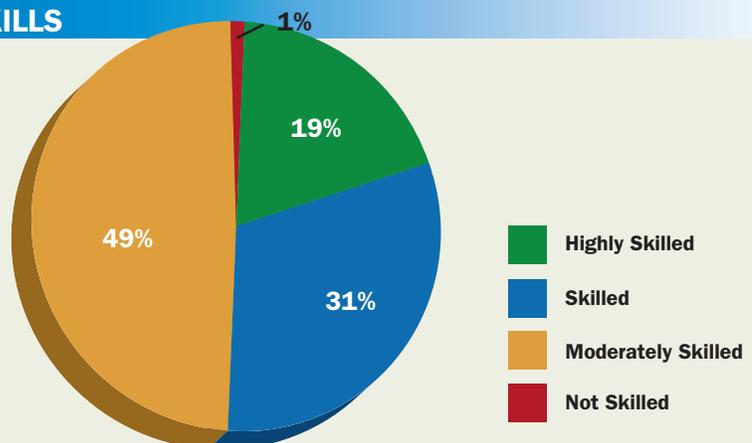
You need to consider objectively the effect that changes to the business and requirements have on the success or failure of the project. If these changes have a negative effect they need to be highlighted and considered in light of the organization's goals. "Ideally, I think everyone would want more objectivity, but in a large corporation it is more about compliancy. If you recognize that the schedule is the most important item, then you need to deal with it. A lot of times the executives just don't seem to care if the results are 100%, they just want to know that the project is on schedule and on budget," said IT senior manager Fleming.

You could be a barrier to objectivity. You may have unrealistic expectations or a private agenda. There could be some lack of transparency with the true sense of purpose. You may have a false assumption. You will be able to overcome these barriers with information, demonstration, and honest feedback. Objectivity is the driver that provides the aim or goal of the project with its intended or desired outcome. You need to demand feedback because many might believe you are not interested. "So, to be completely transparent about what is really going on is not as important to many executive sponsors. It seems as though the executive sponsor would just as soon not be burdened with the details," said Fleming.

You should demand the organization have a comprehensive communication plan and platform that provide meaningful feedback. There should be a periodic reevaluation and update of the purpose of projects and programs that coincide with the business goals. In order to be objective you must have correct and up-to-date information. While information is important, nothing beats a demonstration. Demonstration is where the rubber truly meets the road. Ask, demand, and review concrete results early, often, and in-depth. Demonstration provides the ultimate in objective opinion, for you will know right away what progress is being made and how to move the project forward.

OBJECTIVITY AND TRANSPARENCY SKILLS

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in demanding objectivity and transparency.



SECRET 18: MANAGE FINANCIAL CHANGES

Managing change is key to managing projects. The inability to do this well is almost always a major contributor to failure. You, as the executive sponsor, need to be very concerned about effecting change, since the slightest comment could set the project team in a whole new direction. Change management is all about setting realistic expectations. The importance of this critical factor cannot be understated. Almost nothing can cause a misalignment between expectations and deliverables more quickly than a failure to manage change. You are the keeper of the purse and you need to know what impact changes have on the cost and budget of the project. How skilled are you in financially managing changes to the project?

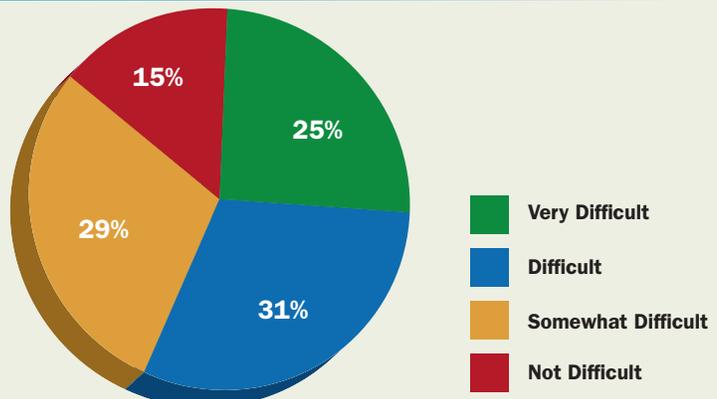
You will almost certainly mentally process the casual assessment of a verbal change request during a hallway conversation as a commitment to include the change at no cost, and with no impact to the original project schedule! You need to demand to understand the financial impact of changes, including cost, return, risk, and schedule. “Projects get behind a dollar or a day at a time. My observation is they get behind because people cannot make decisions. Therefore, it is important to establish a process that enables you to quickly gain the decision information you need,” said Sledge of Robbins-Gioia.

Process consists of the steps to effect change. To determine whether the project team is effectively managing change and to prevent unrealistic expectations, you need to do the following: Make sure there is a clear statement of the requested change and the associated costs, risk, and gain. It’s important to have meaningful project steppingstones, and they need to be set at frequent intervals to prevent irreparable errors if the project goes off-track. “For example, if you have to decide on a baseline change, you would want to know the reasons for the change; how it will affect the cost, time, and scope of the project; and alternatives to and trade-offs from the change,” said Sledge.

The project team should have a consultative and approval process in place to consider change requests. The project team most likely will need additional time and funding. You might have to move or delete some other requirements. That is why having a ranking by cost, risk, and gain is such a powerful tool for deciding whether or not to accept or deny a change request. “Let’s face it, you will never have 100% of the information you would like, but you need to make timely decisions. Quickly establish the minimum set of information and the means to collect the data you need to evaluate the trade-off decisions. If you do not, you will waste time, burn money, and get deeper into the hole,” said Sledge.

DIFFICULTY OF FINANCIALLY MANAGING CHANGES

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills in financially managing changes to the project.



SECRET 19: DETERMINE EXPLICIT USER NEEDS

You, as the executive sponsor of a project, might have intimate knowledge of the explicit user needs just from your position and experience. However, if this is not the case you might consider making sure the project team has conducted and is able to present primary research. The Standish Group's three-step process to gain valuable user information includes interviews, focus groups, and surveys. "The only thing sacred in our company is the user," said Ken Edwards, CIO of Ameritech. "We do focus groups, interviews, and demonstrations to ensure we meet the users' needs. No one in our company talks about internal standards or restricted products. It is all about the user." How skilled are you in obtaining the right information on explicit user needs?

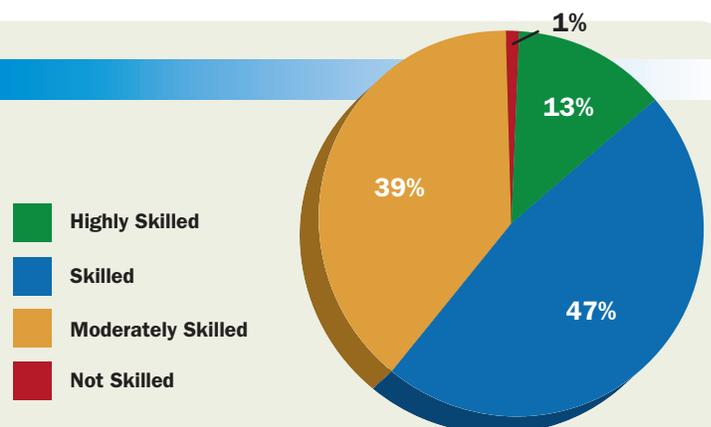
"Over the course of my career, I have worked on projects as both a project manager and an executive sponsor. My comments are a mix of thoughts from both experiences. When I look back on these projects it is hard to separate the two. I think these experiences provide a different and valuable perspective to being a good executive sponsor. However, when I am the project manager, I focus on getting the project done through the project plan. When I am an executive sponsor, I focus on achieving a business objective with a vision and mission that are tied to the organization's business plan and strategic goals. I think it is helpful for the executive sponsor to have managed a project," said Daniel Langermann, IT-2-Business consultant.

A good example of knowing user needs happened at midnight on October 25, 1942, on Guadalcanal. The Imperial Japanese Army attacked the U.S. Marines who were defending Henderson Field, the island's air base. The Marines' defense was a line of water-cooled machine guns. About 100 feet from their position, the Marines set up wires with cans attached. Far away, the Marines could hear the Japanese advancing, but they kept still. When the Japanese tripped over the wires and the cans rattled, the Marines fired their machine guns with 900 rounds per minute. The battle ended three hours later. The Japanese were defeated. Only one American was wounded, 26-year-old Marine Gunnery Sergeant "Manila John" Basilone.

The M1917 fired bullets so fast that the barrel would melt from the heat. The original design of the rapid-fire gun shot 450 rounds per minute. However, the rapid fire caused the machine gun to vibrate. The vibration impaired accuracy and at 1,000 feet, the gun would fire 9 feet from the target. Since the M1917 was mainly a defensive weapon, long-range accuracy was crucial. On Guadalcanal, Sergeant Basilone realized this problem and reengineered the weapon to reduce the vibration. In doing so, he also increased the shots per minute from 450 to 900. Such rapid fire caused the Japanese to think that there were many more Marines at Henderson Field than there really were. As a user of the M1917, Sergeant Basilone was intimately involved.

EXPLICIT USER NEEDS SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in having the right information on explicit user needs.



SECRET 20: ENDORSE THE BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

You, as the executive sponsor, must be committed to endorsing the business objectives of the project. You should have a vested interest and the most to gain by the implementation of the project. Before you take any action you must take the pulse of the organization for the project and the goals for which they are aspiring to achieve. By your endorsement you must then capture the interest and commitment of the organization in supporting the project. If you cannot endorse the business objectives of the project or find that you can no longer endorse these objectives, you need to decline or cease being the project's sponsor. How skilled are you at endorsing the project's business objectives?

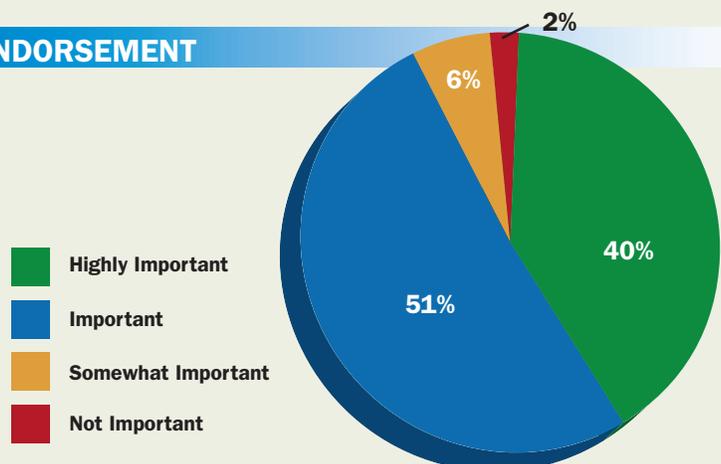
"My approach to being an executive sponsor is to be the link between those who execute and implement the project and those who derive benefit and value from the project. I look to the project team to provide solutions and options. These options should include things like, 'Here is what we can do at different cost, time, and scope points. For example, if you want to speed it up then this limits scope. If you want to achieve more, then this is the increased time, cost, and scope.' This is so I, as the executive sponsor, can make an informed decision. In other words, my job is to act as the bridge between those who can make it happen and those who derive benefit when it does happen," said Langermann of IT-2-Business.

A major issue is that sometimes the business objectives are not clear. "I think 'having a clear business objective' is one of those phrases that is overused. The projects that are the most interesting are the innovative ones where you may not be aware of the clear business results until after the project is done. Innovation does not mean doing the same thing over and over again. Innovation is doing something new. In my experience, where a project has vague [goals] or [lacks] clear business objectives is where we have found breakthrough value," said Soley of the OMG.

You, as the executive sponsor, should know the difference between breakthrough projects and average projects. What you most want to guard against is not project failure, but project management failure. "As a standards organization, success for us is a standard that is adopted not only by the members, but anyone in the industry in general. The standard should provide some level of interoperability, portability, and reuse that did not exist before the standard. Therefore, while an executive sponsor should have a framework to assess value, he also needs to be somewhat flexible to allow for innovation," said Soley.

IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS OBJECTIVES ENDORSEMENT

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills in endorsing the project's business objectives.



SECRET 21: DISTRIBUTE DECISION POWER

Time is the enemy of all projects and that includes decision time. You, as the executive sponsor, should not and cannot make all the decisions. Therefore, you need to have a method for how decisions should be made through the life of a project. You need to consider the impact of these decisions. Who makes the low-impact decisions? Who makes the high-impact decisions? How critical does a decision need to be before it comes to you? You need to consider segmenting the decisions based on roles and responsibilities. You need to consider grouping the decisions. How well do you distribute decision power?

Maintaining high velocity is key to project success, so don't impede speed by insisting on making every decision. "My response should be limited to 'yes,' 'no,' or 'we need more information to back up your recommendations,'" said Kirby Wadsworth, international marketing executive. "I think we are all too familiar with the concept of a 'rock-fetch' where skittish executives who don't have the courage to make a decision say, 'Well, good stuff so far team, but that rock isn't quite the right color, so you need to bring us another one,' sending the project team off in search of yet 'one more rock' and 'just one more' until the team's energy is exhausted and the project stalls."

Sometimes it is hard, as Bentley University's Larson can attest. "In higher education," she said, "it takes much longer than any other type of organization I'm familiar with to come to a decision. Decision-making in this environment requires process, more process, and more process, and then you finally reach a point where you can call the question. For example, with the new MBA, there were numerous forums for the faculty to ask questions and provide their viewpoint—all designed to get people's input, build consensus, and ultimately create a comfort level with what was a large-scale overhaul of our MBA program.

"We were creating a whole new structure that involved team teaching and a studio format that didn't exist previously, so there was a lot of understandable apprehension," Larson continued. "As the executive sponsor, I needed to link arms with my academic leadership team and let everyone know that this was a personal priority. We all had to be united in our view that over time, the new MBA could have a positive effect on our rankings and on our standing in the education and business worlds. This was a democratic process, so we ultimately had to call the question and get people to vote. In the end the new MBA prevailed with a sizable majority, but it was no landslide."

IT INFLUENCE IN DISTRIBUTION OF DECISION POWER

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management's skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in the distribution of decision power to team members.



SECRET 22: OVERCOME ARROGANCE

As the executive sponsor, you need to be aware of arrogance. Arrogance denotes overconfidence, pride, and hubris. Hubris is often associated with a lack of knowledge, interest in, and exploration of history, combined with a lack of humility. Really smart people do not need to make themselves feel better at the expense of others. “I am always amazed at how executives in business fail to realize that other people’s motivations are not the same as their own motivations. You should never put up with dishonest people—that is a showstopper. However, people have very different motivations and if you expect that they will have the same outlook as you then you are never going to succeed,” said the OMG’s Soley. So, how capable are you at recognizing and overcoming arrogance?

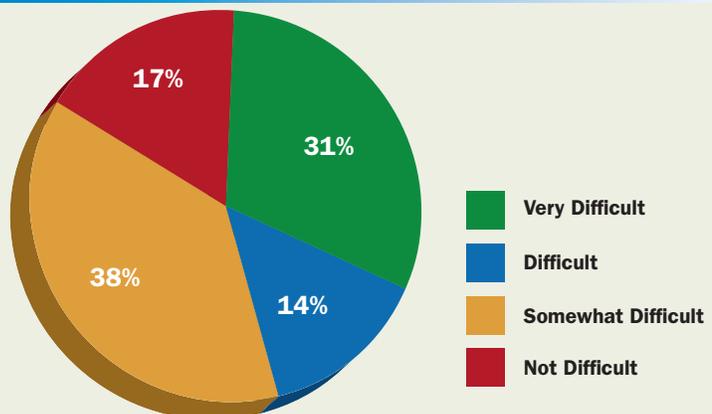
“I think one of the best ways to deal with arrogance is to know two things: Who are your allies, and who are not your allies. So, we were installing SAP into this organization. One of the team members said he knew everything there was to know about SAP,” said CIO and FDA compliance consultant Kelley. “So, I said, ‘Great, tell me how you set up global security’ and laid out my problem. He could not answer some simple questions about the security. He was never arrogant again, but I knew he was not an ally either.”

Soley added, “One thing I don’t mind is earned arrogance; I do very much dislike unearned arrogance. As an executive sponsor I will put up with more from people who have shown me they are innovative and creative. I will not put up with people that have not earned the right to be arrogant. You just need to be aware that people’s motivations, thought processes, dearly held beliefs, approaches to problems, assumptions, and prejudices are likely to be different than your own.”

Kelley said, “It reminds me of a story about George Washington. During a march, George Washington took off his coat to help some of the soldiers move a log across the road. Later that night one of his lieutenants said he should have not taken off his coat and helped the troops. It was unbecoming of an officer. Washington then took a foot-long piece of string and told the lieutenant to push it in a straight line. The lieutenant tried to push the string, but it just curled up. Washington then took the string by the head and moved it forward in a straight line. He then looked at the lieutenant and said, ‘That is called leadership.’”

DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING ARROGANCE

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of overcoming arrogance.



SECRET 23: OVERCOME FRAUDULENCE

Fraudulence can take many forms. In our book, *The Public Execution of Miss Scarlet*, the title character does many things to try to cover up the real status of the project. Some of the things she does are intended to deceive her superiors and co-workers. Other things she does only fool herself into believing that she can turn things around. When she does confront her superior on the real status of the project she is rebuffed. Her stakeholders also refuse to believe the project is going badly. Other characters in the book rationalize why they are having problems with the project. Still other characters are just in denial, while others in the story have their own fraudulent behavior. As an executive sponsor, you need watch out for both outright fraudulence and denial.

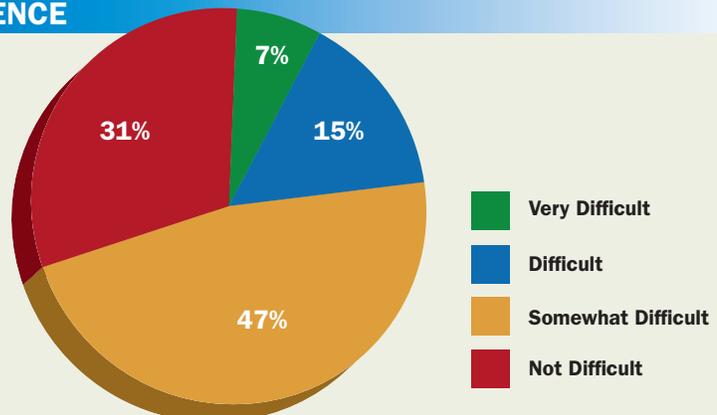
He won the popular vote, he thought he won the Electoral College, and he thought he was the new president. However, there were 20 electoral votes in dispute. If they went to him he would win by 19 votes; if they went to his Republican rival then he would lose by one vote. So he engaged in a bitter legal and political battle over who won the State of Florida. He accused the Republicans of election fraud and ballot box stuffing. His supporters flocked to Florida to oversee the recounts and look at the condition of ballots. A special board was set up to adjudicate disputed ballots. The controversy went on for months.

Congress had the final say on the election and it became a very partisan endeavor. In the end a backroom deal was struck, that if the federal government removed their troops from the South and ended Reconstruction, the Democrats would concede to the Republican. Samuel J. Tilden lost to Rutherford B. Hayes in the 1876 presidential election by one vote. However, throughout his one term in office Hayes would be dogged and labeled a fraudulent president. One of the easiest ways to combat project fraudulence is through transparency. If everything is out in the open it is hard to fool people.

“You have to be truthful. You tell people they have to tell the truth. Do not foster unrealistic expectations. Try not to embellish. The executive sponsor needs to get everyone to commit and have buy-in to the project. You don’t have to be a cheerleader, or worse yet, a consummate phony, said CIO and FDA compliance consultant Kelley. “There is a variety of pieces within a project [for which] you really need to know the truth; for example, target dates. If you have a target date and you know you are not going to make it, you tell everyone and make sure you tell them why. It is fraudulent if you lie about the date because people are making plans based on the target date. However, if you and I agree on a date that I don’t like, that is not fraudulence. It is simply telling the truth.”

DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING FRAUDULENCE

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of overcoming fraudulence.



SECRET 24: USE VALUE AND RISK METRICS

You, as the executive sponsor, need to be keenly aware of both risk and reward. Many people think of these items in the beginning of the project and never consider them again until there is a problem, and even then do not go back and look at them. However, these two items will continually change throughout the life of a project for many reasons, including changes in the business. In most commercial businesses there are only two types of project objectives: Those mandated by government organizations, such as the IRS, or those done to improve the profits and value of the organization. How good are you at using value and risk metrics?

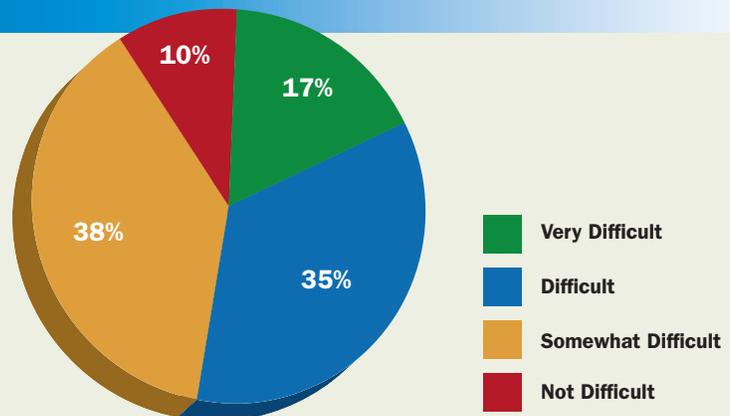
“Different people use different measurements; many people use a percent of revenue or of total expenses. So, say a project has a cost of \$1 million. If the total company expenses are \$1 billion, then the cost is one-tenth of a percent of the expenses. So it may not seem like much and project overruns not material,” said Sybase’s Nathan. Return on investment is a performance measurement used to evaluate the efficiency of a project investment and to compare that project to various other projects. To calculate ROI, take the return of a project and divide by the cost of the project; the result is expressed as a percentage or a ratio.

“I like to use margin improvement as a measurement, because I think it is more sensitive to changes. In the same example, let us say the company wants to improve the margins by \$10 million per year,” said Nathan. “Now the project cost is 10% of the improvement. Therefore, if the project runs over it affects the corporate margin improvement goals, which is a big deal for the investors. Therefore, if the executive sponsor sees the project having a negative effect on their margin improvements they are more likely to react promptly and take the necessary actions to protect the company margins.”

Risk means threats to a project’s success, such as physical, estimating, financial, or political; in quantitative terms, it’s the probability of an undesired outcome. First, risks should be considered by the types of events, such as a key person leaving the project before its resolution. Second, they should be concerned with the probability of occurrence; such as the risk is only a 10% chance that a key person will leave before the project is completed.

DIFFICULTY OF ROI AND RISK METRICS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of encouraging the use of the project’s ROI and risk metrics.



SECRET 25: UNDERSTAND THE PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

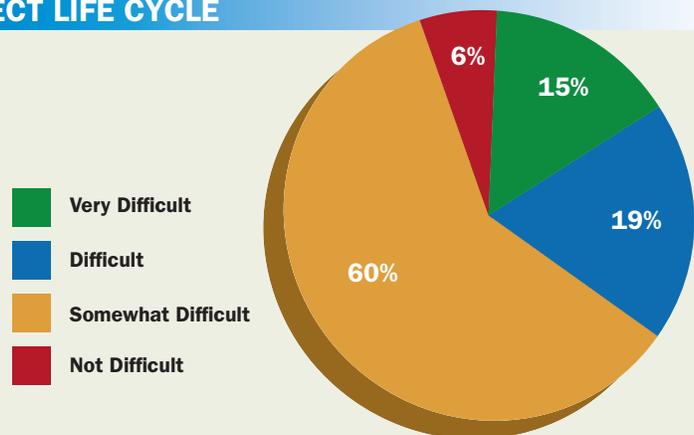
You, as the executive sponsor, are the project's champion. You need to communicate the project's importance to the business. In order for the executive sponsor to communicate to the rest of the organization he or she must know what problem the project solves, what the solution is, and how the solution will be accomplished. The executive sponsor should demand that the project have a concise and to-the-point plan that he or she can read, understand, digest, and repeat. This is in addition to technical specifications and a full project plan. The executive plan does not have to be a separate plan solely for you, but a synopsis of the project plan put into a concise and readable format for the executive. Are you skilled at understanding the life cycle?

"I think one of the things about doing any project is the understanding that you cannot plan everything. When you are in the middle of a project things evolve and situations are in flux," said IT senior manager Fleming. "A good executive sponsor will understand the difference between planning and iterative evolution. For example, having knowledge of the environment is a major plus in communication. Many times you have to justify and explain to an executive sponsor why something is not working or we need resources over here or there. If you cannot explain the situation and get the executive support in two or three sentences you might have a problem with your executive sponsor."

"I was hired from a medical school into a big bank," said Jeff Sutherland, CEO of Scrum Inc. "The bank was doing traditional waterfall project management. The projects were always late, managers were upset and putting people under pressure, the people were frustrated, and it just was not working. The more they put on pressure and controls, the worse it got. My epiphany was at Saddlebrook, where I was the VP of engineering. I was reading this paper from the Santa Fe Institute on how to model artificial life on a computer system. In the paper the author contended that to get the biological system to evolve faster you needed to increase freedom to the point of chaos. So I was reading this and looking over at the COBOL programmers and thinking that was the problem. We had too much control, and in order to make them go faster we needed to release control."

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master the skills of understanding the project life cycle.



SECRET 26: UNDERSTAND PM TECHNIQUES

You, as the executive sponsor, should have a basic understanding of project management techniques and skills. There are really only two types of methods: waterfall and Agile. You should know the difference between a waterfall and an Agile project. However, in either case they are rarely pure, and often an organization will use parts of both methods. In a waterfall project the project manager is the linchpin and you are the driver. The IT community has recognized the true role of the project manager in waterfall projects. With the Agile process the driver is a product owner and an Agile master owns the process.

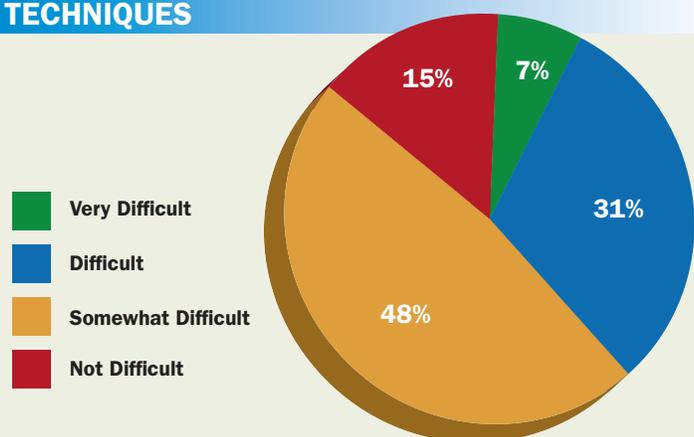
An Agile product owner could be the executive sponsor, but this is a full-time job and most likely you will have other responsibilities. In this case you would abdicate most of your executive sponsor duties to the product owner. Waterfall project managers have to transition to the Agile process as either a product owner or process master. In either case they give up 50% of their roles and responsibilities. In reality the skills required to be a good product owner or project manager bring many benefits to any project. Many of these key skills involve indispensable management proficiencies such as good judgment, diplomacy, and time management. They also include the basic mechanical skills of planning, tracking, and controlling.

Education on Agile and project management is readily available from many places, including many colleges and universities. Private companies, such as specialized education and consulting firms, offer formal classes. “We started the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center [BCEC] project in the middle of all of the investigations surrounding Big Dig cost and time overruns. As the new chairman of the board of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, I suddenly became the ‘owner’ of an \$800 million project to build a new convention center on the South Boston waterfront. When we started the project all we had was the authorizing legislation from the Massachusetts State Legislature,” said Bentley University’s Larson.

“The first thing I did in my new role was to make sure we had a level of program management discipline that tried to focus at every turn on best practices. This was well before we hired the designers, architects, construction managers, and other teams to build the center,” said Larson. “Our project was about keeping our eye on the prize, while managing the details to make sure in a linear, engineer-like fashion that we did all the right things to ensure that the project came in on time and on budget.”

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING BASIC PM TECHNIQUES

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding basic project management techniques.



SECRET 27: OVERCOME IGNORANCE

You, as the executive sponsor, need to guard against ignorance. Ignorance is the condition of being unaware, uninformed, uneducated, and/or unsuspecting about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. Ignorance is often coupled with apathy, or to say it another way, “I don’t know and I don’t care!” One of the best ways to avoid ignorance is to create a communication platform. A communication platform should be both common and easy to use. Make sure the process is a closed-loop system to improve visibility. Nothing turns people off more than not getting messages returned or answered. Use a mix of media and methods that highlight urgency when needed. Do not overuse the communication platform when things are not urgent.

Another way to guard against ignorance is to set goals and benchmark against them to track and improve responses to questions and decisions. Last is to take a close look at the risks and features and learn the reasons for the requirements. Communicate what you have learned through your new communication platform. Communication is the key to overcoming ignorance. One CHAOS University delegate stated that at a former company, a new director of engineering was in an executive staff meeting making a presentation of a project on a new product. After a little while the company president piped up and asked why he was still working on the project since it was cancelled two months ago. The delegate joked that the poor new director of engineering just stood there looking like a penny waiting for change.

“I really liked the style of the executive sponsor for the data center relocation. He would come down to my office and I would share with him the status of the project. I would show him my Excel planning spreadsheets and we would talk about the progress. He would ask a lot of questions,” said IT senior manager Fleming. “If I had an issue with another group at a higher level, he would address it. We would also just brainstorm issues and make decisions. As the project manager we created this bond between us that worked very well. The biggest advantage I had over other projects in the move program was the fact that he would come to my desk once or twice a week and check in with me. In addition, if I had a problem I could just go to his desk and talk to him. This is rare in projects, but I think it is a great way to make sure the project stayed on track.”

DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING IGNORANCE

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of overcoming ignorance.



SECRET 28: HAVE A SUCCINCT VISION

You, as executive sponsor, need to have a succinct vision like John F. Kennedy. In 1961, Kennedy said the nation would put a man on the moon within a decade. It was a clear and simple vision. In 1969, the United States landed a man on the moon, fulfilling Kennedy's simple vision. However, getting there was a different story—the space program was complex, with hundreds of projects. But the greatest thing Kennedy's vision did was to put everyone at NASA on the same page, without any ambiguity. A clear and simple vision statement coming from the executive sponsor is a leading precondition for project success. Of course, like most things in life, this is easier said than done.

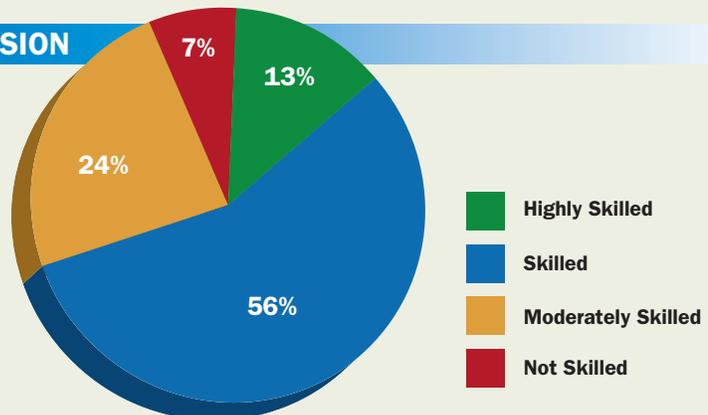
“The leader of an organization only has three first-order responsibilities: the 3Vs, hiring, and organizing. The 3Vs are the most important; these are vision, value, and valuable. The leader must establish a compelling vision of why you are in business or why you are doing the project. The leader must prove why the project has differentiation. The leader must show how this differentiation has value to the customer. Then the leader must prove that the project is valuable to the organization and supports the vision. So the leader sets the vision, shows the customer value, and shows how that customer value is valuable to the organization,” said venture angel Coleman.

The Standish Group has conducted hundreds of “group therapy” sessions over the years. A group therapy session is similar to a focus group or workshop, except all the participants are part of a single project team. This group generally consists of the project manager, executive sponsor, user representatives, and technical representatives of a particular project. The size of each group therapy session ranges from six to 12 people. Sessions have no more than 12 participants because group dynamics tend to get lost in larger groups. A Standish adviser moderates the group therapy session and leads the participants.

The first thing the Standish adviser asks of the participants is to write, in 10 words or less, the goal of their project. In more than 100 group therapy sessions, not one person has had the same goal as any other participant in the session. In one particular session a user wrote, “...will create a reusable object-oriented infrastructure for change,” while a developer of the project wrote, “...is an update to the billing system.” Not surprisingly, this project was canceled with a loss of more than \$5 million to that organization. When there is no common understanding of the project, you know the project is in trouble. However, it is possible to solve half the problems right away by getting everyone on the same page.

IT INFLUENCE IN HAVING A SUCCINCT VISION

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management's skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in having a succinct vision.



SECRET 29: KNOW WHEN TO PULL THE PLUG

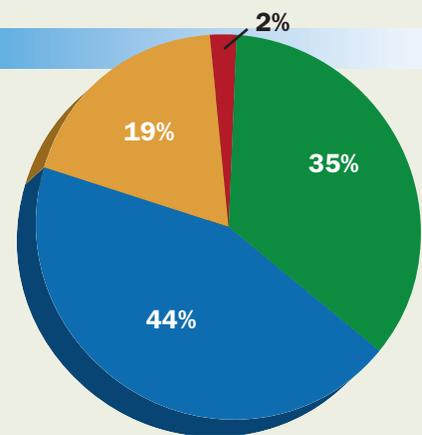
Every project should have a kill switch. You, as executive sponsor, are in charge of the kill switch. A kill switch is a predetermined position where it is unwise to continue to invest in the project. If you reach the point that the project no longer makes sense, take the bath and pull the plug! The three elements that make up the kill switch point are business triggers, technical triggers, and investment triggers. A business trigger is an event that changes the course of the business in such a way it renders the project to have reduced business value. A technical trigger is an event that disrupts the current technical solution in a manner that reduces the value of the project to the organization. An investment trigger is when the cost to continue the project is greater than the expected return.

“I knew when to pull the plug when I couldn’t find one happy person. We were in development, but in reality we were R&D building prototypes. So, we would spend three to four months building a prototype and then show it around. All we wanted was for somebody to say that is pretty good,” said Don Haderle, IBM Fellow, CTO, and father of DB2. “It might not work at this stage, but the customer thinks it is a good thing to have or if they didn’t then you would have to make changes. So say they said it was pretty good. We would expand the development with a bigger or a longer development period. Then again we would show it to customers for feedback. It might not be elegant, but it worked. Here again we wanted the ‘aha moment’ from the customer. If we did not get the ‘aha moment’ we knew we needed to make changes.”

Apple Computer’s Copland operating system is an example of pulling the plug on a project. “I felt that we would put out a release that no one would buy. We had no marketing plan and no understanding of the quality of the product. It was a shame in that the Apple people were truly advocates of the new operating system. They were very, very brilliant people,” said Ellen Hancock, professional CEO and corporate director, and former head of engineering at Apple. “However, brilliant people need discipline to lead them to a successful launch of a new product. They really didn’t have a strong executive sponsor and it was too late for Apple to continue without a new operating system. Therefore, I made the decision to go out and buy another operating system. This is when we bought Next OS, and that brought Steve Jobs back into Apple. This was the end of Copland.”

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING WHEN TO PULL THE PLUG

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding when to pull the plug.



SECRET 30: DEVELOP A SIMPLE VISION

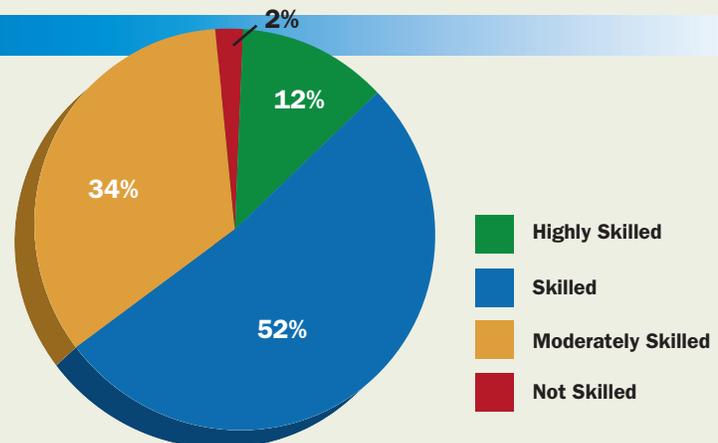
You, as the executive sponsor, need to have a simple vision. The simple vision should encompass project benefits for the short-, mid-, and long-term of the project's life cycle, and it should be communicated, and agreed to, by all project stakeholders. The executive sponsor needs to ensure that the simple vision is tied to the overall corporate vision and strategy. The project vision and the corporate vision should mesh together in the short-, mid-, and long-term life cycle. The vision should allude to what is in it for the users and how the overall organization can benefit from the project. Are you good at conveying a simple vision?

"All programs need a committed executive sponsor or they just don't get done. For example, when he was with Sun, Scott McNealy said we were moving the entire product line over to SPARC. His famous quote was, 'We will put all our wood behind one arrow,' said Dave Bealby, international management consultant and venture angel. "To many, if not most, in the organization this was the scariest thing they ever heard because many of the products were very successful. While Scott was the ultimate executive sponsor, all the major areas within the company had to have an executive sponsor that believed in the vision. These sponsors made sure that third-party software was ported over to SPARC, the sales channel was properly and timely realigned, and manuals were updated. All this took individual executive sponsors to make the vision a success."

"The executive sponsors are always creating tension between the developers and the business people. This is good only if it provides motivation. On the other hand, having a weak executive sponsor, or worse, multiple executive sponsors, causes stakeholders to promote their different agendas," said Fidelity Investments' Niemi. "This increases the backlog on our Fund Customer And Product Profitability [FCAPP] and confuses priority for the development team and creates elephant projects. This, in turn, caused lots of mistakes, poor decisions, and wasted efforts. In one case the head of one of the technical groups tried to take control of a large group with multiple executive sponsors, but then he got blamed for all the problems and ended up leaving the organization. The FCAPP project was a classic elephant project starting in 1999 and is still in development in 2012."

IT INFLUENCE IN SIMPLE VISION

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management's skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in developing and maintaining a simple vision.



SECRET 31: TRACK PROGRESS WITH METRICS

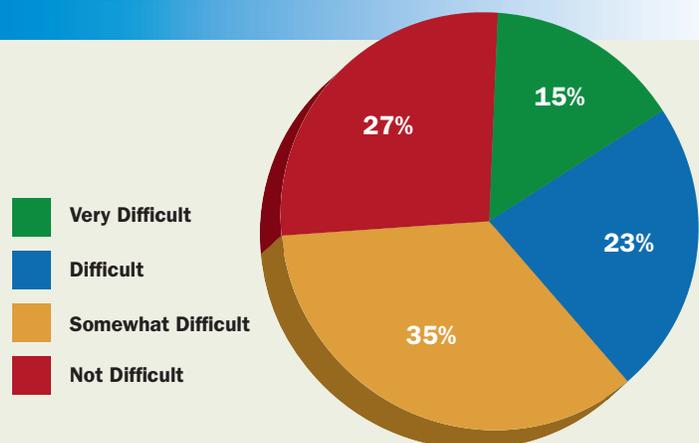
You, the executive sponsor, should have the team develop a method to present the progress of the project in an easy-to-understand form. In this easy-to-understand form you should be able to see the actual goals and attributes against the forecasted plan goals. This presentation method should be based on the team's normal metrics that they use to measure the project progress. In this way you could dig down deeper if you want more information. However, you should not have to learn how to use a project tool or read a Gantt chart, project details, and other detailed reports to be able to track progress. The game of golf suggests that the winner will hit a golf ball fewer times than the other players. After each hole the scores are tallied and each player knows where he or she stands. You want to consider how the project team can become a winner and how the scores are kept. One of the easiest ways to keep score is to set up a goal system.

"The executive sponsor needs to have the mechanisms in place to effectively oversee and get insight on how the initiative is performing over time. For example, we are a program management company and I assumed on one of our larger internal programs that we would track it using standards tools. I would have my plans, baseline, resource scheduling, cost profiles, and the standard reports," said Robbins-Gioia's Sledge. "What I did not have was the system established for our own internal use. It took some time to get this in place. We had training for people to learn how to use it. It took time on my part to communicate my requirements and the information I needed to get out of the system to provide its direction."

"In 2006, Palm was trying to build a Web operating system. They were running three-week sprints, but doing their testing later. The number one issue on a lean list is that nothing is partially complete. Their management said that they did not have enough testers to do the quality assurance inside of the sprint. So, I suggested an experiment like Edwards Deming would do. We would run a few sprints with the tester inside and also do the same QA in the current process," said Sutherland of Scrum Inc. "A few weeks later they had the data and found that one hour of testing inside the sprint took 24 hours outside of the sprint. So I said that that shows they did not have enough testers. They were shocked. They asked, 'Does that mean it takes two years to ship something we should ship in a month?' I said, 'If you can multiply it does!'

DIFFICULTY OF BASIC METRICS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding the basics of the metrics.



SECRET 32: DRIVE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

You, as the executive sponsor, need to understand and drive the project activities. The executive sponsor is the project's champion and communicates the project's importance to the business. In order for the executive sponsor to communicate to the rest of the organization he or she must know what problem the project solves, what the solution is, and how the solution will be accomplished. One of the things you need to know is what activities you will be involved in and how much time you will spend on these activities. Depending on the organization's project management methods and policies these activities could be substantial.

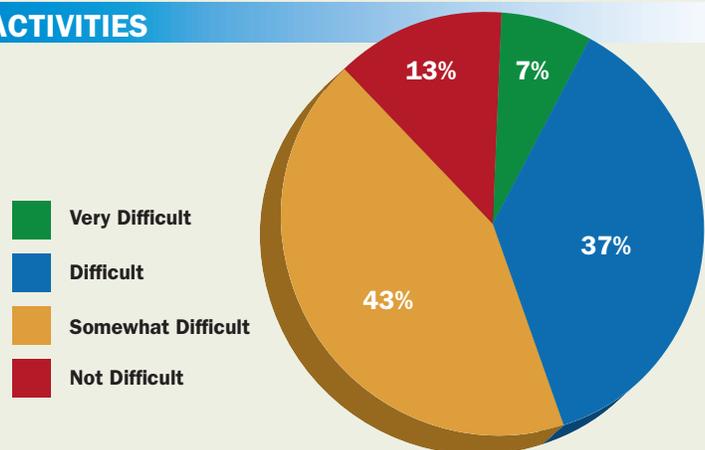
If your organization is using the Agile process it could absorb 100% of your time if you are the product owner or very little if you are not. Since most likely you are not the product owner, the activities are mostly meeting with the product owner and providing input. On the other hand, if you are using the waterfall method this could amount to 5% to 10% of your time. As an executive sponsor of a waterfall project, a well-thought-out and well-articulated project plan is a must. Your executive plan should include a description of the project's scope with a list of activities, a schedule of steppingstones with time estimates, and resources with assignments and responsibilities. Additionally, it should include cost estimates and risk factors.

Henry VIII was King of England from 1509 to 1547. He is one of the most colorful and notable characters in all of history. He is most noted for his six wives, cruel reaction to detractors, and the break with the Roman Catholic Church. However, what traits made Henry so notable were his intelligence, education, and knowledge. Henry wrote and played his own music. While we normally picture Henry as being rotund, he was an avid jousting player in his younger years. He would often disguise himself to participate in tournaments, to the chagrin of his father, Henry VII. He also liked to dance, hunt, and play tennis.

The real lesson here for the executive sponsor is his thirst for information. At a young age Henry surpassed his tutors and demanded more education and formal training in multiple subjects. During his reign very little escaped his attention. He was a workaholic and spent most of his time in court meetings doing interviews with diplomats and politicians. He was constantly reading and responding to dispatches that came from throughout England and the rest of Europe. In an age where information traveled by horse and boat, he knew at all times what was going on within his kingdom and throughout Europe, especially items that affected his administration and kingdom.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING PROJECT ACTIVITIES

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding project activities.



SECRET 33: CELEBRATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

You, as executive sponsor, should cultivate an atmosphere of accomplishment and focus on execution. Most behavioral scientists recommend positive reinforcement of desired behavior and ignoring unwanted behavior. One of the best tools an executive sponsor can use to advance this practice is celebration. Celebration allows the executive sponsor to reward accomplishment and behavior that will advance the progress of the project. Do you know how to properly celebrate accomplishment?

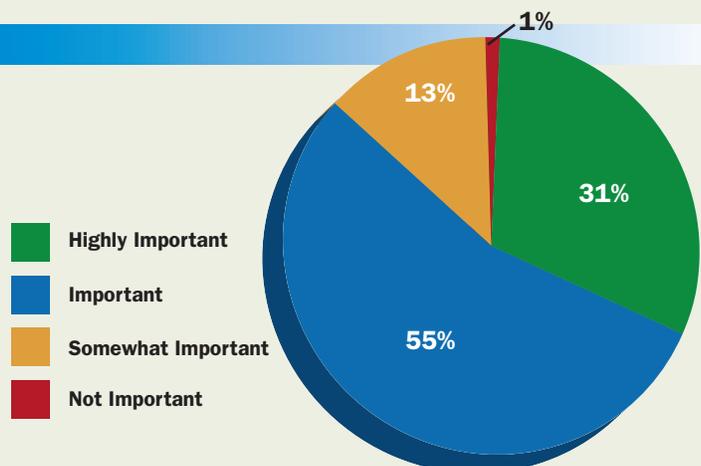
The three elements that comprise celebration are recognition, reward, and event. One the easiest and the most effective method of celebrating is through recognition of an accomplishment. The executive sponsor who says thanks for a job well done or for an extra effort will find a great payoff. This can also include recognition by the company, such as naming a person of the month or designating a special parking place for a week or a month. The executive sponsor who understands and recognizes true accomplishments and concrete results will earn the respect and admiration of the team. However, undeserved recognition can undermine the benefit and cause dissension within the group. That is why it is important for the executive sponsor to be fully informed and understand the project that is being executed.

In the early days of Tandem Computers, the company had what was known as a “Beer Bust.” Every Friday from about 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. employees would stop work and join together to celebrate that week’s accomplishments. People from the factory, accounting, marketing, development, and executives would meet and talk informally about the company and what they had been doing that week. There may not be a direct cause and effect here, but in fact when Tandem stopped holding the “Beer Bust” the company lost its edge.

After a major event or the end of the project the executive sponsor should hold an event, like a party or dinner out. This could also include a Broadway show or a boat ride including spouses. It could be a picnic in the park, a baseball game, or a game of darts. This is the great equalizer where all the team members get to celebrate success. This is where no one gets ignored. An event provides a platform for encouraging greater performance. Executive sponsors should remember that they will have more than one project and people will remember who gave the best parties.

IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master celebrating large and small accomplishments.



SECRET 34: TRACK INVESTMENTS

You, as the executive sponsor, are responsible for all investments in the project. Therefore, it is essential for you to keep track of these investments. A common method for a waterfall project is quantifying project performance by comparing the amount of work that was planned with the work that was accomplished. The value of work performed, calculated in terms of the baseline cost, is known as budget cost of work performed in the cost/schedule control systems criteria. However, this is just to keep track of cost. A better method is Net Value Analysis (NVA). NVA is similar to Earned Value Analysis (EVA), but replaces the cost element with gain.

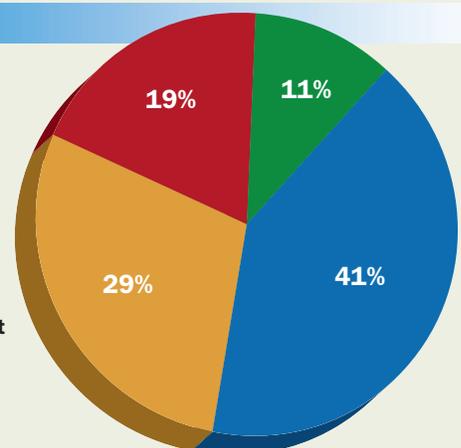
Like EVA, NVA is a method for quantifying project performance by comparing the amount of work that was planned with the work that was accomplished; this is the value of work performed, calculated in terms of the estimated ROI or gain versus a budget cost. In the Agile process you want to track burndown, or the amount of work in story cards that gets completed. A burndown chart is a publicly displayed chart showing remaining work in the backlog. Updated every day, it gives a simple view of the progress. The burndown provides quick visualizations for reference. However, like EVA, it does not calculate the value of the investment-only cost. Our OptiMix product allows you to track progress by value both for waterfall and Agile.

“During the custom sales force automation systems project at this company we created a policy on making decisions. The good part was nothing was based on cost. Everything was about value,” said CIO and FDA compliance consultant Kelley. “All decisions were based on the value to the organization, users, and ultimately our clients. For example, we had 4,000 customers with hundreds of products. What was the value to the salesperson and the customer if they could offer a discount on the spot to get a deal? So, we implemented floor-level discounts so the salesperson could offer deals while with the customer. The sales organization loved it, and we had a great increase in sales. It was all about the executive sponsor and users making valuable and timely decisions.”

Investment events must also be considered in the light of business changes or a business trigger. A business trigger is an event that changes the course of the business in such a way that renders the project to have reduced business value. An example of a business trigger may be the loss of an account for which the project was designed or the stoppage of a product line. The trigger could simply be that the project is no longer aligned with corporate goals. The executive sponsor should flip the kill switch as soon as the project encounters a business trigger.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING INVESTMENT EVENTS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding what investment events affect value.



SECRET 35: TRACK TECHNICAL EVENTS

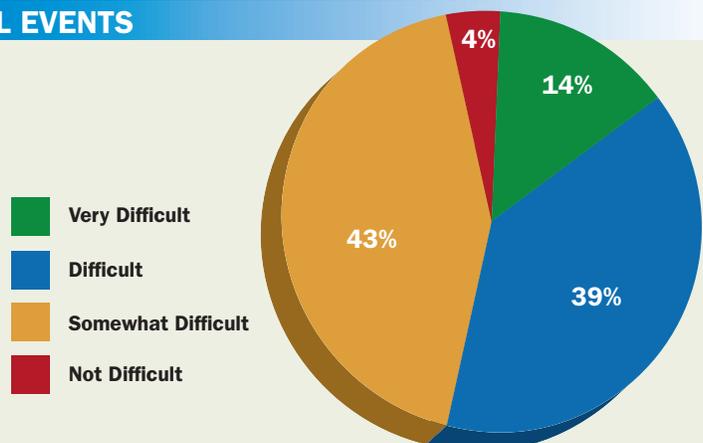
You, as the executive sponsor, need to be aware of technical changes that could impact the project or program. A technical trigger is an event that disrupts the current technical solution in a manner that reduces the value of the project to the organization. An example is client/server projects. The Internet made many of these projects obsolete, yet organizations continued to invest in them well past the recognition that they had little to no value because of inertia and fear. On the other hand, you also need to be aware of technical standards within your own organization. While you and your team might become enamored with the latest whiz-bang technology, your infrastructure might not support it or corporate standards may prevent the adoption.

“Tektronix spent a fortune on planning, marketing, and building a graphical workstation. However the business was performing poorly. I, as a marketing manager by trade, convinced management the problem was the product had no distinction that made it stand out and was a ‘me too’ product. I persuaded them to build a first-class product based on the latest technology and innovations. The first thing I did was to pick a team to evaluate the latest chip technology. The team spent weeks considering different offerings. They selected a chip from MIPS,” said international management consultant and venture angel Bealby. “I was then told Tektronix only works on Motorola chips. While the team was disappointed, they looked at the Motorola offerings and selected the 8800 chipset.” Tektronix never did become a force in the workstation marketplace, while Silicon Graphics, which did use the MIPS chipset, enjoyed years of high-performance leadership.

“A good executive sponsor will own the future. Let’s face it, the reason for any project is to create new stuff. However, there is always pressure to enhance the old stuff and use the resources for present-day problems. A good executive sponsor will be using up resources for something that most people cannot see how it will help the organization in the future. I used to comb research and academic groups for ideas. Many of these projects took five to 10 years to mature into market,” said IBM’s Haderle. “If you wait until the market is on you, then you are too late. As a CTO of a large organization, like IBM, you need to bring new talent in to work on new stuff and understand how the new stuff will help create the future.” A good executive sponsor must have a clear vision of the future.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING TECHNICAL EVENTS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding what technical events affect the value.



SECRET 36: HAVE COMMITMENT

You, as the executive sponsor, need to commit to the project or program. You should have your own plan that describes this commitment and expected involvement with the project. Your plan should include a communication method to get updates on ongoing activities and issue resolutions. “An executive sponsor can effectively champion only so many programs. It is a commitment and an investment of time, energy, and institutional and political capital. If the executive sponsor gets involved in too many programs, he or she cannot be effective on any of them. Executive sponsors must choose their initiatives wisely and pick the programs whose results they can be passionate about,” said Robbins-Gioia’s Sledge.

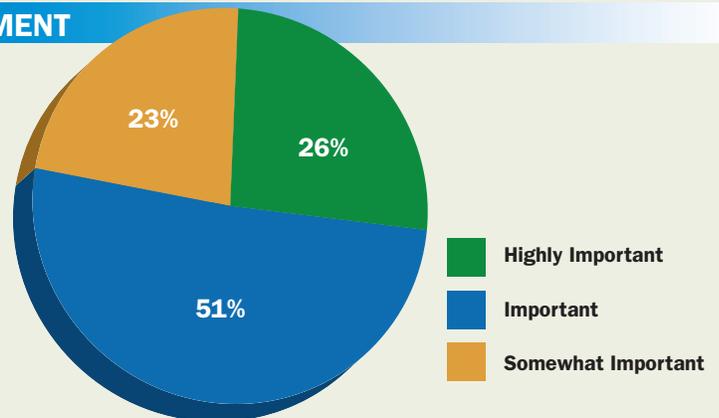
“We do quite a few projects a year and not all require an executive sponsor. The functional heads can handle most projects within our organization. When I think of an executive sponsor it is not as a figurehead. It is a person who gets deeply involved and adds value. The executive sponsor needs to allocate their time and commit to helping the team be successful,” said Sybase’s Nathan. “I bias my sponsorship to projects that I can add value and allocate my time to make a positive impact to the success of the project. It is important that the executive sponsor does a self-assessment on whether or not they are ready to make the necessary commitment.”

“The executive sponsor is a key person in the program. Programs are investments, and organizations need to get a return on their investments. I think it is great when we are able to serve as an executive sponsor,” said Bounds of Booz Allen Hamilton. “Also, I think it is OK to say no when we do not have the bandwidth or it is a challenge for us to serve. My advice is to not accept the role if we know we cannot give the program the attention it needs. It is much better to refer to someone else to act as the executive sponsor when we just do not have the time or ability.”

“I think you can really get pumped up about a program when you have a vested interest in its outcome. An executive sponsor could micromanage everything, but this is not a wise investment of his or her time. A critical item is collaboration with the project or program manager. The program manager takes care of the details. The project team worries about the execution. The executive sponsor worries about priorities and the passion,” said Sledge.

IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING COMMITMENT

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of having a firm understanding of their real commitment.



SECRET 37: BE FAMILIAR WITH SIMILAR PROJECTS

You, the executive sponsor, should demand and receive information on outcomes, costs, risk, value, and other information about similar projects and programs. Your project manager should have access to similar projects to use as role models against your current project. Role models should include successful and unsuccessful projects. These role models can act as guides to the current project or discover points of peril that can be avoided. Every project will have its differences, but there will be plenty of similarities with other projects to measure against. The Standish Group has a database of 80,000 that can provide this kind of information to be used as role models.

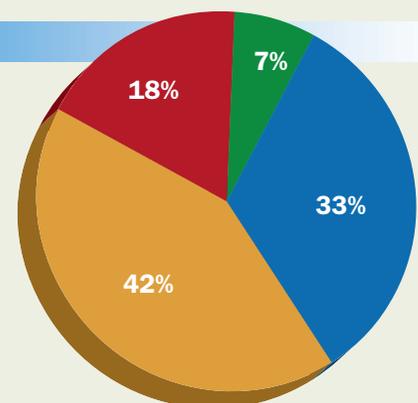
The average project will have 2.1 restarts, so there is a good chance that the current project has been tried before. The former project has a wealth of measurement information. You should review this information and understand what areas hampered the project's progress and look for signs in the current project where similar situations could result in poor project performance. Knowing this, you could then take remedial action to help the project along. In addition, you should know the project team's history and past performance on a similar project of type and scope. It is especially important to understand the project manager's history.

"It is important for the executive sponsor to understand which processes can be automated and standardized so the team can reduce cost and reduce delivery times. By standardizing repeatable processes you increase predictability. Predictability is the one thing that all good executive sponsors want and need. Another underlying aspect of sponsorship is ensuring trust and respect, both among the team members, and between the team and the sponsor," said Wadsworth, international marketing executive. "Teams need a strong, no-nonsense sponsor, someone who will provide clarity to the objective, turn the lights on, avoid patting the elephant, get out of the room, and hold them accountable."

The Standish Group's Single Project Assessment is a comprehensive, yet easy way to assess the critical elements of an individual project to improve the chance of your project coming in on time and within budget. Single Project Assessment looks at and measures all the CHAOS critical success factors and project best practices within your individual project profile and delivery organization. The process is done online, virtually and asynchronously, with minimal disruption and effort to your organization. You will learn from this engagement the individual project success rate as it compares to 80,000 projects and 1,000 organizations with a similar project. Single Project Assessment also covers time and cost overrun percentages and feature deficiency rates. You will learn what attributes give you the greatest chance of success and which attributes give your project the greatest stress.

DIFFICULTY OF KNOWLEDGE OF SIMILAR PAST PROJECTS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of knowledge of past projects of a similar nature.



SECRET 38: OVERCOME OVERAMBIITION

You, as the executive sponsor, need to be an impatient visionary. The problem is there is a fine line between being impatient and being overambitious. Overambition is a strong desire to execute a significant project to gain fame, fortune, or power through the impact of overreaching goals. Overambition is one of the Five Deadly Sins of project management. No sin is more dangerous. There is nothing wrong with ambition. In the movie *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas' character says, "Greed is good." Ambition is also good. Without ambition, where would we be? However, uncontrolled ambition is the problem—it's like a tornado. The point is to control and funnel ambition to accomplish some useful goal.

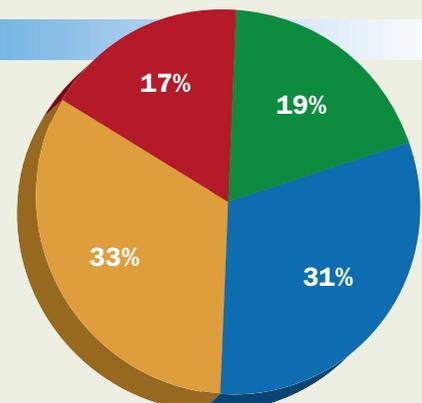
Three things that can help you overcome your own overambition are risk-based priority, iterative development process, and staged deployment. The first thing you should do is a risk assessment. The benefits of doing an overall risk assessment include highlighting behaviors that are causing the project to overrun and providing management with the ability to mitigate them. The iterative development process allows for gradual course correction, much like a ship would do before GPS. If you are using a waterfall method, you might consider reducing the time and size between stages. Staged deployment has many benefits. The benefit of rolling out features and functions in stages is to take the focus off the complete project and instead put it on a smaller endeavor, thus allowing the organization to have some quick wins and get a quicker return as well as reduce risk.

"In the early '80s I was working at Hit or Miss, a specialty clothing retailer, as their CIO. I reported to the CFO. We had a number of competing projects and we just could not do them all. My boss, the CFO, had his projects and he wanted them to be the priority," said Kneeland of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. "Other VPs and executives had their projects and they also claimed theirs were the most important. I would get threats from each of the executives that they would hold up my budget, sell off my desk, or turn off the electricity in my office if I didn't bump their projects to the head of the priority stack. I came up with the idea of an executive committee headed by the president of the company."

He continued, "On a monthly basis, I would present all of the projects. The executives would then explain in detail and defend their projects, the cost, and the strategic importance to the organization. The executive committee would then vote on which projects would get done in which order. The president would have the final vote. In essence, the president took on the responsibility of the ultimate executive sponsor. Since he was now responsible for scheduling, the executive sponsors calmed down and stopped demanding unrealistic priorities and timeframes, making life easier for them and me. It was nice since I got to keep my lights on, my desk, and my job."

DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING OVERAMBIITION

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of overcoming overambition.



SECRET 39: ESTABLISH A COMMON VOCABULARY

You, as the executive sponsor, should insist on a common vocabulary. A common vocabulary is a collection of words and phrases that are defined and have meaning. It is a sum or stock of words employed by a language, group, individual, or work, or in a field of knowledge. Having a common vocabulary of words and phrases within an organization promotes good communications. Having a common vocabulary builds transparency and accountability into the process and the program. A common vocabulary provides objectivity so there can be no ambiguity in the results. It also comes back to common goals, and the reason the organization is doing this project or program. How good are you at establishing a common vocabulary?

“If you develop a good process that is repeatable and measurable, it comes with a common language. It also comes with a set of metrics. Because you are so focused on having to deliver objective results, it forces a common vocabulary. Part of having a common vocabulary is building transparency and accountability into the process,” said venture angel Coleman. “A common vocabulary provides objectivity, so there can be no ambiguity in the results. It also comes back to the first principles, which are: What are our goals, and why are we doing this project or program?”

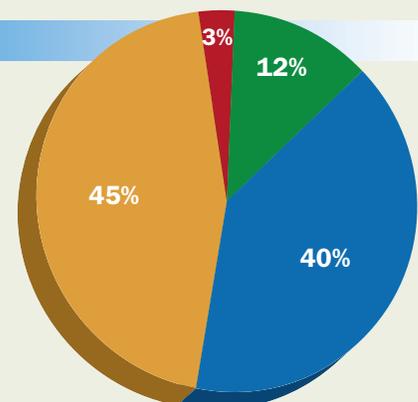
A common and agreed upon vocabulary should be part of every project management toolkit. During one of Standish Group’s CHAOS University sessions, the class broke up into six workshop “focus groups” to undertake a variety of topics, one of which was titled “Infrastructure Management.” In this workshop we delved into the requirements for managing infrastructure and the accompanying problems and issues.

Not wanting to steer the groups in any way, we first instructed them to define the term “infrastructure management.” To do so, the groups had to discuss what was meant by the word “infrastructure.” It’s a word that gets thrown around quite frequently in our industry and one that we discovered is quite versatile. Some attendees focused on “software infrastructure,” others on “hardware infrastructure.” There were debates over whether humans were part of the equation. What about electricity and air conditioning? Is the phone system included? What about the concrete of which the basement of the building is made? Surely these things are considered infrastructure—or are they?

Having a versatile word can be a good thing. After all, minimizing the number of terms and words in our industry is helpful. However, it can also be bad. Many of our workgroups started debating the management issue right away, only to later discover the source of many arguments had to do with confusion over what exactly it was that they were trying to manage.

IT INFLUENCE IN A COMMON VOCABULARY

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors to communicate in a common vocabulary.



SECRET 40: USE A DECISION PIPELINE

Standish Group research shows that latency between decisions is a major contributor to project delays and failures. Standish Group has developed a tool, called the Dezider, that can help organizations speed the decision-making process, and thereby improve project success rates. “Projects get behind a day at a time. My observation is they get behind because people cannot make decisions. Therefore, it is important to establish a process that enables you to quickly gain the decision information you need,” says Sledge of Robbins-Gioia. The three elements that make up the decision pipeline are issue clarity, timing, and goal.

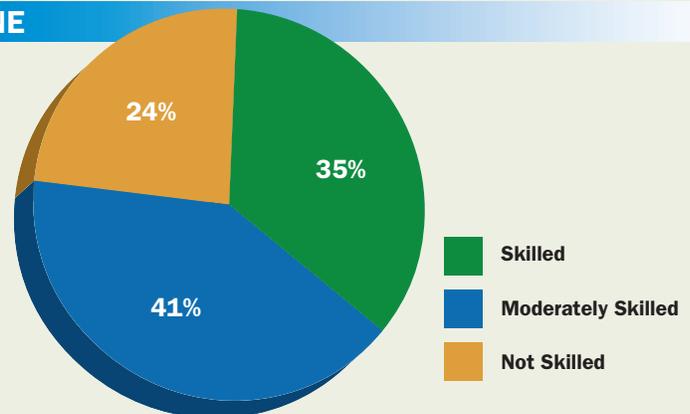
Clarity of the issue is the most important objective in coming to a decision. An issue that is fuzzy or is not well understood is interpreted by people differently and therefore is often reversed or flawed. It is the most difficult of all project problems and many project teams are not very skilled at providing clear issue statements. One of the ways to help with issue clarity is to break down the decision into smaller and multiple decisions, leading up to a bigger decision. A decision pipeline approach allows you to create minor decisions, leading to a bigger decision. Minor decisions get processed faster and have greater acceptance.

Timing is the second most important issue. Delays in decision-making cause delays in the project. Even minor decisions with minor delays cause frustration for the team members. If team members believe the organization does not feel it is important enough to make timely decisions then they will feel they have the luxury to slack off and not put forth maximum effort. Most organizations are not very skilled at making quick decisions, but most executives agree it is both important and not very difficult to master. However, it just takes effort to manage and reduce decision latency and make quicker decisions. A pipeline can set a timer for decisions and enforce timeliness.

The goal is the target for both timing and participation. It is important that each decision is made at the right level with the people who have the right roles and responsibilities. It is important that enough people have their voices heard and to ensure that each decision is not reversed. On the other hand, getting more people to be part of the decision can increase decision latency. A decision pipeline can effectively increase decision participation and decrease decision latency. Inside the decision pipeline goals are set for participation and timing.

IT INFLUENCE IN USE OF A DECISION PIPELINE

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management’s skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in encouraging the use of a decision pipeline.



SECRET 41: DELIVER STEPPINGSTONES

You, as the executive sponsor, should have the project delivered in steppingstones. A steppingstone is a small but significant deliverable or an Agile iteration. A steppingstone activity allows for tangible inspection either visually or hands-on. Steppingstones are easy because you can see them. Each steppingstone is assigned an owner who is responsible and accountable for its completion. Your project plan should comprise identifiable steppingstones that are measurable, quantifiable, and concrete. Steppingstones are keys in the iterative software development process that lead to more deliverables or indicate the project is not on the right track. Steppingstones are powerful because they allow for rapid feedback, creation of feature velocity, and accelerated user training and acceptance. Are you good at ensuring the delivery of steppingstones?

The three elements that make up steppingstones are ambiguity, team size, and story points. Ambiguity is the embrace of the uncertain. Steppingstones by their nature are vague. In the Agile process you write the story so it is vague and then you have the conversation with the owner or user. The conversation drives to clarity. Team size is one of the most important aspects in the Agile process. In our recipe for success we specify that the ideal team size is six people. After more years of research we are even more convinced that this is the perfect team size. Story points represent the effort to complete a story.

“In my job as CTO we needed to figure out what was the next bump, because if you miss the bump then you could miss the whole market. For example, in 1993 one of my people came and said Internet transactions are going to be a big deal. So, I said let’s put a two-person team together to develop a prototype to read and write a transaction from a browser to DB2,” said IBM’s Haderle. “That took us three months. We did it, and to our pleasant surprise it worked. So then we expanded the program to six people, created some nice useful products with customer feedback, and kept adding to the team.”

He continued, “My counterparts in the other parts of IBM were doing the same; that is, building skunk projects to understand and develop the Internet. We then expanded the program to many teams and many products that eventually turned into WebSphere. The key was as executive sponsor I was able to prove the value along the way, collaborate with my peers and partners within IBM, and get more and more funding as we proved the technology in the market.”

STEPPINGSTONES SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in encouraging the use of steppingstones.



SECRET 42: TRACK PROGRESS AGAINST THE PLAN

You, as executive sponsor, need to know the project team is tracking its progress. Tracking means to measure the progress of the project against the project plan. The project manager must be able to define the metrics, measurements, and steppingstones (actual deliverables). Have an estimate of the resources needed per task and a plan to make the resources available. The estimated dates for completion of the steppingstones should be based on the above information. Tracking also considers changes to the specifications, such as loss of key personnel, time overruns, and other items that affect the project. In many cases there is a detailed change contingency plan in place with associated risk factors, cost increases or decreases, and gain increases or decreases.

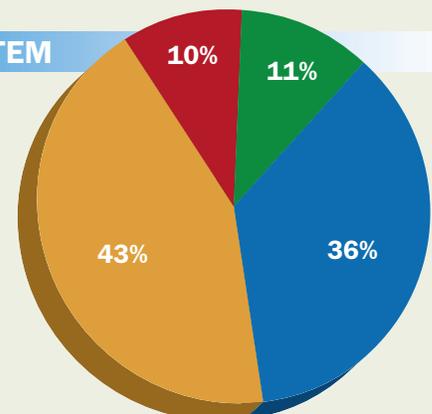
“One of the mistakes a program manager makes is not understanding the executive sponsor’s information requirements. There has to be collaboration between the program manager and executive sponsor. Every executive sponsor is going to have different information needs,” said Robbins-Gioia’s Sledge. “Some of this information is predicated on the size and complexity of the program and talent and experience of the program manager. However, the two must come to a consensus on the information requirements and share delivery. One of the ways executive sponsors can help themselves is to take the time up front to clearly identify how they measure progress. Executive sponsors need to tell the program manager the requirements they need so they can effectively provide oversight.”

The 1948 presidential election pitted accidental incumbent President Harry S. Truman against very popular and highly favored New York Republican Governor Thomas E. Dewey. Truman was not very popular, having taken over for the fallen Franklin D. Roosevelt. He narrowly won his party’s nomination. In addition, the Democrats had been in power for the last 16 years and the country was looking and ready for a change. Republicans thought Dewey was a shoo-in and advised their candidate to avoid risks. So, Dewey took the high road. His speeches were filled with catchy phrases and nonspecific, optimistic assertions. His dim-witted tagline was, “Your future is ahead of you.”

The polls clearly showed Dewey well ahead of Truman as the fall campaign began. Truman decided to take the gloves off and attacked Dewey by name and on specific issues. Until then, presidential candidates rarely used their opponents’ names in speeches and hardly ever criticized them. This practice earned Truman the nickname “Give ‘em Hell Harry.” Thinking he was invincible, Dewey continued to keep above the fray, and speech after speech was full of clichés. In fact, the polling organizations had Dewey so far in the lead that they stopped surveying the voters in October. However, Truman kept pounding away at Dewey in what most thought was a futile effort. Truman won by 303 electoral votes versus Dewey’s 189. *The Chicago Tribune* headline “Dewey Defeats Truman” clearly jumped the gun.

DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT TRACKING SYSTEM

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of understanding the project tracking system.



SECRET 43: CREATE A COMMUNITY

You, as executive sponsor, are not only part of the project community, you are the mayor of the community. Creating and maintaining a community facilitates a healthy ecosystem. A community in the context of a project, program, or ecosystem is a unit of a sociopolitical and economic organization consisting of a number of people, groups, departments, and divisions. Community leadership is typically formalized but casual and permanent, and at the same time fluid. Membership and the power structure in the community are very dynamic. A healthy project community shares a common language, culture, and opportunity. A community can become a major part the organization's communication platform. How good are you at creating community?

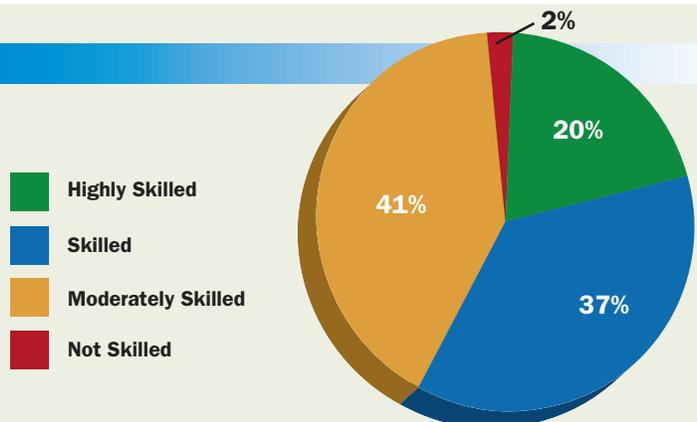
The three elements that highlight a good community are value, discovering barriers, and overcoming barriers. Establish a value and benefit for the organization as motivation to create and maintain a community. Then define the purpose and objective of the community with measurements. Then discover the barriers. The barriers to creating and maintaining a community include the lack of a common infrastructure. In order to overcome some of these barriers, assign an evangelist or multiple evangelists who have stature within the organization to promote the community. Also important is having a visible executive sponsor who would be persistent and accountable for the success of the community.

"As executive sponsor of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, I thought it was important to reach out to the myriad interested parties to get feedback and support. This included not just legislators, the governor, and the mayor, but the neighborhood groups that surrounded the convention center," said Bentley University's Larson. "The new convention center site is located in South Boston, which is a very traditional, close-knit neighborhood, and we did not want to infringe on people's daily lives or disrupt their sense of community. Pulling all those groups together is the essence of this type of management capability."

She continued, "This project was not about me, it was about the team—a project oversight team that involved someone who knew construction really well, another person who ran a development company that had built large commercial structures in the Boston area, folks like me who understood the politics, people who had experience in the travel and tourism industry, and local neighborhood leaders. Having such a diverse team was a much different approach than other large public projects in and around Boston had taken previously, virtually all of which had faced major challenges that often tarnished project reputations and results. I think our group dynamic was a major factor in the project being so successful, coming in on time and on budget, and later serving as a model for convention centers around the globe."

PROJECT COMMUNITY SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in dealing with the project community.



SECRET 44: EXHIBIT HONOR AND PRIDE

You, as executive sponsor honor, must start with your values. Honor is the sense of satisfaction taken in an achievement, possession, or association with a project, program, or ecosystem. Actions needed to create and maintain a sense of honor are awareness, transparency, communication, and sponsorship. Honor starts with management values. There should be a good feedback system that provides information about both positive and negative happenings. There should be a project focus. The organization should have some social responsibility actions. Last, the organization should always celebrate its successes. The organization should implement a fair and honest recognition and reward system. Do you exhibit honor and pride?

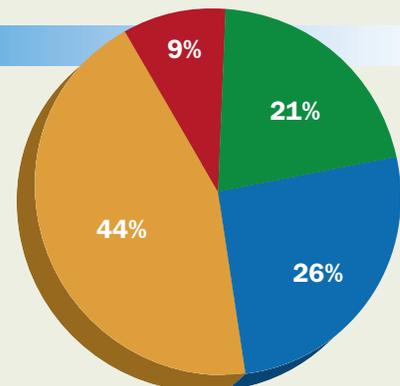
Two ingredients that emphasize honor are awareness and transparency. Awareness provides the attachment to the project success and goals, thus showing the dignity and value of the program. Awareness can build confidence. If the team and stakeholders are confident, the project will have a greater chance to succeed. Awareness is accomplished through communication and acceptance. Communication helps build a good name or public esteem. Acceptance helps keep honor or pride from turning into arrogance. Lack of real feedback is a sign of poor acceptance. The project team needs to help the stakeholders with understanding the value and focus on the important issues. The project team will also need to overcome cynicism, inaction, and apathy. Sadly, it is easier to do nothing.

Transparency provides the self-respect as to the progress, direction, and position of a project. If team members and stakeholders believe there is complete transparency they will again gain confidence, even in the face of setbacks. In order to overcome the normal project barriers the organization needs to work at being emotionally mature. This maturity can only come from within the organization through team orientation and peer pressure. Transparency promotes best practices for team orientation and proper peer pressure. Team-building workshops, like the Standish Group's Miss Scarlet and Zoo, would be of great benefit. Just one workshop will help the organization move to a more team-oriented environment.

"For me, the perfect executive sponsor is a person who fully understands his or her business; his or her resources; what his or her goals and objectives are and how they relate to the rest of business; and knows when he or she needs help," said CIO Jones. "Not only does the executive sponsor need to know when he or she needs help, but where to go to get the help. He or she needs to know who they can ask and who they can trust to get the help. As a coach to executive sponsors, you need to be proactive in helping them to ask for help because many see this as a sign of weakness. It is not; it is just good business and leadership."

PROMOTING HONOR AND PRIDE SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in promoting honor and pride.



SECRET 45: OVERCOME ABSTINENCE

You, as executive sponsor, have the responsibility to overcome abstinence. Abstinence, in the context of project management, is the act or practice of refraining from participation and contribution to the project. Yogi Berra once said, “If the fans don’t come out to the ball park, you can’t stop them.” If people have a choice they may make the choice to stay away. If they have goals and commitments to their main job that the project interferes with they will stay away. Absence of critical stakeholders is the bane of a successful project. Are you skilled at overcoming abstinence?

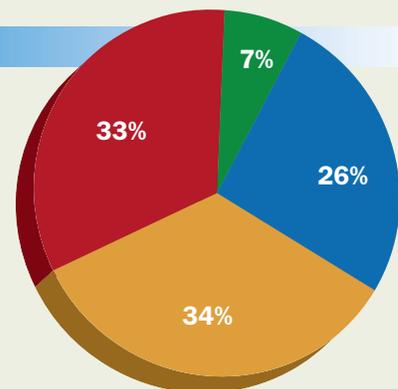
The three elements that help overcome abstinence are required participation, regular and recurring communications, and remove and replace. You need to require participation and mandate that essential stakeholders take part in the project. Such mandates should be enforced with penalties for noncompliance. You need to make sure there are regular and recurring scheduled communications and meetings. The meetings should be advertised well in advance to avoid last-minute excuses. You must remove and replace stakeholders who do not participate in the project. In most cases, such replacement will most likely be a relief to the wayward participant, since their absence represents both a lack of interest and commitment.

“I think executive sponsors often fail to recognize who on the executive or leadership team has a stake in the project. The executive sponsor needs to know the impact of the project on these people if the project is to be successful. The executive sponsor needs to leverage these executives in the decision-making of the project or program,” said Booz Allen Hamilton’s Bounds. “It is really important for the executive sponsor to reach out to his or her peers/ stakeholders and tell them what they need and get it for the team. I think often project managers are ill-prepared for the organizational transformation that takes place when implementing a project. The executive sponsor needs to help the project manager with executive leverage as part of the project.”

In his book *How to Run a Successful Meeting in Half the Time*, author Milo O. Frank suggests one of the best ways to reduce meeting time is not to have one in the first place. This would also clearly reduce abstinence. The author suggests you consider other ways to communicate, because people hate meetings and especially unproductive ones. The author also suggests that to come to a decision quickly in a meeting is to take a vote on the subject and move on. Of course, this is the same premise behind the Standish Dezider. Using Dezider.com you do not need a meeting and you get votes on how to move forward quickly.

DIFFICULTY OF OVERCOMING ABSTINENCE

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of overcoming abstinence.



SECRET 46: AVOID DECISION LATENCY

You, as the executive sponsor, need to make quick decisions. Decision latency is a major cause of project stress, delays, and failures. Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink, The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* is about making quick decisions. Gladwell suggests that quick decisions based on intuition can be more accurate than well-researched and careful analysis. He lays out many examples of where a quick response was much better than a drawn-out response. What is really powerful about *Blink* is that many of the examples provide a framework for making rapid decisions.

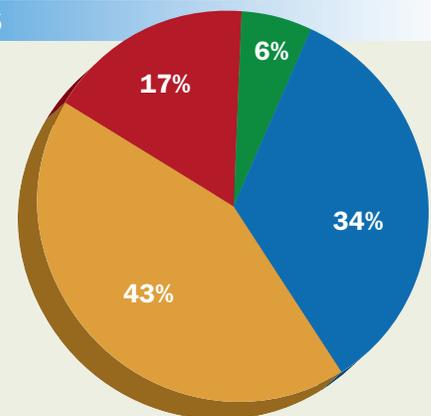
For instance, Gladwell details the cardiac ward of the Cook County Hospital. There, a doctor will ask six questions to determine if the patient should have more tests or be sent home with a package of Tums. In the case of the Blue versus Red Army game, the preset communication and protocols allowed the participants to make not only quick, but accurate, decisions. "I spent a decade with a hierarchical organization. Everyone brought me their issues and asked me to make a decision. In every meeting I would be asked to make a decision. Each time I would make the decision," said Bounds of Booz Allen Hamilton.

"Wisdom tells me there is a better approach. The biggest difference now is I empower my teams to think like leaders and give them the freedom to make most decisions. It is my mentoring style. I spend enough time with my team so they know how I think, I reward them, and I count on them to make decisions. One thing I avoid is shooting them for their decisions even though sometimes I would have decided differently. What I try to do is when they ask me to make a decision is tell them how I would make the decision and say to them, 'This is how I think about this or that,'" said Bounds.

The Dezider's (Dezider.com) benchmark feature allows you to measure your decision-making capability. Under the issue tab, click on benchmark. This will bring you to a listing of all your closed issues. Select the issues you want in the benchmark report and click on generate report. The system will generate a report with the average response latency, the average decision latency, and the percentage of stakeholders responding to your issues. You can also use the advanced search feature to select issues to benchmark. The export feature allows you to move the benchmark data into an Excel spreadsheet for further reporting and analysis.

IT INFLUENCE IN GETTING OTHERS TO MAKE QUICK DECISIONS

IT executives were asked to rate their IT management's skill in influencing and educating the project executive sponsors in getting others to make quick decisions.



SECRET 47: NEGOTIATE

As the executive sponsor, you are the prime negotiator. Delivering a successful project requires negotiating the plan and execution. Every project must have a business objective, such as increasing revenue, improving customer satisfaction, reducing errors, cutting costs, or improving control. The scope defines the boundaries of the project, such as the business functions and organizations impacted, as well as the constraints, such as deadlines, budget ceilings, and other assumptions. These must all be defined in business terms. Once this is done a plan can be presented to the executive sponsor to start the negotiations. Are you a skilled negotiator?

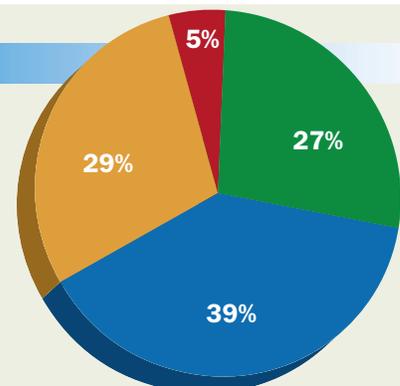
The two components that make up negotiation are power and time. All power resides and emanates from you, the executive sponsor, whether or not you realize this. Like feudal kings, you grant power to the project participants in order to move the project forward. Here you must use your executive skills in a manner that is not overpowering and dictatorial, but orchestrates the way to get everyone to play the same tune with the right notes. Executive sponsors who do overpower may find their participants less enthusiastic, which could jeopardize the project. In addition, while the executive sponsor may have the power, you may not have the power to change the process or the technology and many other organizational constraints.

Time is an area of considerable consternation for many executive sponsors. They all want it now. So, negotiations must center on what it is and when is now. For example, if there is a project that needs to be in place within five months because of market conditions and/or corporate commitment, that is a firm time frame. The executive sponsor will start with the premise that the project must be done in five months. However, what if the IT department estimates that the project as it is specified will take nine months to complete? If five months is the real deadline then scope must change. If the scope cannot change then the deadline must change. If the executive sponsor forces a deadline without changing the scope, that outcome will most likely end up in a disaster. Executive sponsors do not have the power over physics.

“I was involved with three distinct sales forecasting projects to support three different manufacturing companies. All three manufacturing companies needed to understand the sales forecast to be able to buy parts and schedule work for the plants. What made these projects interesting is that manufacturing departments are generally skeptical about the accuracy of sales forecasts,” said Langermann of IT-2-Business. “There are two schools of thought in the sales forecasting business. One is if you want to understand demand, you need to talk to the people in business development who are talking to the customers. The other school of thought says that salespeople are too optimistic, and you need to consider an economic statistical model. My role was to negotiate the vision of how we would come up with a valid forecast that manufacturing could use.”

IMPORTANCE OF BASIC NEGOTIATING SKILLS

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of basic negotiating.



SECRET 48: BE AWARE

You, as the executive sponsor, must have your project team focus on creating and maintaining awareness. Awareness is the condition of being informed, educated, and/or curious about the project and stakeholder goals, directions, details, issues, and opportunities. However, we all suffer from too much information. The actions needed to create and maintain a sense of awareness include designing a communication system that provides the right information to the right levels at the right time, reducing information overload. It must address lower, mid-level, and executive stakeholders. It should be centrally controlled, simple to use, and offer two-way communication.

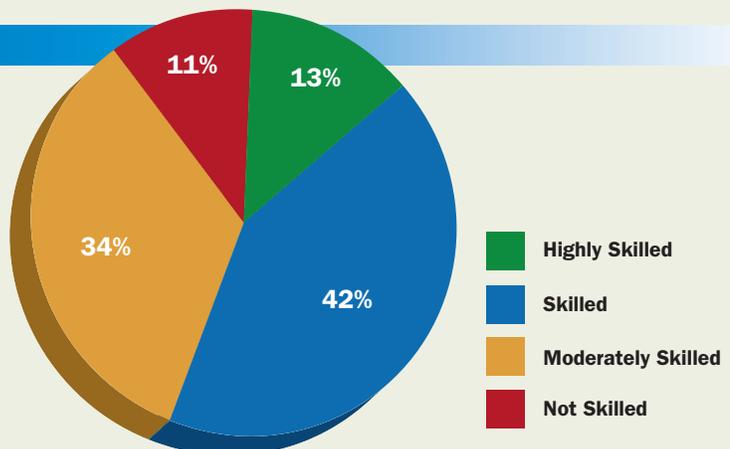
The main barrier to awareness is information overload. People are inundated with information. When you get 600 e-mails a day, which ones are important? It is the sorting and selecting of information that is the critical issue. Much of the information is unstructured, uncoordinated, unintelligible, and useless. In order to overcome the information overload barrier, communication should be managed by content, proper levels, and the “need to know.” Many of the CHAOS University delegates thought it should be managed centrally, while others thought this approach would reduce awareness by filtering to only those things that the central authority thinks are important.

You also need to consider how to deal with rumors, particularly bad ones. Bad rumors can really kill the progress of a project. One solution is to have a central place for rumors or “rumor central.” You could let people post anonymously and then the central authority would be able to answer those rumors. This would cut down on rumors running rampant, especially bad ones. A recent example is President Barack Obama. He successfully used a central rumor control system to combat charges made by his rivals during the 2008 presidential campaign.

“If you are the executive sponsor, you need to walk in the user’s shoes and understand how the user will use the product from the project. I think it is important that the executive sponsor have a working relationship with the people who will use the product,” said Langermann of IT-2-Business. “For example, if you are the customer service executive and the new application results in making the customer service function more difficult, that would be a problem. The phone calls are coming, questions are getting asked, complaints are being filed, and the customer representative feels that the organization is no longer equipped to handle it. It just cannot be good for the organization. So the executive sponsor needs to have general empathy with the user.”

AWARENESS SKILL LEVEL

IT executives were asked to rate the skill level of their project executive sponsors in demanding awareness.



SECRET 49: BOND WITH THE PM

You, the executive sponsor, need to have a strong bond with your program manager or owner backlog manager. If the project fails it is your fault, not the project manager's fault. That distinction falls squarely on you. On the other hand, if the project or program is successful it is because of the stakeholders and project team. That is just a fact of life. However, the project manager can and should help you by generally connecting with the stakeholders and team members. A quality executive sponsor will have natural communication skills and use that natural skill to foster awareness and transparency. If the executive sponsor does not have this natural ability it is up to the project manager to fill in the gaps and provide the communication.

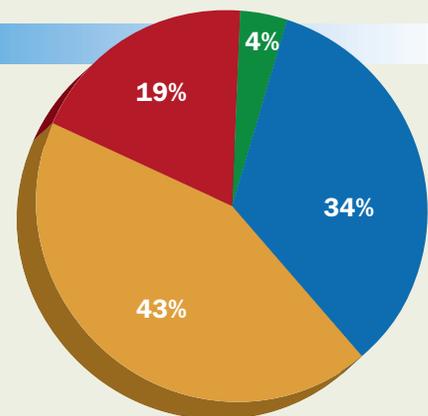
A good executive sponsor will demand, and a good project manager will respond with, a communication platform that the executive sponsor can use easily. Together, the project manager and executive sponsor will use the communication platform as a bully pulpit to advance the project's agenda. The project manager and executive sponsor will also use this platform to communicate with each other. Executive sponsors help themselves by having the ability to measure progress. Project managers help the executive sponsor by providing metrics and measurements that they can understand and assimilate. A quality executive sponsor will know the basic metrics and use these metrics to track the gains and risks.

Issuing responses that are both timely and truthful will help create the bond between the project manager and the executive sponsor. Project managers need to be both active and responsive to bring the right type of project issues to the executive sponsor. The project manager needs to help the executive sponsor be readily available to answer questions, make suggestions, influence peers, and resolve issues. One of the mistakes a program manager makes is he or she does not understand how the executive sponsor addresses issues. There has to be collaboration between the program manager and executive sponsor. Every executive sponsor is going to have their own style for addressing issues.

"I think it is a good idea that the executive sponsor and program manager interview each other before starting a new program or project. It is not that different than going out to a consulting firm and getting an engagement manager," said Langermann. "Sometimes it doesn't work out so well and the engagement manager needs to be replaced. It is important for the executive sponsor to make sure the program manager gets what you are trying to accomplish from the business-value side of the equation; if he or she does not, then it could be a real problem."

DIFFICULTY OF KNOWLEDGE OF PM'S PAST PROJECTS

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their project executive sponsors to master skills of knowledge of the project manager's past projects.



SECRET 50: CELEBRATE WITH A PARTY

You, the executive sponsor, should celebrate your successes large and small. Nothing makes a person or groups of people feel better than a sincere thank you. Thank you's or accolades can be relatively cheap, such as a simple pat on the back with a "Thank you; you did a fine job." A kind word goes a long way. Reward the team when steppingstones show early successes. Grant time off (if possible) when steppingstones are reached. Give team members gift certificates to their favorite restaurants to compensate for extra long work hours. Hold team lunches with no work just to take a break. Don't forget the red carpet post-debut party.

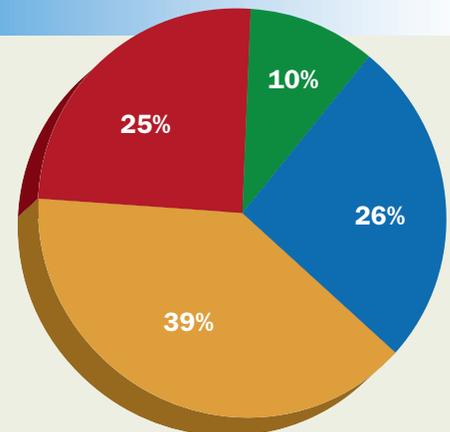
"We don't celebrate our successes sufficiently. We spend a fair amount of time concentrating on our failures and variances from our plan in terms of the triple threats: cost, time, and scope. However, we have had major successes and we must ensure that the leadership and staff recognize these major accomplishments," said Bounds of Booz Allen Hamilton. "We need to document the lessons we learned both good and bad during this project. In today's fast-paced world we are looking to get those skilled people on the next project without looking at what was just accomplished. It is the responsibility of the executive sponsor to schedule time to celebrate and review project success."

Dolley Madison knew how to celebrate and she knew how to give a party. During her husband's tenure as Secretary of State under Thomas Jefferson, she would often entertain and acted as a surrogate First Lady to the widow Jefferson. In 1809, James Madison ran for president and after a hard-fought battle became the country's fourth chief executive. In celebration of this victory and to reward her husband's supporters, Dolley created and hosted the first Inaugural Ball in 1810. Since the Madisons were not that financially well off, and presidents (even today) do not get entertainment expenses, nor at that time had a campaign war chest, Dolley sold 400 tickets for \$4 each.

Since then every president has had an Inaugural Ball and most have had more than one. Andrew Jackson was the first president to have two Inaugural Balls. William Henry Harrison attended all three of his Inaugural Balls held in his honor. It was Warren G. Harding who started the trend to make the Inaugural Balls a charity event. He had one at a private home. Clinton holds the record with 14 balls and played the saxophone at them. George W. Bush had eight, and Barack Obama has had 10 so far. So, the next time you have a hard-fought campaign, think of having a ball.

IMPORTANCE OF CELEBRATING

IT executives were asked to rate how important it is for their project executive sponsors to master the skill of throwing a celebration party.



SUMMARY

In our examination of successful projects, most have quality executive sponsors with expert vision and prompt responsiveness. Projects that have an executive sponsor who inspires the team do much better than projects that lack inspiration. Projects that have a visionary who enlightens the team and stakeholders have a higher rate of success. Projects that have a strong and decisive executive sponsor also do better. Executive sponsors who celebrate small and large accomplishments move their teams to greater performance. On the other hand, most challenged and failed projects typically lack quality executive support. In most cases, projects without quality executive support will perform poorly.

Projects that have an active and responsive executive sponsor fare better than those left to hang alone without a champion. An executive sponsor who is readily available to answer, suggest, influence, and resolve appeals indicates commitment and responsiveness. “One of my main principles in signing up to be an executive sponsor is to make sure that I can add value to the project team. The project needs to fit into my knowledge base and experience to be able to add value to the team. Stripes alone does not make one a good executive sponsor. You need know what you are talking about to gain and keep the respect of the team. It just works so much better if you know what you are talking about,” said Sybase’s Nathan.

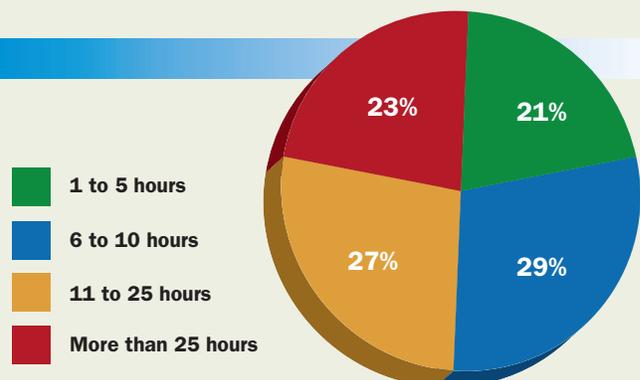
Executive responsiveness increases the chances of success. The executive is accountable to ensure a successful outcome. The greater the executive’s skill in the Standish success factors, the greater the chance the project will be successful. On the other hand, a nonresponsive or mediocre executive increases the chances that a project will experience overruns or failure. “Having the stripes makes a big difference. Often during a project the peer groups have conflicts and do not agree on issues before them. For example, a user will say they need these 10 reports. Then IT will go off and try to find a way to give the user the 10 reports,” said Nathan.

Nathan continued, “Because the executive sponsor has the stripes, he or she can question the users as to why they need those reports and what they are going to do with them. One of the problems is the team is in the trenches and are not always able to see the bigger picture. The nice thing about having the knowledge base and experience is you can step back as an executive sponsor and look at the broader view of the project.”

You are not born a good executive sponsor. Executive sponsorship is a developed skill. The 50 secrets to being a good executive sponsor in this report discuss the attributes of quality executive sponsorship. The executive sponsor who adheres to these principles will develop as a quality executive sponsor and enjoy greater project success.

EXECUTIVE TIME

IT executives were asked how much time an executive sponsor should allocate for effectively supporting and governing a simple project over its lifetime. Simple project: under \$750,000 in labor cost; six months or less in duration; scope is well defined and understood; a small project team (six or fewer); and similar to other projects done by the organization.



TRUE COST

In our research paper titled “The True Cost of a Project,” we examined a typical project budget to look at all the costs that were not included. In this example in our paper, the project cost 50% more than the budgeted cost because of these hidden expenses. The cost of the executive sponsor is rarely included in the budget or the cost of a project. This means it is not part of the return on investment (ROI) calculation as well. In our example of a \$1 million project budget the true cost of the executive sponsor added more than \$40,000 to the true cost of the project. However, the cost is only the direct labor cost of the executive sponsor, not the lost opportunity value of the executive sponsor’s time and effort. Neither the direct cost nor the lost opportunity cost was included in the value or ROI calculation.

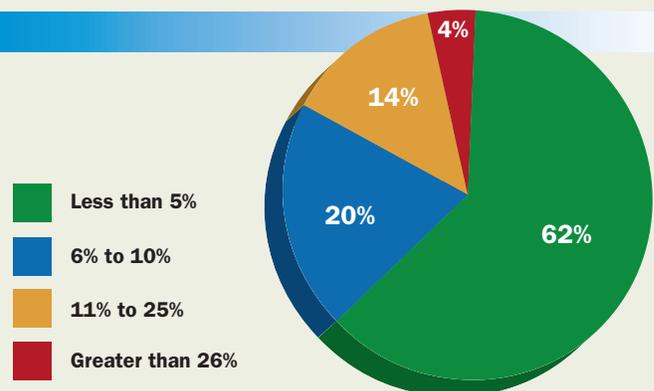
In a recent engagement we were asked to examine four different methods for upgrading a critical system. These methods included a total rewrite, two different packages, and modernization. One of our major concerns for the packages and the rewrite methods was the cost of the executive sponsor’s time. In this case, the executive sponsor was the prime rainmaker and business development driver. The executive sponsor estimated he will spend a third of his time on this project. Over the life of the rewrite or package implementation projects this could easily equal one to two years’ compensation. While a raw cost of time would be expensive, the real cost is the loss of opportunity, creativity, and promotion. We estimate the cost would be as much as \$20 million. This cost exceeded the budget of the entire project.

Many organizations have tried to reduce executive time and cost by creating surrogates or proxy executive sponsors. “I think a proxy works if it is not really a proxy, but a delegation of authority. You can help the person be an executive sponsor by providing guidance, but the executive sponsor must have the authority and respect of the team. If the team thinks that the person is just standing in for you because you do not have the time to devote to the project it puts the proxy in a very difficult position,” said Sybase’s Nathan.

“At VMware we had a couple of projects where there was a little bit of executive sponsor proxy. I found nothing good about having a proxy executive sponsor. It is my opinion that it just does not work. If we have a project then there should be an executive sponsor who has accountability to make it work and be successful. I want to make this clear that the executive sponsor is totally responsible and accountable for the success or failure of the project,” said VMware’s Heil. “You should always be able to find the right level of executive sponsorship, whether it is at the senior level, vice president level, or director level.”

SENIOR EXECUTIVE TIME

IT executives were asked the total maximum percentage of time a senior executive can devote to the executive sponsor role, over all projects and programs. Senior executives can spend about 7% of their time on project activities. Of course, it is expected that senior executives will work longer hours, so the average per week would be 60 hours or about 4 hours per week on projects.



EDUCATING THE EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

“I think it is important to groom people to be an executive sponsor. First, you choose potential candidates who have the three basic prerequisites: subject knowledge, connections, and good judgment,” said Sybase’s Nathan. “Then you need to choose the right setting for the new sponsor. And make sure that he or she can have a reasonable chance of success. You can be in the background and provide guidance to help the person along. Here again, the team needs assurances that the new executive sponsor is not a puppet for someone else, but he or she is in charge.”

Standish Group research shows that executive sponsors have no formal training on how to be an executive sponsor. In addition, the majority of organizations claim that the primary vehicle for executive sponsor training is on the job. The project manager assigned to a project that the executive sponsor is supporting does most of this education. The thinking is, each time an executive sponsor supports a project he or she will gain more experience and knowledge on how to be an executive sponsor. There are a number of problems with this on-the-job training practice.

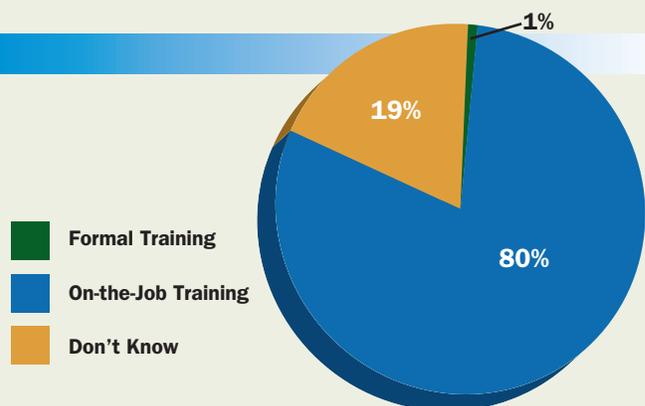
First, there is the reliance on the project manager. The project manager may or may not know how to run projects, but he or she has no formal training on how to educate the executive sponsor on how to be a good executive sponsor. “The problem is that project managers have their own view and language. The project manager looks at the project tactically,” said Bounds of Booz Allen Hamilton. “He or she looks more in the weeds of the project or the details to try to get it done. The executive sponsor tends to look at it as a strategic event.”

Second, the project manager is in a subordinate role and may not have the good standing with the executive sponsor to provide the necessary influence. “He or she will look at the project on how it aligns with the goals of the organization. In the project management profession we have our own language and plenty of acronyms. So there is a gap and it really is up to the project manager to fill the gap,” said Bounds. “We cannot expect the executive sponsor to understand the PMBOK [project management body of knowledge] and all of its artifacts and processes.”

Third, each project manager may have different views, approaches, and opinions on how to be a good executive sponsor. Therefore, the executive sponsor may receive conflicting and harmful information on how to be an executive sponsor. “It is up to the project manager to make that translation. Executive sponsors, on the other hand, have the responsibility to ensure that the project manager makes that translation,” said Bounds.

EXECUTIVE SPONSOR EDUCATION

IT executives were asked how their executive sponsors know/learn how to be executive sponsors.



EXECUTIVE SPONSOR ASSESSMENT

The Executive Sponsor Assessment asks about and measures the 50 secrets as outlined in this report. It also rolls up many of these secrets into characteristics. There are many characteristics, but the 10 prime characteristics are:

Resolution Promptness: During the life of the average project there is a need to make thousands of decisions and resolve many issues. Resolution promptness is the executive sponsor’s skill at making timely decisions and addressing issues as they surface. Resolution promptness also is the skill to get others to accept and believe in their decisions. You, the executive sponsor, need to have the skill to get others to make timely and rapid decisions. You need the ability to back up others they have trusted to make decisions.

Clear Business Objectives: Clear business objectives are achieved when all the stakeholders are focused on and understand the core values of the project. You, the executive sponsor, need the skill to help stakeholders see the big picture and show how the project aligns with the organization’s business strategies. The quality executive sponsor will provide a simple and succinct vision that all can grasp and follow. The executive sponsor can tie back the project’s functions to the original agreed-upon vision and objectives.

Emotional Maturity: Executive sponsors with emotional maturity have the ability and capacity to perceive, assess, manage, and direct the emotions and actions of the project stakeholders and team members. It is the skill to identify and remove unnecessary roadblocks. It is the skill to demand transparency and excellence. For the executive sponsor, emotional maturity means how to recognize and deal with the CHAOS Five Deadly Sins. The CHAOS Five Deadly Sins are fraudulence, arrogance, abstinence, overambition, and ignorance.

Stakeholder Motivation: Executive sponsors with the skill to motivate stakeholders create and maintain quality relationships with users and stakeholders. Executive sponsors with this skill have empathy with the user process and procedures. They explicitly understand the real needs of the stakeholders and use these needs to motivate them. The quality executive sponsor will understand what motivates the stakeholders and frame the solution to harness their enthusiasm. The quality executive sponsor will develop a project community of stakeholders. The executive sponsor will use the community to motivate the stakeholders.

Team Motivation: Executive sponsors with the skill to motivate the team help the team to achieve excellence and drive progress. A quality executive sponsor will distinguish between activity and progress. He or she will recognize achievements and reward these accomplishments. The quality executive sponsor will celebrate outstanding effort with sincerity and will fairly commensurate the effort. In this manner the quality executive sponsor will ensure the celebration motivates the entire team and promotes harmony.



Value Insight: Executive sponsors with value insight skills understand how the project brings value to the organization and what events affect that value. A quality executive sponsor will know what the organization will gain from a successful project outcome. The quality executive sponsor will know the risks and how to mitigate the risks whether they are business, technical, and/or investments. The quality executive sponsor will not only have value insight for the project he or she is commanding, but insight for the value of the other projects. In this regard, the executive sponsor will be ready when called on to make decisions that are best for the organization.

Communication Astuteness: Quality executive sponsors will have natural communication skills and use those skills to foster awareness and transparency. The skilled executive sponsor will insist on excellence in execution. The quality executive sponsor will demand a communication platform to promote pride and honor in being part of an important project for the organization. The quality executive sponsor will use the communication platform as a bully pulpit to advance the project's agenda. However, the adroit executive sponsor will use tools like our Dezider (Dezider.com) to include stakeholders in decisions and gain feedback.

Resource insight: Executive sponsors with resource insight skills know what it takes to get the job done. A quality executive sponsor will have a keen appreciation of the commitment that they need to make, as well as the commitment other executives, stakeholders, and team members need to make to the project. The quality executive sponsor will consider the hidden cost of executive time, user lost production, IT support, and other stakeholder time in the project resources.

Process Insight: Understanding the process helps the quality executive sponsor manage the needed resources and commitments. The quality executive sponsor knows in advance how to react to situations that may be troublesome to the inferior executive sponsor. A skilled executive sponsor can avoid many problem areas by understanding how the process should be done, not how it is being done. The quality executive sponsor will have a summary conception of the project's methodology, such as waterfall or Agile.

Measurement Insight: Executive sponsors help themselves by having the ability to measure progress. A quality executive sponsor will know the basic metrics and use these metrics to track the gains and risks. Changes to the project will not frustrate the quality executive sponsor. He or she will have ardent comprehension of how the changes affect the cost and returns. The first metrics and measurements the quality executive sponsor should understand are the decision process and timing.

DIFFICULTY OF CONNECTING WITH THE EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

IT executives were asked to rate how difficult it is for their IT project workforce to master the project management skill of generally connecting with the executive sponsor.



PERFECT EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

This report is an attempt to outline the 50 best practices and tools needed to be a good executive sponsor. These 50 secrets have been researched and developed for executive sponsors to help you improve your skills. “The perfect executive sponsor would be someone who understands the product arena, so if it was software they would have some experience in software, maybe as a product manager. I think the perfect executive sponsor would be someone who understands team dynamics. He or she should also have tremendous communication ability to convey the value of the project to his or her management,” said the OMG’s Soley.

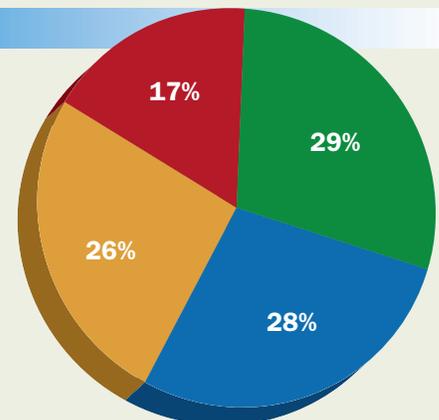
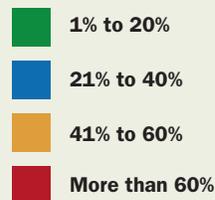
“A good example is we had a tremendous executive sponsor for our support CRM system. We were using Siebel for support and it was working fine, but wasn’t the same platform as sales. The sales department was using Salesforce.com, so we decided to support Salesforce.com as well in order to have a single enterprise view of the customer. Support had three distinct roles, and the executive sponsor understood these roles really well. He also had a pulse of the support leadership. He focused on the minimum set of success criteria to drive the teams to be happy. He was absolutely in charge of scope control,” said VMware’s Heil.

“The perfect executive sponsor will first have the domain knowledge to add value to the project. Second, the executive sponsor will have broad internal and external connections so when he or she needs support it will be there for the team. Third, the executive sponsor will have the ear and confidence of the CEO. There will be times when the executive sponsor will need to go to the CEO, and if the CEO does not have confidence in the executive sponsor then he or she could lose the respect of his or her peers and maybe the team,” said Nathan of Sybase.

Soley added, “The executive sponsor is the person holding the umbrella over the team, because we know when it rains it pours, and ultimately keeping the crap from hitting the team. By doing this the team can do what the team was hired to do without too much interference. On the other hand, for providing such protection the executive sponsor should be made to look good by that team.” And according to Heil, “One of the key things an executive sponsor can do is control scope and make sure it aligns with the success criteria.” Finally, Nathan concluded, “The biggest item for the executive sponsor is to gain and maintain the respect of the team. If the executive sponsor loses the respect of the team, then the project is most likely lost.”

EXECUTIVE SPONSOR EFFECT

IT executives were asked what percentage of a project’s success is directly attributable to the quality of the executive sponsor. Their answers suggest that a little less than half of a project’s success is a direct result of the contribution of a quality executive sponsor.



50 SECRETS TO BEING A GOOD EXECUTIVE SPONSOR AT A GLANCE



- Secret 1:** Inspire
- Secret 2:** Know How the Solution Will Be Used
- Secret 3:** Understand the Project Management Process
- Secret 4:** Set Goals
- Secret 5:** Get the Right Project Resources
- Secret 6:** Promote Excellence
- Secret 7:** Understand Business Events
- Secret 8:** Communicate the Facts
- Secret 9:** Reward Outstanding Effort
- Secret 10:** Provide Clarity of Purpose
- Secret 11:** Recognize Team Member Contributions
- Secret 12:** Obtain Decision Acceptance
- Secret 13:** Develop Quality User Relationships
- Secret 14:** Understand the Executive Sponsor Role
- Secret 15:** Understand Risk and Reward
- Secret 16:** Make Quick Decisions
- Secret 17:** Demand Objectivity and Transparency
- Secret 18:** Manage Financial Changes
- Secret 19:** Determine Explicit User Needs
- Secret 20:** Endorse the Business Objectives
- Secret 21:** Distribute Decision Power
- Secret 22:** Overcome Arrogance
- Secret 23:** Overcome Fraudulence
- Secret 24:** Use Value and Risk Metrics
- Secret 25:** Understand the Project Life Cycle
- Secret 26:** Understand PM Techniques
- Secret 27:** Overcome Ignorance
- Secret 28:** Have a Succinct Vision
- Secret 29:** Know When to Pull the Plug
- Secret 30:** Develop a Simple Vision
- Secret 31:** Track Progress with Metrics
- Secret 32:** Drive Project Activities
- Secret 33:** Celebrate Accomplishments
- Secret 34:** Track Investments
- Secret 35:** Track Technical Events
- Secret 36:** Have Commitment
- Secret 37:** Be Familiar with Similar Projects
- Secret 38:** Overcome Overambition
- Secret 39:** Establish a Common Vocabulary
- Secret 40:** Use a Decision Pipeline
- Secret 41:** Deliver Steppingstones
- Secret 42:** Track Progress Against the Plan
- Secret 43:** Create a Community
- Secret 44:** Exhibit Honor and Pride
- Secret 45:** Overcome Abstinence
- Secret 46:** Avoid Decision Latency
- Secret 47:** Negotiate
- Secret 48:** Be Aware
- Secret 49:** Bond with the PM
- Secret 50:** Celebrate with a Party