THE SPONSOR AS THE FACE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

by Dr. H. James Harrington, CEO of Harrington Associates and Douglas Nelson, Harrington Associates
# Table of Contents

**Introduction** .......................................................... 3  
**Traits of a Good Sponsor** .................................................. 5  
  - Sponsor Responsibilities to the Executive Team .................................. 5  
  - Sponsor’s Level of Commitment ...................................................... 5  
  - Sustaining Sponsorship .................................................................. 6  
**The Changing Role of Sponsor** ................................................ 8  
  - The Initiating Process Group .......................................................... 10  
  - The Planning Process Group .......................................................... 12  
  - The Executing Process Group ......................................................... 15  
  - The Monitoring and Controlling Process Group ............................ 16  
  - The Closing Process Group .......................................................... 17  
**Conclusion** .............................................................. 19  
**References** ................................................................. 20
Introduction

President Woodrow Wilson once stated, “If you want to make enemies, try to change something.” Creating change is risky business and an important way to minimize that risk is to have credible, enthusiastic sponsors who support and drive the change.

Innovation is the hot topic in today’s business environment. Innovation by its very nature fosters significant change in any organization. Business leaders around the world are working to bring out more new items faster than ever in order to survive and thrive in a turbulent economy. We are cycling up and down the product S-curve (see Figure 1) at an unprecedented rate. And not only products, but services as well, are experiencing this rapid cycling through the S-curve.

At one time, companies were able to ride on a competitive advantage for quite a while before it was necessary to introduce a new product or service. Today, a business advantage hardly reaches past the center of the S-curve before competitors coming from their own area or even different industries erode the market of the current product or service. Changes are required in the way businesses manage projects in order to accommodate the rapid changes in products, processes, and services that innovation and external competition bring. One of these major changes is the increased need for sponsor involvement in the execution of projects. The sponsor can minimize barriers to change and ensure the rapid and effective implementation of project outcomes.

Ideally, once the sponsor has legitimized the project, everything would run smoothly and the project scope would remain constant. By providing the resources required to implement the project, the sponsor’s involvement would be negligible until the final results are available for evaluation. However, seldom do things run this smoothly in the real world.

Kotter (1996) released a study stating only 30% of change initiatives were successful. This author’s research and research by many others indicates that the success rate remains at or about 30%. Hammer and Champy (2009) observed, “Some 50% to 70% of reengineering attempts fail to deliver the intended dramatic results.” Burke (2011) noted “examples of significant and successful organizational change … are exceptional. Most organization change is not significant or successful.” The Economist Intelligence Unit (2013) found that approximately 50% of strategic initiatives do not receive appropriate executive-level attention and “28% admit that individual projects to implement strategy do not typically obtain the necessary senior-level sponsorship.” Improved sponsor involvement in organizational change management (OCM) can improve these numbers.

For simplicity, this paper uses the term project, but a number of the sponsor activities are equally relevant for programs. When a project is part of a program, the role of sponsor may be fulfilled by the program manager.
The following statement from *Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide* (PMI, 2013b) provides the foundational concept for this whitepaper.

“A sponsor provides resources required for change and has the ultimate responsibility for the program or project, building commitment for the change particularly at the senior management level across the organization. Direct responsibility and accountability for the change needs to be clearly defined and accepted at an appropriately high level within an organization. Consequently, the sponsor for a change effort should be someone who has sufficient authority, influence, power, enthusiasm, and time to ensure that any conflicts that could impede the change are resolved in a timely and appropriate fashion.”

PMI’s 2013 *Pulse of the Profession™* (PMI, 2013c) directly links success with an active sponsor who exhibits visible sponsorship and advocacy for the change effort, assesses and mitigates any resistance to the change, and oversees the business and management issues that surface. The report noted that “More than three quarters of projects (79 percent) at high-performing organizations enjoy active project sponsors, compared to less than half (43 percent) at low-performing organizations.” The sponsor’s active and visible support of the change from initiation to completion is important in order to deal with the organization’s culture, to ensure that all stakeholders are represented and to build alliances with others across the organization. Active support throughout the process is positively correlated to a successful outcome. The 2013 APQC Open Innovation report (American Productivity & Quality Center [APQC], 2013) reinforced the essential role of the sponsor: “Executive sponsorship can help remove roadblocks and drive participation in open innovation efforts.”

Note: Sponsors usually are not relieved of other work responsibilities when they accept the role. The sponsor’s activities are usually in addition to their normal workload and, as such, individuals considering accepting the role of sponsor must assess their current workload and be sure that they have adequate time to participate in the project.
Traits of a Good Sponsor

Conner (1992) listed six characteristics that are important to a strong sponsor:

- **Power:** The organizational power to legitimize the change with recipients
- **Sense of urgency:** The ability to continuously stress the need for change
- **Vision:** A clear definition of what change must occur
- **Public role:** The ability and willingness to demonstrate the public support necessary to convey strong organizational commitment to the change
- **Private role:** The ability and willingness to meet privately with key individuals or groups to convey strong personal support for the change
- **Leverage:** The capability to engage and commit others to the change

Sponsors need to be change leaders and not just managers. While managers focus on planning and short-term horizons, devise processes and structures and solve problems, sponsors establish direction for the future, communicate through vision, and forge aligned, high-performance teams.

**Sponsor Responsibilities to the Executive Team**

A sponsor is usually a high- or middle-level manager who has direct accountability to the executive team. As a result, the executive team usually defines a list of expectations that they have placed upon the sponsor’s assignment as his/her activities relate to the executive team. These often take the form of key points in the sponsor’s job description. Typically, the executive team seeks sponsors who:

- Understand the organization’s culture and values
- Keep projects aligned with organization’s strategy and portfolio direction
- Provide leadership to the project team
- Provide ongoing assessment of the project’s viability
- Work with other sponsors
- Focus on realization of benefits
- Seek opportunities to optimize cost/benefits
- Ensure continuity of sponsorship
- Provide feedback and lessons learned to the executive team

**Sponsor’s Level of Commitment**

A formal job description for a project sponsor is helpful. A job description reduces misunderstandings between the management team, the project team and the sponsor regarding expectations. An individual who is considering serving as a sponsor for a project should complete an analysis similar to that shown in Figure 2. Anyone who rates less than 60 probably should consider whether the project sponsor role would be appropriate.

The relationship between the sponsor and the different entities that make up the project management system is a two-way street. It’s a win-win situation with better information exchange that allows for effective performance of their assigned responsibilities more effectively. Having an honest, open exchange of information between the entities provides the best overall benefit to the total organization. In order to help the sponsor perform his or her assignment, the project team should identify sustaining sponsors (see next section) who are losing enthusiasm, provide accurate status reports, keep the project plan updated, maintain accurate and thorough daily logs, and highlight weaknesses that could cause delays and/or overruns in projected budgets.
The Sponsor as the Face of Organizational Change

Sustaining Sponsorship

A top-down change project begins with the executive sponsor promoting the project. Acceptance and support of the change by all of the stakeholders, including those who may not have direct contact with the executive sponsor, is important. To accomplish this, the executive sponsor should enlist the help of the mid-level managers who have the power to legitimize the change with first-level managers. Once the mid-level managers are on board, they engage the first-level managers and communicate the purpose and value of the change. The buy-in from first-level managers allows them to become sponsors of the change to their teams. Engaging lower-level managers does not transfer accountability, but is a delegation of responsibility for portions of the sponsorship activities (see Figure 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the project is worthwhile implementing for the business.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the professional competencies to add value to the project.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am willing to be held accountable for the outcome from the project.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that the project’s goals and objectives can be met.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I will commit the time required to support the project.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the leadership traits to serve as the sponsor for the project.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the necessary organizational contacts to secure the project’s resources and cooperation from the interfacing functions.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in a position to influence the outcome of the project.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: _ ___________________________________________________________ Sum: _____

Figure 2: Sponsor Commitment Analysis
Accountability then flows up from the first-level managers through the mid-level managers with the executive sponsor retaining ultimate accountability for the project and benefits realization.

This downward flow of responsibility is what Harrington, Conner & Horney (2000) referred to as "cascading sponsorship." The inclusion of multiple layers of sponsorship activities creates a network of sponsors functioning in a way that sustains the project's forward progress. Thus, these managers might be termed "sustaining sponsors". The sponsor functions elaborated in the remainder of this paper may be carried out by the executive sponsor or one or more of the sustaining sponsors. However, the term "sponsor" as used here should be seen as a function that must be performed and for which the executive sponsor is ultimately accountable.

Change is impaired if there is no network of sustaining sponsorship that maintains the integrity of the implementation as it moves down through the levels of the organization. Flowing sponsorship down through management layers is an effective way to eliminate what Conner (1992) termed "black holes" that may be caused by:

- Bureaucratic layers
- Cultural differences
- Geographic distance
- Personal differences
- Budgeting issues
- Lack of time
The Changing Role of Sponsor

As a project progresses through its life cycle, the role of the sponsor shifts to give emphasis to the major challenges facing the project team in the current Process Group. Although the shift in emphasis relates to all parts of the project team’s activities, the focus here is on what the sponsor needs to do to support OCM concepts. Figure 4 depicts the five Process Groups of the project life cycle and is used to show how this emphasis changes during a project.

Figure 4: The Five Process Groups in the Project Lifecycle
Figure 5 depicts the five phases that make up the Change Life Cycle Framework defined in *Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide* (PMI, 2013b) and depicts the change management activities that should be planned and managed as part of the project management plan and its related artifacts.

---

**Figure 5: Change Life Cycle Framework**

- **Current State**
  - Business objectives
  - Formulate Change
    - Identify/clarify need for change
    - Assess readiness for change
    - Delineate scope of change
  - Plan Change
    - Define the change approach
    - Plan stakeholder engagement
    - Plan transition and integration
  - Implement Change
    - Prepare Organization for change
    - Mobilize stakeholders
    - Deliver project outputs
  - Manage Transition
    - Transition outputs into business
    - Measure adoption rate and outcomes/benefits
    - Adjust plan to address discrepancies
  - Sustain Change
    - Ongoing communication, consultation, and representation of stakeholders
    - Conduct sensemaking activities
    - Measure benefits realization

- **Future State**

- **Adaptive Change**

---

*Organizational Business Strategy*

**Current State**

- Business objectives

**Future State**

- Realized Value

---

**Need for Time**

**Realized Value**

---

*Figure 5: Change Life Cycle Framework*
Figure 6 shows the relationship between the five Project Management Process Groups defined in the *PMBOK® Guide* (PMI, 2013a) and the Change Life Cycle Framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Management Process Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiating</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustain Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Executing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring and Controlling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closing</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6: Relationship between the Process Groups and the Change Life Cycle Framework**

**The Initiating Process Group**

The *PMBOK® Guide* (PMI, 2013a) states that “The Initiating Process Group consists of the processes performed to define a new project by obtaining authorization to start the project.”

The sponsor is the individual with the power and authority to legitimize the project within the organization. The sponsor has the responsibility for acquiring and deploying the necessary resources. He or she is deeply involved in the development and approval of the business case. Before a project is formalized, the business case analysis should be completed and approved with requisite funding for developing the project plan.

The start of project management planning begins once the project is formalized. The executive sponsor may continue to serve as the project sponsor or that function may be delegated to another individual or group that better fulfills the project sponsorship requirements, such as the program manager where the project is part of a larger program. But as noted earlier, the delegation of responsibility does not relieve the executive sponsor of accountability for the project outcomes.

One of the outputs from the business case assessment is the charter for the project. As a result, the sponsor is usually deeply involved with providing input to and approving the project charter. Typical activities that the project sponsor is involved with during Initiating Process Group include:

- **Complete sponsor evaluation:** The sponsor will complete an evaluation and prepare a personal activities checklist. This checklist may be reviewed and discussed with the project manager.

- **Conduct an organization readiness assessment:** An adaptation capacity audit is usually conducted during this project life cycle stage. The adaptation capacity audit assesses the organization’s capacity for change and identifies gaps that should be addressed either before the project is launched or simultaneously with the project launch. The sponsor will review the results of this audit and participate in establishing any mitigation plans necessary.
Analyze change impact on existing systems and structures: The sponsor should work with the project manager to evaluate how change will impact existing systems, networks, and structures, including the people affected. This evaluation should be reflected in the project plan with components addressed in the work breakdown structure.

Consult relevant historical data: The sponsor should verify if relevant past project documentation exists that can be used as historical data to improve chances of success for the project. He or she should analyze how recommendations therein can help improve the way the project and OCM activities are managed.

Understand what the project requires: The sponsor has to understand the business case, the charter and the specifics related to the project so that he or she can answer detailed questions related to the project and be able to make presentations related to it. The sponsor also needs this information to select the right people with the right background, experience, and technical knowledge to be active members on the project team.

Once the sponsor has a clear understanding of the project's goals, requirements and the organization's readiness, he or she needs to take an active role in communicating this information with the applicable parties. Activities will include:

Communicate the project vision: The sponsor communicates the vision for the project with all stakeholders. This should be a clear, tangible and accessible description of the future state and business drivers. The sponsor creates an active dialogue about the future state with all stakeholders.

Define current state and proposed future state conditions: The sponsor will perform and document a statistically sound characterization of the current state situation. This will serve as the benchmark for evaluating the success of the project. The current state analysis is part of the “formulate change” phase in the change life cycle framework and serves as a baseline for developing the change impact analysis and the metrics to measure adoption rate later. The sponsor will also define the future state and identify gaps between the current and future state. This comprehensive definition is used to identify the measurement and sampling plan for tracking change results as the project moves forward.

Convey a sense of urgency: The sponsor should convey the compelling need to transform the elements of the business system in a timely manner. The sponsor should demonstrate the ability to overcome all obstacles to achieving the future state.

The sponsor will also be involved in some vital documentation and management activities at this stage, including:

Review stakeholder register: All of the stakeholders and their requirements must be defined and documented as part of the stakeholder register. The sponsor will review this register in detail assuring that the requirements can be met based upon the proposed project objectives.

Identifying potential change agents: Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide (PMI, 2013b) defines change agents as “active proponents and drivers of the change.” The sponsor will ensure that the entire project team and identified change agents complete a change agent competency evaluation to determine that they are ready to fully support the project. The sponsor should approve mitigation plans for any inadequacies discovered.

Reviewing stakeholder matrix: The sponsor will ensure that the stakeholder matrix includes a map of all stakeholders and their level of support for and influence on the project.
■ **Developing a responsibility and accountabilities agreement:** This document will define the roles and interfaces between the sponsor and the project team.

■ **Defining the adoption metrics:** The sponsor and the project manager need to analyze and agree on the project adoption and integration metrics that the recipients will be required to reach in order to deem the project a success.

■ **Manage resources:** Part of the value of the project may be a reduction in resources when process improvement is part of the future state benefits. The sponsor will ensure that a plan is in place to effectively reallocate surplus resources (including personnel) to new value-creation opportunities.

### The Planning Process Group

The *PMBOK® Guide* (PMI, 2013a) states that “The Planning Process Group consists of those processes performed to establish the scope of the effort, define and refine the objectives, and develop the course of action required to attain those objectives.”

Planning is the strategic part of the project management cycle. Its final result is the project management plan that sets the framework for the rest of the cycle. The sponsor ensures that the plan will produce the desired results without exceeding the allotted resources. This requires the sponsor to understand all of the changes, the change enablers, and risks associated with the organizational culture.

Organizational change is a process (Figure 7) of transforming an item or process from its current state through a transitional period to a future state that is deemed superior to the current state.

![Figure 7: The Change Process](image)

During the Planning Process Group the recipients are still operating in the current state situation. At this point in the life cycle, it is important that the recipients and the sponsor have an understanding of the deficiency of the present state and the additional deficiency that will occur if they continue to operate in the current state. As a result, it is important that the sponsor ensures that the requirements of all the stakeholders are well-defined and addressed and that good change management practices are embedded throughout the project management plan—thereby maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of the project and minimizing any negative impact on the organization.
Typical activities of the sponsor during this process group include:

■ **Making revisions to goals, objectives and return on investment:** Any adverse changes in these three areas will require the approval of the sponsor and, in some cases, the approval of the executive committee. In some organizations, a governance board assumes the responsibility for project revisions.

■ **Performing a culture assessment analysis:** A culture assessment needs to be conducted so that the culture that is unique to the areas affected by the change and the culture of the organization itself are considered in how the project is designed and implemented. One important cultural aspect to assess is resistance or acceptance of change. The sponsor should make a detailed review of the culture assessment to be sure that it matches past experience in dealing with the area. The project team should then demonstrate to the sponsor that these cultural considerations are reflected in the risk management plan.

■ **Approving project scope:** The project manager will firm up and document the project’s goals, objectives, and boundaries. The sponsor will take an active role in reviewing and approving all goals, objectives and boundaries. The sponsor will ensure that all goals, objectives, and boundaries keep with the project charter.

■ **Protecting intellectual capital:** The sponsor will ensure that the project content has been evaluated to determine if it contains creative and unique items that should be protected by patents or trademarks.

■ **Reviewing past lessons learned:** A review of lessons learned regarding past changes should be conducted during this process group to identify potential barriers and enablers related to similar projects. The enablers should be integrated into the project management plan to strengthen the possibilities of success. Medium- and high-level barriers should have mitigation actions as part of the risk management plan. The sponsor will supervise the development of the risk mitigation plans.

■ **Defining change approach:** An approach to managing the change includes education on the change process and training for the project deliverables. The sponsor should validate the adequacy of these training programs and ensure that the right people take part.

The sponsor’s role also includes approving or obtaining approval of key elements that the project needs to move forward, as well as defining and developing systems and strategies. Some of these activities include:

■ **Project management plan approval:** The sponsor thoroughly understands and approves the project management plan. The sponsor is responsible for ensuring that change management is an integral part of the plan.

■ **Approving budget:** The sponsor must review and sign off on the initial budget and any subsequent changes to the budget or resources along with an analysis of how these changes impact the benefits that the project should yield.

■ **Approving work breakdown structure:** The sponsor should review the detailed work breakdown structure to ensure that its design can produce the desired results and includes the OCM activities without exceeding the resource and/or time allocations.

■ **Defining the data reporting system:** A project data reporting system needs to be developed and implemented as part of the project management plan. The project data reporting is often in the form of a dashboard that is shared with all stakeholders during the project life cycle. The sponsor must define project related data, formats, and reporting frequency required.
■ **Developing transition management strategy:** It is well known that change is perceived as difficult. The sponsor’s role is to help recipients understand that transition difficulty is only temporary and that the future state should ease many of the deficiencies that the current state is generating. A transition management strategy is developed to help recipients understand the need to abandon the current state, bear the effort of the transition, and embrace the future state. The sponsor will be deeply involved in developing and rolling out the strategy.

■ **Approving the communications plan:** There is a need to provide complete and accurate information related to the project. The communications plan should address the audience’s interests, fears and organizational culture. The sponsor should ensure that this communications plan is prepared and sets reasonable expectations for the future as early as possible. Frequently, the sponsor makes the initial project announcement as part of the plan.

■ **Developing sustaining sponsorship:** Sustaining sponsorship begins with the development of the stakeholder matrix that defines the recipients’ managers. Each of the recipients’ managers will complete a sponsor evaluation. The intent is to engage all recipient managers and convert them into sustaining sponsors; those that cannot be actively engaged should at least become neutral if they were negative.

■ **Implementation assessment review:** When the work breakdown structure is completed and approved, the project team should conduct an implementation assessment to define potential problems that they may face in completing the project. This assessment and the mitigation plan are reviewed with the sponsor.

■ **Defining stage gates:** The sponsor defines the points in the project management plan where he or she will perform a detailed review of the entire project’s progress and accomplishments to determine recommendations to the executive committee as to whether the project should be continued, modified or cancelled.

■ **Interface with the executive committee:** At regular intervals, the sponsor will report to the executive committee on the status, progress and risks related to the assigned project. The sponsor will keep the executive committee informed related to changes affecting scope or objectives of the project.
The Executing Process Group

The PMBOK® Guide (PMI, 2013a) states that “The Executing Process Group consists of those processes performed to complete the work defined in the project management plan to satisfy the project specifications.”

The main sponsor activities during the Executing Process Group are to ensure that the project management plan is implemented as agreed upon and that the project team is assembled and resources procured for the project. If major changes are required to the scope during this stage, it will be the sponsor’s role to assess and authorize them.

During the executing activities, especially as project results are delivered, the change process moves into the transition state. This is a state where recipients may perceive a loss of control of their activities and stress levels will increase. The recipients will need to change the way they perform their assigned tasks. For this reason the sponsor will focus on converting any resistance to support of the project. The sponsor will continue to follow up, track and be involved in the activities that were started during the previous process group. Additional activities in the executing process group include:

- **Evaluating project team performance:** The sponsor will analyze the makeup and competencies of the project team to be sure that the project team continues to have the ability to meet all project goals and objectives and is delivering at the right pace for the change to be sustainable.

- **Scheduling stage gates:** The sponsor will schedule stage gates where complete reviews of the project are conducted. Members of the executive committee are invited to attend any of the stage gates.

- **Evaluating communications effectiveness:** The sponsor should ensure that the communication plan’s effectiveness is measured through a survey or other means. The sponsor will assess and authorize any proposed changes to the communication plan to correct any failings or discrepancies. The need to achieve the future state is discussed and reinforced through visible day-to-day activities.

- **Sustaining communication:** This activity is particularly important. With time, some managers’ interests may shift away from the project and become redirected to other areas. They may stop communicating the importance of the project and become what is termed as “black holes.” Information and knowledge related to the project is provided to them, but they do not share it with the people impacted. One way to avoid this is to hold regular team meetings that are open to all stakeholders.

- **Conducting recipient survey:** As the project delivers its results, interviews and surveys of the recipients will help define the enablers, opportunities and threats related to the project transition. The sponsor will be involved in establishing mitigation plans for the medium and high-threat items identified—including areas of resistance, as well as support plans for any opportunity that needs to be implemented.

- **Conducting sensemaking activities:** Sensemaking activities are defined in Managing Change in Organizations: A Practice Guide (PMI, 2013b) as the “conversational and social practices that enable individuals and groups to make sense of what is happening around them.” The sponsor begins the sensemaking process during this process group to ensure that there is adequate support for the emotional and personal changes required to implement and sustain the project. This sensemaking activity continues on through the remaining process groups as the project life cycle moves forward.

- **Conducting a synergy survey:** This is an appropriate time to conduct a synergy survey to determine weaknesses and strengths related to the interfaces between the project team and the recipients. The sponsor should be involved in developing plans to correct any problems identified in the assessment.
The Sponsor as the Face of Organizational Change

©2013 Project Management Institute, Inc.

The Monitoring and Controlling Process Group

The PMBOK® Guide (PMI, 2013a) defines the work of the Monitoring and Controlling Process Group as consisting of “the processes required to track, review, and report the progress and performance of the project; identify any areas in which changes to the plan are required; and initiate the corresponding changes.” Many of the tasks and activities regarding monitoring and controlling overlap with the execution tasks and activities, which are run in parallel.

At the end of this phase, the future state situation will have been completely implemented and its impact on the organization, as related to the goals and objectives of the project, will have been measured and evaluated.

The sponsor leverages his/her influence to reinforce new behaviors associated with the desired state. Some of the sponsor activities include:

■ Reviewing project status reports: The sponsor receives project status reports and is responsible for analyzing them to understand current statuses and risks. Frequently, the sponsor will schedule meetings with the project manager and project team to clarify or consolidate these reports.

■ Measuring the future state: The sponsor will ensure that the measurement plan for the future state has been adequately implemented and is operating effectively. The measurement of adoption does not wait until the end of the project, but runs throughout this phase of the project life cycle.

■ Ensuring data integrity: The sponsor verifies the integrity of the data being collected to ensure that a sufficient sample has been taken and that the data is true and accurate. The data informs a gap analysis comparing the new state to the previous old state.

■ Analyzing objectives and goals: The sponsor compares the results of the data collected and/or gap analysis conducted during this process group to determine if the project is meeting its objectives and goals. If the project is not meeting interim objectives and goals, the sponsor will ensure that adequate changes are made to the project management plan to close the gaps. If the gaps can’t be closed, the sponsor highlights this condition to the executive team and makes a recommendation.

The sponsor takes an active role in keeping recipients and executives informed related to the progress of the project and the integration of its results. Frequent communication updates are required to encourage the recipients to embrace the changes. Some related activities include:

■ Conducting adaptation capacity audits: Often during this process group, a capacity audit is conducted to determine the stress levels in the affected areas. The sponsor will review the audit results and the mitigation plans for offsetting any high-risk areas.

■ Reviewing training results: The sponsor will review the summary report that defines how the recipients have been trained on the changes that the project requires. In addition, the sponsor should consider personally interviewing a sample of the operating-level recipients.

■ Reviewing change acceptance analysis: This analysis is conducted to measure the effectiveness of the OCM activities up to this point. The sponsor will do a detailed review of this analysis and approve any proposed changes to the project management plan.
Conducting transitions analysis: An analysis is conducted to determine if affected managers within the organization are prepared and personnel properly trained to take over the responsibilities of managing the changes brought about by the project. This is analysis of the managers’ abilities and skills and, as a result, the sponsor often conducts it. When weaknesses in the current management structure are identified, the sponsor will ensure that actions are taken to remediate them.

Overseeing a sustainability plan: The sponsor should actively participate in helping the project manager and the recipients’ managers prepare a sustainability plan to ensure the gains made by the delivery of the project results will be maintained after the project team is disbanded. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to ensure these plans are adequate and attainable.

Analyzing documentation: All of the documentation related to the changes brought about by the project should be formally documented and released before the end of this process group. The sponsor should require that a documentation analysis be performed that defines all of the required documents and their statuses.

The Closing Process Group

The PMBOK® Guide (PMI, 2013a) defines the Closing Process Group as consisting "of those processes performed to conclude all activities across all Project Management Process Groups to formally complete the project or phase, or contractual obligations.”

The Closing Process Group is designed to close out the project once the project deliverable is turned over to operations management. Often the impact of the project’s results upon the organization is projected over a period that extends the life of the project, but the project management team is disbanded as soon as all the transition activities have been finalized. Typical activities that the sponsor will be involved in include:

Overseeing the transition plan: The sponsor will ensure that a comprehensive, detailed plan is prepared for transitioning the responsibilities for the changes brought about by the project to the operating units within the organization. The sponsor will ensure that this plan not only meets the needs of the project management team, but also has the full support of the operations management team that will be accepting these new roles.

Ensuring engagement systems alignment: The sponsor will ensure that the rewards and recognition, as well as the sensemaking and other engagement systems in use by the affected areas of the organization, are adequate to encourage recipients to embrace the change and to ensure that any undesirable behavioral patterns are corrected.

Hosting focus groups: Typically a series of focus groups are held with different levels of recipients. The focus groups provide feedback on their experiences related to the project’s results and to define possible improvements for future project’s OCM activities. The sponsor may take part in some or all of the focus group sessions.
- **Conducting final stage gate:** The sponsor and project manager conduct a final stage gate. Attending this stage gate will be the executive team, the project management team, and the operations team that will be accepting the responsibilities for maintaining the outputs from the project. To successfully complete this stage gate, the following conditions must be realized:

  - All agreed project goals and objectives must be completed and statuses approved by the executive team.
  - All the required documentation must be formally released and the recipients trained to integrate the deliverable.
  - The transformation plan must be completely implemented to the satisfaction of the project management team and the operations team responsible for sustaining the changes.
  - The sustainability plan needs to be documented and agreed to by the sponsor, project management team and the operations teams.
  - There must be agreement that the project management team should be disbanded and reassigned to other activities.

Following the final stage gate, the sponsor will also play a role in the concluding activities for the project. Some of these include:

- **Conducting lessons-learned review:** The project management team and the sponsor conduct a postmortem of all project management activities to define strengths and weaknesses in the approaches and methods used. A report is generated that documents this analysis and makes recommendations on how to improve the way future projects and OCM activities are managed.

- **Archiving relevant documents:** The sponsor should verify that all relevant project documents are stored in a project management information system to be used as historical data.

- **Closing procurement activities:** The sponsor verifies that all procurement activities have been completed before agreements are closed out.

- **Performing project team members’ evaluations:** The sponsor should be involved in a documented review of the performance of each project team member. The sponsor should ensure that team members are recognized and rewarded based upon their individual performance.

- **Signing final close report:** The project manager and sponsor prepare a final close report that summarizes the activities and results of the project.
Conclusion

Organizations are more effective when they recognize project sponsorship as a core competency. Sponsors play a critical role in effectively integrating project management and a disciplined approach to change management that dramatically improves the odds of a successful project implementation. For projects to be successful today, a major commitment from the organization’s leadership is required. The sponsor plays a key role by promoting and sustaining the focus on the project’s critical nature and its urgency as well as by coaching employees and executives and, finally, by communicating a shared sense of the need for change. The leadership within the organization needs to be the first to change, thereby motivating the rest of the organization by setting the example and displaying the desired behavioral patterns. One of the main responsibilities of the sponsor is to ensure that the organization’s leaders continue to be involved and provide visible support throughout the entire project life cycle.

Unfortunately, today very few organizations have an executive management team that has developed the skills and knowledge to support an effective OCM system. Until this is accomplished, project failure rates will continue to be high. With today’s focus on innovation, projects are becoming the key drivers of organizational success. It is absolutely essential that the executive team develops the capability to be sponsors that truly understand, promote and demonstrate the organizational change management competencies in project management.
The Sponsor as the Face of Organizational Change

References


