Adaptive habitus?

Project managers' evaluation of the role of the

executive sponsor in complex projects

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Abstract

Project management literature frequently refers to the role of project executive sponsor but does not address in any great depth the factors contributing to effective project sponsorship, a role increasingly associated with project success. Most research about key project roles addresses either structural or behavioural factors with a definite emphasis on the former. This research attempts to bridge an emerging structural-behavioural schism applying the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. Project managers' assessments of the effectiveness of the role of the executive sponsor are analysed using two different approaches. The internal infrastructure projects projects under scrutiny have been described by project owners as both complex and of medium to high risk. Analysis of 30 interviews identifies nine key attributes of successful project sponsorship. Significantly project managers appear to be exercising a complex range of behaviour patterns; adaptive habitus? These behaviours may serve to mask inadequate sponsor performance.

Keywords
project, sponsor, project manager, habitus, Bourdieu

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Introduction

Appreciably absent from the growing body of research into the management of projects within organisations is a focus on the structures and agents actively affecting the project, in particular the role of the executive sponsor and the interactions between the project sponsor and project manager. With some notable exceptions, explanations of performance in projects have tended toward either structural/organisational aspects or behavioural factors, with a decided emphasis on the former. This Parsonian emphasis in the project management literature on the roles of the various agents and associated normative expectations has led to a systematic undervaluing of the dispositional dimensions of social interactions. On the other hand, agent-centred (behaviouralist) models tend to ignore social elements in the construction of individual motivation and ability to act (Reed, 1997, p. 21). In investigating the role of the project executive sponsor, this research seeks to bridge this dichotomy by drawing upon the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu to offer a more balanced context for understanding the key role of the executive sponsor in projects. Bourdieu's approach to understanding the relationship between actors and structures builds on the key idea that objective structures have subjective consequences (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu's methodological approach has become increasingly influential within the social sciences and his ideas present a basis for analysing social interactions influencing project performance.

The paper is organised in the following manner. The first section outlines the current status of research on the subject of executive sponsorship as critical agents in the field of project management. Secondly the research methodology is presented, followed thirdly by a brief overview of Bourdieu's framework. The fourth section reports on major themes emerging from the research. Finally, by way of conclusion, follows an interpretation of the research findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

Status of knowledge: the role of the executive project sponsor

Although most project management bodies of knowledge recognise the importance of the role of executive sponsor in achieving project success, with limited exceptions very little research has been conducted. Primarily, project sponsors are seen as providing resources for a project (Dinsmore, 1993; Kliem, Ludin, et al, 1997; Curry, 1995; Turner, 1999; Crawford & Brett, 2001). This is demonstrated in many of the more common definitions of the role such as the one provided in PMBoK® which describes the sponsor as "the individual or group within or external to the performing organization [sic] that provides the financial resources, in cash or in kind, for the project" (PMI, 2000, p.16). Increasingly however, the appointment of a project sponsor is being viewed as vital to project success (Kay, 1997; Ingram, 1994; Stevens, 1998) and the Association of Project Management's APMP Syllabus describes the project sponsor as the individual "who is the primary risk taker" for the project

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(APM, 2000). More recently Hall et al. (2003) investigated the role of the project sponsor under new public management in the UK.

Given this recognised correlation between the role of the project sponsor and the ultimate success of the project surprisingly little has been written on the characteristics of the role. There is, however, a growing amount of anecdotal evidence that project managers, aware of the importance of the executive role, are taking the initiative to act. Recent articles like "Surviving the Sponsor Exit" (Melymuka, 2004a) and "Firing your Project Sponsor" (Melymuka, 2004b) not only stress the importance of the role of the project sponsor with respect to project success, they also quote advice from a number of senior project managers who suggest ways of dealing with inadequate sponsor performance. Anecdotal evidence that project managers routinely take the initiative to address perceived deficiencies in the role of the project sponsor is supported by findings from this research.

Research Methodology

Background
Most project management literature to date on the subject of project success has approached the issue from a structural perspective (roles and responsibilities with organisational structure). However, if the dynamics of the project are to be understood, it must come from a study of practice and the dispositions of key agents, which arise out of and in turn influence the structure and history of the organisation in which the project is being managed. A behavioural approach, which stresses personal autonomy, ignores the 'structuring structures' which restrict freedom of choice and also contribute to the historical development of the field (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 31). Bourdieu argues that the hiding of the structures accounts for the illusion of free choice within the cultural framework (Bourdieu, 1991a, p. 37). On the other hand the current focus in project management, on definition of project roles, can lead to the assumption that once the roles are defined and communicated the humans occupying those roles will respond 'puppet-like' to the prescribed definitions (see Turner, 1990, for a discussion of later applications of Talcott Parsons' theory).

Approach
The methodology chosen to help reveal both the 'structuring structures' and the 'habitus' was influenced by two approaches to sociological research; Grounded Theory and the methodology developed by Pierre Bourdieu in his own sociological research. Grounded Theory allows theory to emerge from the data, thus minimising the propensity for the researcher to pre-determine the outcomes through overly structured questioning techniques (Strauss & Corbin,1990; Dey,1999). Bourdieu's approach combines the gathering of data ahead of the interview, in this case through preparatory conversations with the interviewees or with others in the organisation followed by interviews that

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involved 'assisted self-analysis' (Bourdieu, 1991b). This approach was found to be particularly effective as information about the history of the project and the organisation was essential to our analysis. Also, the interview subjects (project managers, project directors and senior managers) tend to be busy, active, pragmatic people for whom reflection can be both difficult and time-wasting.

The ability of the interviewer to engage and emphathise with the interviewee in order to help the interviewee to express things which they had never clearly articulated before, was vital (Bourdieu, 1991b). Also, gathering of knowledge prior to the interviews helped researchers construct the history of the project and '...continually come up with the right questions – those genuinely basic hypotheses that, being grounded in an intuitive and provisional representation of the interviewee's own generative formula, provoke that formula to reveal itself more completely' (Bourdieu (ed.) 1993a, p. 911, cited in Moingean et al., 1997, p. 388). Many interviewees commented afterwards that they had found the interview experience to be 'helpful', in the sense that the interview had allowed them to articulate many issues which they had been previously unable to express, having been constrained by requirements of confidentiality or lack of time or opportunity. An essential aspect of Grounded Theory is successive development of the researchers' knowledge of the subject matter and as the interviews progressed the interviewer's ability to emphathise, engage and draw out responses was substantially enhanced. Hence, in keeping with Bourdieu's methodology and consistent with Grounded Theory, some interviewees were contacted again for further clarification, after analysis of the interview data revealed possible gaps.

Interviews
30 interviews of between 1-2 hours each, with follow-up interviews if required, have been conducted in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom; 4 with project sponsors, 24 with project managers and 2 with project directors. As expected from previous research in this field (Thomas et al., 2002), repeating themes appeared early in the process. Interview subjects were selected to represent a range of industry sectors, from both the government and commercial sectors. During the interviews participants were asked to focus on a project that had been agreed with the research team prior to the interview. Projects were internal infrastructure projects deemed by the organisation to be of medium to high complexity and medium to high risk (level 4 and above on a Likert scale of 1-7). The measure of complexity was based on the degree of clarity of goals and goal paths and the propensity for goals and goal paths to change during the project life cycle (Hirokawa and Orlitsky, 2001). Risk was interpreted as risk to the organisation. Most projects discussed, but not all, were also deemed by the project owners to have been successful.

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The original research design included a much higher proportion of sponsors as interviewees, however, as many project sponsors refused to participate, the research team was forced to modify this aspect of the research design. Incidentally, the executive sponsors who did agree to be interviewed were also described by others as being highly effective in the role. To encourage frank discussion, anonymity of both the interviewee and the organisation was guaranteed. In accordance with the methodology discussed above, the approach of the interviewer was to encourage participants to recount their own 'lived experience' rather than recite organisational or project management best practice. Each interview has been coded, recorded and transcribed and the transcriptions were analysed using proprietary text analysis software. Transcripts were also subjected to detailed textual analysis by researchers. This combined approach allowed for more effective identification of themes arising from the interviews. Nine main themes arose during the analysis. Coded records of the interviewees' positions and the project characteristics are shown in Table 1 (Appendix A).

Application of Bourdieu's conceptual framework

Before presenting the research findings it is useful to briefly summarise those aspects of Pierre Bourdieu's work that have been used in the analysis.

Practical Logic
For Bourdieu social phenomena as observed in practice are influenced by the interaction of habitus, objective structures and historical circumstances (Harker, 1990). Deriving from this are two key aspects of what Bourdieu call practical logic (Bourdieu, 1990a; Gorton, 2000). First, practices themselves are never fully conscious processes because actors are an integral part of their circumstances and their environment. Being part of a particular environment, actors usually know, without consciously knowing, the right thing to do (Bourdieu, 1990b). As a result of this unconscious knowledge we also contribute to the reproduction of that world which supports the coincidence of objective structures and those structures that become internalised or subjective. The result is the illusion of immediate understanding of the 'rules of the game' – a key characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe (Bourdieu, 1990a). Second is the improvisational nature of practice, which results from the 'impossibility of living solely by rules' (Gorton, 2000, p. 280). The concepts of habitus, capital and field are helpful in understanding the processes which operate in practice in social groupings, found in projects and organisations.

Habitus
The word 'habitus', in the sense applied by Bourdieu, describes the sum total of properties that constitute the person or group, including that person or group's relationships and background. It is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes second nature and

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these inculcations last throughout life (Bourdieu,1984, pp. 6–7, 170). This includes intellectual, moral and spiritual values, which, in Bourdieu's model, are the main determinant of class membership (Bourdieu, 1984). According to Bourdieu, 'habitus' is not only an unconsciously acquired sense of the 'rules of the game,' it is a 'structuring structure', which influences both what we do and the perception of what we do, and is itself 'structured' by the practices and categories of thought that have been internalised within the field in which the agent operates. Pierre Bourdieu defines 'habitus' as a practical sense (*sens pratique*) that inclines agents to act in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather, he defines it as a set of *dispositions*, which generates practices and perceptions. However, as the results from the research interviews suggest, experienced project managers might consciously or intuitively adapt their behaviour to fit the prevailing 'habitus' in each situation or with each different sponsor. Sometimes that adaptation is radical.

Capital
Bourdieu uses the term 'capital' in the sense of accumulated assets, not necessarily physical assets, which have value in the society in question (see Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 22ff, 111ff). Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks and the tendencies that arise from these networks to support each other. However, social capital may not always be beneficial. Social capitial can operate in a positive or negative manner depending upon its propensity to support the realisation of the project. Bourdieu uses other notions of capital, including symbolic and economic capital, which are useful when discussing relationships influenced by a distribution of conferred power in an organisation. Whereas social capital consists of resources based on connections and group membership, symbolic capital is the form into which different types of capital are transformed as they become legitimated (Bourdieu, 1987).

Field
Bourdieu uses the term 'field' to describe a sphere of social life, which is progressively developed through the social history of particular sets of relations. With respect to projects within organisations the fields are constituted by the social relations comprising the 'restricted field' of the project itself and the 'wider fields' of the organisation and its environment, with which the project must interact and on which it depends for validation and resources. Unlike an organisation chart which defines formal positions but does not always depict the real distribution of power in the organisation, Bourdieu's notion of field is more like 'a map of power '(Moingeon et al., 1997, p. 386) for the organisation. Each field can be seen as a field of forces marked by an unequal distribution of resources and thus a tension of forces between dominant and dominated in which social agents clash to preserve or transform this relationship of forces. The battles which define the field and its boundaries

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give the field a dynamism, distinguishing Bourdieu's use of this concept from that of a "closed *system* " (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 228). However an 'objective complicity' also exists among agents who believe in, or at least subscribe to a belief in, the value of what is at stake (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 73).

Major themes emerging from the research

Perceptions of the role of the project sponsor
Themes derived from the interviews were expressed as desirable attributes, either present or absent in the style of sponsorship of the project in question. The project sponsor is a formal role but if habitus is 'structuring structure' and is conditioned by the fields, the organisation and project, and in turn conditions the fields, the results of this research also reveal, at least to some extent, the habitus of the organisation's governance. The most frequently cited attributes associated with effective project sponsorship were reported to be:

1. appropriate seniority and power within the organisation
2. political knowledge of the organisation and political savvy
3. ability and willingness to make connections between project and organisation
4. courage and willingness to battle for the project
5. ability to motivate the team to deliver the vision and provide ad hoc support
6. propensity to partner with the project manager and project team.
7. excellent communication skills
8. ability and willingness to provide objectivity and challenge the project
9. personally compatible with other key players.

These attributes will be discussed briefly, citing responses from individuals. Respondents are coded with letters. Refer to Table 1.

1. Seniority
All respondents cited 'appropriate seniority' as a fundamental requirement of an effective sponsor for this kind of project, the level of seniority being commensurate with the importance of the project to the business. Typically respondents cited that the sponsor must have 'direct access to a decision maker in the business ... political clout' (A); 'a mandate from senior management' (B), 'shield the project manager from the Board' (D); 'support the project at a high level' (F); 'champion the cause at a senior level...with authority to support and delegate' (I).

2. Political awareness and knowledge of the business
Sometimes expressed as 'political savvy', this was also a recurring attribute required to influence key players in the business on behalf of the project, and

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to mentor the project manager the sponsor needs a strong knowledge of the business itself, the internal politics and the key players involved.

> *"If he had been a little more politically savvy in managing the board, he would have still been there, and I would have had his sponsorship to move those projects, and the board's sponsorship also ... The company quite possibly would not have fallen over." (D)*

3. Ability and willingness to make connections on behalf of the project.

As a corollary to political awareness the ability and willingness to facilitate connections within the wider organisation on behalf of the project was cited by a majority of respondents. The project manager's attention tends to be focussed on managing the day to day exigencies of the project, therefore s/he relies on the sponsor to alert him/her to connections that might be important for the project.

> *"The sponsor, who was at a particularly high level in the organisation, would regularly email me or send messages via her colleagues to alert me to something which was going on in the organisation, which might potentially have some impact on the project. In such a large and diverse organisation, I [PM] could not possibly have access to her knowledge at an organisational level. This was invaluable." (z).*

> *"She [the sponsor] gave me lots of information about context. She kept me grounded. Kept me heading in the right direction, kept dragging my head up from focussing on technical issues to paying attention to the environment, which was very useful." (G)]*

4. Courage.

Several respondents cited the importance of courage, willingness to make decisions, take risks and battle with other senior players in the organisation on behalf of the project. This is essential to meet project deadlines avoid problems due to delayed decision making.

> *"I've seen in some organisations ... where project sponsors are at arm's distance, they're happy to engage, and if the project is heading the wrong way they'll blame it all on the project manager or find some other part of the organisation on which to shift the blame." (A)*

> *"Someone [a sponsor] who is willing to personally bear risk, and personally stay behind when it's difficult. Someone who is quite brave. For instance ... the guy [sponsor] said 'right these are the people who are on the project, some things you're not going to like, and when you don't like them, I'm going to be there.' And it was a very good way of saying 'this project's going to be hard, and I'm still going to be there.' It's someone who doesn't dip out when things get difficult on projects ... who says 'come and tell me what your problems are in this project." (H)*

5. Motivate team to deliver vision and provide support where necessary.

This attribute was valued by a majority of respondents. If the sponsor's commitment was not overt, motivation of the team was often hard to maintain.

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> *"The thing about many organisations is a project might be happening in a particular business area. So what they'll do is say 'the head of that business area should be the project sponsor'. And more often than not they just don't take an active involvement or interest in it. And the level of involvement that that contributes to the project is next to nothing. So that is what I call sponsorship in name only, and it happens probably the majority of the time rather than the minority."(A)*

All respondents considered that the sponsor's demonstrated support for the project team was essential. In most cases 'support' was the first attribute mentioned by respondents.

> *"They [sponsors] need to be available and responsive." (H)*

However the most desirable type of support was ad hoc. The high value placed on support 'only when required' positively correlated with the value placed by project managers on professional autonomy.

> *"The nature of support should be ad hoc – when needed." (I)*

> *"But I think that's the beauty of him [the sponsor]. He only injected himself when he thought he was needed." (F).*

Lack of visible support was perceived to be a major threat to team morale.

> *"Project teams work so hard. They work much harder than the sponsor who is going home at normal times and all the rest of it while the poor people, well you know. But to actually recognise that. All people need is a morning tea or something." (H)*

6. Partnering with project manager

Ad hoc support is closely connected with trust which, in turn, is linked with the willingness of the sponsor to foster a partnering relationship with the project manager. Valuing a partnering approach on the part of the sponsor aligns with the overall desire for autonomy over the project assumed. All, except one respondent (D), replied that the project manager's autonomy was high, however in many cases the respondents replied that autonomy was not given freely but assumed.

> *"The Project Manager and the project sponsor need to be hand in hand the whole way through. They need to be able to understand each other's goals initimately, and to a certain extent, they need to back each other. You almost need to be able to second guess the other person, so if someone else in the organisation hits you with something, you can give the right answer and one they're going to support, and vice versa." (A)*

> *"There needs to be a partnership with the project manager." (B)*

> *"He [the sponsor] encouraged trust and respect." (F)*

> *"The project sponsor's and the project manager's roles kind of align in this case [project delivery]. They are both concerned with getting things done. It's just that they seem to have different levels of focus." (G)*

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Other respondents indicated that trust had to be gained with the project sponsor before a partnering relationship could be established. In only one case could this response on the part of the sponsor be attributed to inexperience on the part of the project manager as in all other cases the project managers were highly experienced. Possible explanations could relate to the culture of management in the organisation (favouring micro-management or trust and autonomy), the sponsor's amount of experience the role might also be a contributing factor, as well his/her own work style (detail orientation or focus on overview), or the quality of the communication between parties (see next category).

> *"She [the sponsor] was nervous at first. I [PM] was an unknown quantity for her and she is not a naturally trusting person. It took a while to change the relationship. I had to work hard." (Z)*

7. Communication
This category influences most of the other attributes. Qualities cited fall into two main groups. There were comments about the pattern of formal communication:

> *"[Requests for decisions] disappear at top end – I often need to report upwards and act without authority in order to get deliverables on time." (I)*

However most comments concerned the quality of the informal communications:

> *The sponsor was very good at telling stories in order to get his point across; 'a good educator' (F).*

and several commented on level of informal access to the sponsor:

> *"If he [the sponsor] was more approachable just to discuss ideas rather than just being very direct and results oriented." (C)*

> *"He wasn't available or responsive."(H)*

> *"Current sponsor, he is a bit distant, a bit aloof." (K)*

Some of the latter fall into the category of personality fit and will be discussed in 9.

8. Objectivity and challenge
A surprising result, it was apparent that many respondents admired sponsors who provided objectivity to the project, actively challenging the project manager:

> *"The sponsor must provide objectivity for the project manager." (A)*

> *"Should provide insight." (I)*

> *"She challenged me to think outside the box, made me consider other things. You couldn't just throw something onto the table unless you could justify it and back it up. She wasn't a yes person and I think that's great. She pushed you and expected you to push back. If she said something she expected you to challenge her as well." (B)*

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However, with the exception of two respondents, there was a general consensus that the sponsor did not require detailed knowledge about the project, either with respect to project management processes or technical expertise.

> *"They [the sponsor] don't really need to be interested in technical details, what they really need to say is 'is this being owned, is it working, is everybody behind it.' And ensuring ownership is there."* (H)

9. Personality

This is an interesting and difficult category as the interactions in a project sponsor/project manager relationship are necessarily specific to each pair of individuals, Nevertheless, it was one of the most frequently cited themes, being mentioned by all but one project manager. Most respondents mentioned that the personalities of the project sponsor and project manager had to be compatible. The desire for compatibility did not exclude the need to be challenged.

> *"You have to be compatible. We have the luxury of being a large organisation and if we start off with a client or sponsor and the project manager's not compatible with the client then we can change. Because we have enough project managers to be able to chop and change."*(B)

The importance of compatibility was also recognised by the same respondent's manager:

> *"My last boss actually said the hardest part in managing projects for her was matching us [project managers] to clients. Not our ability to do the job, we could all do the job, we did it in different ways, but she said matching the right project manager to the right client guarantees its success. If I get that wrong, she said, you'll have angst the whole way through."* (B)

Other comments were not so encouraging:

> *"Adherence to basic social norms on the part of the sponsor, like not having tantrums with customers. It's the extreme self-centredness that's both a curse and a blessing. It's handy when you want something done, but otherwise not. The guy [sponsor], if he wanted someone in his team to come into his office would pick up the hands free and go 'here boy' and hang up. It's like he's treating him like a dog."*(C)

It is also apparent that personality style affects communication and affects the accuracy of information available to the sponsor about the project at any one time:

> *"I provide the documentation reporting and status reports as he requires. Other than that, I'm not going to go and pester him. You don't wake up a sleeping tiger do you?"* (J)

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Project managers and habitus

Evidence from this research, and anecdotally, that many experienced project managers are managing projects in ways which mask inadequate sponsor performance is overwhelming. Although the majority of projects discussed in this research were deemed successful by project owners, the effectiveness of sponsors, as perceived by the project managers, varied considerably. With few exceptions a pattern is emerging of insufficient engagement on the part of the sponsor and unwillingness or inability to give the project manager the kind of high-level support required to succeed in achieving project goals. Experienced project managers emerge as consciously and routinely employing a complex range of behaviours with the sponsor and other senior managers in the organisation in order to achieve appropriate levels of support for the project.

> "In the end they were supportive [the sponsor and the senior developer] but it was an uphill battle initially." (C)

> "Makes my job harder, to have to sell ideas to the sponsor. Probably 70% harder."(K)

> "I often need to report upwards and act without authority in order to get deliverables on time – company has a blame culture that hides behind process to avoid personal responsibility." (I)

> "Then a couple of other large projects came up as well so the battle was always to make sure they [the sponsor] were focussed on the most important one." (E)

> "I [PM] had to be extremely canny with expressing ideas and opinions with a view to influencing him [sponsor] the way I wanted him to go. Openness is not a word I would use to characterise my dealing with him. It was completely my energy driving it. There was some encouragement but not from the sponsor." (C)

> "Projects, especially long term projects change sponsors, so there must be some profile ... a mechanism in place for how to deal with changing sponsors. We start all over again. You build the relationship from scratch. And the attributes of the sponsor are critical to the success of the project." (K)

Another very interesting outcome, one which needs to be explored further, is the number of project managers who reported that the tolerance for ambiguity on the part of the sponsor was very low. This is particularly significant as the projects under investigation were all deemed to have levels of complexity and risk of 4 and above on a Likert scale of 1-7 (See Table 1). The majority of project managers interviewed found that they had to simplify issues for the project sponsor, often to the point of masking complexities that might have benefited from discussion with the project sponsor.

> "His tolerance for ambiguity was extremely low. He wanted everything nailed down ... it means you have to be fully prepared before you go and see him." (C)

> "He [the sponsor] didn't really like it [ambiguity], and this project had a lot of ambiguity. So you [PM] would suggest a path, and there'd be arguments against it, and then you'd work through the next bit. Which is partly why the investigation phase went from six weeks to five months... It wasn't one plus one equals two at all. And he [the sponsor] likes that. And this project wasn't that, so he struggled with it. So you'd [PM] deliver pieces of information in small chunks, so he could go 'okay I understand that. let's move on to the next step'." (E)

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These observations require more research and will be explored in papers to follow.

Analysis

Limitations
As so few sponsors were willing to participate in the interviews it was not possible in this research to gain access to a similar depth of 'lived experience' from the point of view of the sponsor. Consequently the results have been largely reported from the perspective of the project manager or project director who reports to the executive sponsor. The propensity for correlation of 'world views' between the project managers and the sponsors was therefore limited. According to Bourdieu's framework, responses are conditioned by the respondent's understanding of the 'rules of the game'. Hence the nine major themes emerging from the research, being based on project managers' perception of the effectiveness of the role of the project sponsor, are themselves limited by the respondents' own 'worlds of possibilities', which are constructed by habitus. The attributes are only 'ideal' in relation to the respondents' own 'knowledge of the game', however, this effect would have been ameliorated to some extent by the high level of project experience possessed by the majority of interviewees.

Because this research spanned a range of organisations and industry sectors, the peculiar nature of each 'restricted field' (project within each organisation) could not be investigated in depth. Contextual and historical information, although gathered before and during the interview, was not at a sufficiently detailed level to reveal factors in the organisational culture, which might have affected the style of sponsorship or the means by which project managers adjusted or compensated. Bourdieu argues that aspirations and practices of individuals and groups tend to correspond to the formative conditions of their respective habitus, including what they judge as 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' for people of a certain position in the social world of the organisation. Habitus is 'necessity made into virtue' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 95). Thus the habitus of each organisation, as a social grouping, will influence to a greater or lesser degree the habitus of the both sponsor and the project manager.

Discussion of major findings
Habitus sets structural limits for action. The literature is beginning to reflect a general recognition of the vital role played by the project sponsor. This research has defined a number of themes or attributes which managers of complex projects require in terms of support at the executive level. Based on anecdotal evidence these results were not unexpected. However the more interesting results offer evidence that experienced project managers are utilising highly developed and wide ranging behaviour sets in order to

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compensate for what they perceive as inadequate support at a senior level. One respondent (K) estimated that compensating for an unengaged sponsor accounted for 70% of the time he spent managing the project. For Bourdieu "habitus generates perceptions, aspirations, and practices that correspond to the structuring properties of earlier socialization" (Swartz, 1997, p. 103). However the behaviour of the majority of the project managers interviewed suggest a conscious adaptation of habitus. Bourdieu recognises that there is ongoing adaptation as habitus encounters new situations, but he also argues that but this process tends to be slow, unconscious, and tends to elaborate rather than fundamentally alter the primary dispositions. Bourdieu talks about "defensive strategies" as a way habitus tends to restrain action in ways that are consistent with its original dispositions (Swartz, 1997, p. 107). Bourdieu also acknowledges (1990b, p 108) that habitus "may be superseded under certain circumstances – certainly in situations of crisis which disrupt the immediate adjustment of habitus to field – by other principles, such as rational and conscious computation." Situations of crisis, where project success is at stake, may therefore encourage conscious forms of tactical behaviour. But while admitting that strategising on occasions can be conscious, Bourdieu is quick to assert that the characteristics of habitus are nonetheless discernable (Swartz, 1997). This is where evidence from this research may be at odds with Bourdieu's thesis.

Either habitus permits project managers, who are entrusted with highly complex projects, to exhibit highly adaptive behaviour or these people are frequently subjected to crisis situations in which they are forced to disrupt habitus temporarily. Bourdieu sometimes stresses this "innovative" capacity of habitus (1979, p. 4) but being in a frequent state of crisis might be expected to produce high levels of stress, and the associated disruption between habitus and field would eventually reveal itself. By implication, in Bourdieu's framework, this would be likely to reduce the effectiveness of the person within the field. The dispositions of habitus predispose actors to select forms of conduct that are most likely to succeed in the light of their resources and past experience. Habitus orients action according to anticipated consequences. This puts power and its legitimation at the heart of the functioning and structure of habitus, since habitus involves an unconscious calculation of what is possible, impossible, and probable for individuals in their specific locations in a stratified social order. "The relation to what is possible is a relation to power" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 4).

According to Bourdieu's conceptual framework the sponsor must not only possess high levels of symbolic capital, status conferred by position and reputation, within the wider field of the organisation but must also exhibit high levels of social capital, including courage, and be willing to exercise it on behalf of the project. Other forms of capital, such academic capital, like technical or industry specific knowledge, were seen to be less significant in terms of support for the project. Bourdieu constructs the individual and society "relationally" as if they are two dimensions of the same social reality stressing

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that "the socialized body (which one calls the individual or person) does not stand in opposition to society; it is one of its forms of existence" Bourdieu, 1980, p29). In this respect the sponsor role can be interpreted to be integral with and constructed by the organisation of which s/he is part.

Conclusion

The role of the project sponsor is emerging as a complex and difficult one that must be carefully assigned, bearing in mind the characteristics of the project and its importance to the organisation. However this research suggests that the role of project manager is emerging as equally complex. The experienced project managers interviewed have revealed that they consciously use a highly diverse set of behaviours in managing these high level projects. Either their particular habitus is characterised by a high level of adaptability or they are exhibiting a particularly extreme form of adaptive habitus in their daily work.

Another aspect of habitus gives both comfort and caution to those seeking changes in organisational practices. The habitus will change with each historical discontinuity in a direction that attempts a compromise with prevailing conditions. However the compromise will never be 'neutral' as the perception of objective conditions is itself engendered and filtered through the habitus. Changes in the habitus will thus '...reflect structural changes, the habitus of previous generations and how historical changes are perceived and reacted to on the basis of prevailing habitus' (Gorton, 2000, p281).

This research has opened up opportunities for further research to investigate the characteristic of effective sponsorsip in the 'restricted' and 'wider fields' of project management within specific industry sectors and for different levels of project complexity.

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Appendix
Table 1

Interviewee	Role	Experience in PM (yrs)	Position in business	Industry sector	Project deliverable	Team size (max)	Budget ($US)	Schedule (months)	Perceptions (Likert scale 1-7)			Changes in success criteria	Success criteria varied	Success rating -		
									Complexity	Risk	Technical difficulty			Schedule	Budget	Overall — Very Good (E) Good (G), Fair (F), Not good (N)
A	PM	20	Most senior PM in org.	Finance	IT	45	$25 M	24	7	7	5	N	N	G	G	E
B	PM	10	Bus. devel. Mgr.	Property	Const.	20	$65M	14	7	6	7	Y	Y	G	G	E
C	PM	2	Sr sales eng.	Telecoms.	IT	12	900,000	4.5	4	6	7	Y	Y	G	F	E
D	PM	12	Commercial mgr	Engineering	Change project	8	$900,000	9	7	7	5-6	Y	Y	N G	N G	N G
E	PM	5	Ass Director	Finance	IT	8	$500,000	1.5	7	5	6-7	Y	Y	N	E	E
F	PM	3	Site manager	Property	Construction	25	$20,000	7	6	5-6	4	N	N	E	G	E
G	PM	1	Contractor	Public - Health	IT / change	Vari ed	$20,000	8	6-7	5	6-7	Y	Y	G	E	E
H	PD	3	IS - PD	Education/H R	IT	8	$2 M	12	5	3	4	Y	Y	G	G	G ?

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Interviewee	Role	Experience in PM (yrs)	Position in business	Industry sector	Project deliverable	Team size (max)	Budget ($US)	Schedule (months)	Perceptions (Likert scale 1-7) Complexity	Risk	Technical difficulty	Changes in success criteria	Success criteria varied	Success rating - Schedule	Budget	Overall (Very Good (E) Good (G), Fair (F), Not good (N))
I	PM	20	IT/ change/ marketing	Public - energy	Org change/IT		$643,000	14	6	5	2	Y	Y	G	G	G
J	PM	17	IT/comms	Entertainment	IT	26	$10-12M	24	6-7	7	4	Y	Y	?	?	?
K	PD	25	Mech eng	Govt.	Business improvement	10	$10.4 M	60	6	5	5	N	N	?	N	G
L	PM	6	Dev mgr	Airline	IT	20	$3M	36	5-6	7	5	N	N	N	N	G
M	PM	10	Mgr	Govt.	Public policy	14	$7,000	5	6	3.5	6	N	N	Y	N	N
N	PM		Ass Dir	govt	property	9	$1.5M	3	5	6	5	N	N	Y	N	G
O	PM	7	Snr consultant	relocation	IT	10	$500,000	5	4	5	7	N	N	G	G	G
P	PM	10	Consultant	Media & communicati	Strategy	6	$2.5M	2.5	6	7	6	N	N	F	G	G

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Interviewee	Role	Experience in PM (yrs)	Position in business	Industry sector	Project deliverable	Team size (max)	Budget ($US)	Schedule (months)	Perceptions (Likert scale 1-7)			Changes in success criteria	Success criteria varied	Success rating -		
									Complexity	Risk	Technical difficulty			Schedule	Budget	Overall
														Very Good (E) Good (G), Fair (F), Not good (N)		
Q	P dir	10	mgr	Development	Port development	4	$1.2M	36+ —	6	4	5	N	Y	N	?	G
R	Spo nsor	20	Ass DG	Govt.	Change	varie d	No budget	10	7	7	7	N	Y	G	G	F
S	PM	12	Implementati on mgr	Automotive	IT	60	$1.2 M	18	5-6	6	5	N	N	F	G	G
U	PM	1	Research assistant	Health	Best practice	5	$10,000	3	6	5	4	N	Y	G	G	G
T1	PM	6	Services mgr	Waste mgmnt	Business improvement	6	4 M	9 mths	5	5	5	N	N	G	G	G
T2	Spo nsor	24	Projects coordinator	Waste mgmnt	Business improvement	6	4M	9	4-5	5	4	N	N	G	G	G
T3	cont racto r	13	Commercial mgr	Waste mgmnt	Business improvement	6	4M	9	4-5	6-7	4-5	N	N	G	G	G
V	PM (cha nged)	10	Snr account advisor	Govt	IT	8	$100,000	12	6	5-6	4	Y	Y	G	G	G
W	Spo nsor		Dep CEO	Education	Org change	3	$65,000	18	5	4	5	N	Y	G	G	G

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Interviewee	Role	Experience in PM (yrs)	Position in business	Industry sector	Project deliverable	Team size (max)	Budget ($US)	Schedule (months)	Perceptions (Likert scale 1-7)			Changes in success criteria	Success criteria varied	Success rating -		
									Complexity	Risk	Technical difficulty			Schedule	Budget	Overall
														Very Good (E) Good (G), Fair (F), Not good (N)		
X	Spo nsor	20 appr ox	Dep mng dir	Finance	Joint Venture	45	$25 M	24	6	7	6	N	N	G	G	E
Y	Spo nsor	0	Dep CEO	Education	Org change	3	$650,000	18	4	3	4	N	N	G	G	G
Z	PM	25	Contracto r	Education	Org change	3+	$650,000	26	6	4	3	Y	Y	G	G	G
AA	PM	3	Mgr	Events mgmt	Org change	5	$9,000	2.5	4	4	3	N	N	G	G	G
BB	PM	12	Land. architect	Parks & recreatio	Design &develop.	12	$100,000	24	6	5	5	N	Y	G	G	G