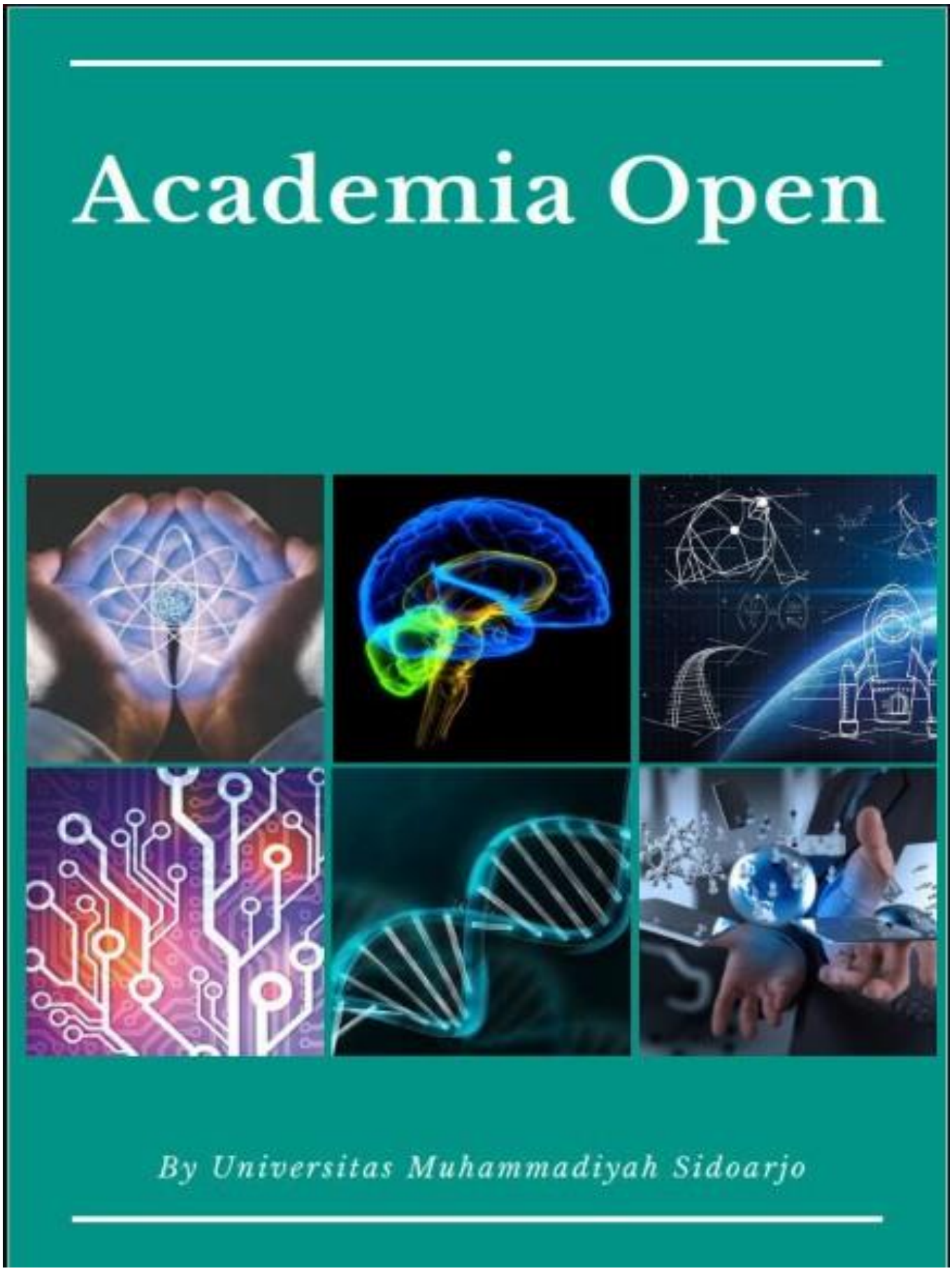
Academia Open

Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832



ISSN 2714-7444 (online), https://acopen.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

Academia Open

Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

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DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

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Academia Open
Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

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Academia Open

Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

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ISSN 2714-7444 (online), https://acopen.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

Academia Open

Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

Project Sponsorship in Recovering Delayed Projects: A Case Study from Korek Telecom: Sponsor Proyek dalam Pemulihan Proyek yang Tertunda: Studi Kasus dari Korek Telecom

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Abstract

General Background Project management literature recognizes project sponsors as key stakeholders responsible for strategic guidance and executive support throughout the project lifecycle. **Specific Background** During periods of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic and regional political instability, many telecommunications projects experienced severe delays and declining stakeholder confidence. **Knowledge Gap** Although prior studies emphasize the strategic importance of project sponsors, limited research explains how sponsor involvement contributes to recovering delayed internal projects during crisis conditions. **Aims** This study examines the role of project sponsorship in managing the recovery of a delayed internal project at Korek Telecom. **Results** The findings show that active sponsor engagement strengthened stakeholder coordination, improved communication channels, and restored organizational trust during the recovery process. The sponsor also assumed operational leadership responsibilities by guiding process redesign, managing risks, and aligning team roles through structured governance tools such as the revised business case, work breakdown structure, RACI matrix, compressed projectschedule, and riskregister. **Novelty** Thestudy highlights a dual sponsorship model in which the project sponsor functions not only as a strategic authority but also as an operational leader during project recovery. **Implications** These findings provide practical insights for telecommunications organizations and other industries by demonstrating how sponsor-led governance mechanisms support structured decision-making and coordinated recovery strategies in delayed projects.

(219 words)

Keywords: Project Sponsorship, Delayed Projects, Telecom Project Management, Project Recovery, Risk Governance

Key Findings Highlights

S1.ponsor leadership supported coordinated recovery actions during a delayed telecom project.

G2o.vernance tools structured team alignment, accountability, and risk management.

S3.trategic authority combined with operational guidance during crisis project recovery.

Published date: 2026-03-03

ISSN 2714-7444 (online), https://acopen.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

Introduction

In the dynamic field of project management, Throughout the project lifecycle, project sponsors act as important stakeholders by offering guidance, supervision, and executive assistance [1]. In times of crisis, when projects are prone to delays, uncertainty, and a decline in stakeholder confidence, their engagement becomes even more crucial [2]. Project success frequently depends on more than simply resources and planning; it also much depends on how well leaders, such the project sponsor, do their duties. Projects in a variety of industries experienced extensive delays as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and political unrest throughout the Middle East. One of the industries most affected was telecommunications, where efforts to improve processes and roll out infrastructure were severely disrupted.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in conjunction with the political instability that existed in many locations, posed difficulties that had never been seen before in the implementation of the project [3]. Such disruptions have had a significant effect on industries like telecommunications in Iraq where large-scale infrastructure projects rely on dependable funding, steady supply chains, and governmental consistency [4]. During this time, one of the major projects for the national telecom company Korek Telecom encountered serious delays. The research is about process change and improving quality. Therefore, no consultant needed from outside the company. All details in the project scope will be managed by the Korek Telecom project sponsor and the rest of the project team. The main objective of this paper is to present possible solutions to overcome the issue of the delayed project at Korek Telecom as well as brining consistency to the process. This study is guided by the following research question: In times of crisis, how can project sponsors manage the recovery of delayed projects while maintaining organizational consistency and process quality?

Literature Review

2 .1 The Role of the Project Sponsor

Project sponsorship is identified as a crucial component of project delivery success, especially for high-risk or delayed projects. [5] explains that project sponsor has the responsibility of maintaining executive-client contact because he/she is usually considered from the executive level. [6] stresses that the sponsor's role is not an easy one since it involves much more than just approving deliverables or finances. In order to guarantee alignment with organizational objectives, a project sponsor must act as a strategic champion for the project, offering vision, direction, and continuous support. Successful sponsors are supposed to aggressively remove obstacles that could obstruct the project's advancement, push for the resources that are required, and keep the project team and senior leadership informed. However, [7] argue that some sponsors are passive and are unnecessary in some projects. They explain that some project sponsors micromanage, some can even be aggravating by getting involved in project details/ decisions while other sponsors prioritise other tasks within the project. On the other hand, [6] explain the challenges the project sponsor has to endure in the project lifecycle. Some of those challenges include insuring projects are being managed well along with the organisation, project manager and the project team are all performing as required.

2 .2 Team Building and Motivation

High-performing teams are essential in navigating crises and overcoming delays. [8] argue that project managers need to concentrate on fostering a sense of purpose among the different team members in addition to goals. The five stages of [9] team lifecycle, forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning, remain essential to comprehending team growth. Group dynamics can be successfully managed by managers and sponsors who match their leadership approaches with these phases. Another important factor in project recovery is motivation. [10] cites Herzberg's two-factor approach, which distinguishes between motivators and hygiene elements. Although financial incentives are not always the best motivator, commitment is frequently increased by trust, justice, and personal development. [11] emphasize the importance of psychological safety and respect, especially in environments of rapid change.

2 .3 Risk and Conflict Management

The COVID-19 pandemic's quick spread and severe effects on a number of Middle Eastern nations highlighted how vulnerable commercial, industrial, and educational projects are by nature; many of these projects were canceled or significantly delayed. The necessity of contingency planning has been brought to light by COVID-19, an unpredictable global crisis. Project managers and decision-makers must prepare for unforeseen events by creating strong alternative plans [12]. Most academics agree that projects are nevertheless prone to delays or alterations due to strategic realignments, scope variations, constraint revisions, or shifting milestones, regardless of how much preparation is done [13]. Furthermore, two enduring factors, effort and uncertainty, inevitably shape all projects, regardless of their size, complexity, or scope. This aligns with Murphy's Law, which emphasizes that "whatever can go wrong will go wrong, and most likely at the worst possible time," as well as Parkinson's Law, which states that "work expands to fill the time allotted" [14]. These facts highlight how important it is to conduct a systematic risk assessment at every stage of the project, especially when developing information technology (IT). In order to reduce the possibility of project failure, risk assessment makes it easier to identify, plan, track, analyze, control, and communicate any risks in an organized manner. In support of this perspective, [15] emphasize the importance of incorporating extensive risk evaluation and conflict resolution techniques into project management, showing that the application of three essential risk assessment components can dramatically lower the probability of failure and improve project success overall.

Methodology

Academia Open
Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
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This study adopts a qualitative, practice-based case study design to investigate how project sponsorship influences the recovery of a delayed internal project. The ongoing process improvement project at Korek Telecom provided the empirical foundation for this study. The project was led within a balanced matrix organizational structure, meaning the project sponsor and functional managers shared project authority. No external consultants were engaged, and all roles were filled internally. Data were collected from internal project documentation, planning artifacts (business case, project schedule Gantt chart, RACI matrix), and iterative review cycles throughout the 25-day project window.

A revised business case was created in order to realign the project (Table 1). This document defined goals and deliverables, explained stakeholder roles and approvals, and identified the conflicts that caused the delay. Additionally, it set the project's goal of restoring process consistency and quality in a shorter amount of time. The sponsor-led decision-making process was based on the business case, which offered a well-organized justification for recovery measures as well as a transparent process for gaining support from stakeholders.

Table 1: Business Case for Korek Telecom

Section	Details
Project Title	Korek Telecom
Project Duration	25 days
Conflict	COVID-19 pandemic and political instability delayed the telecom system project
Objectives	1. Identify causes of project delay 2. Analyze variances and gaps 3. Regain stakeholder confidence 4. Develop revised project plan with contingencies 5. Establish KPIs and RACI matrix 6. Increase awareness of quality
Aim	To maintain good project quality and process consistency
Deliverables	Data collection and analysis, revised business case, new plan process; work instruction map; KPIs and controls
Risks	Compliance risks; stakeholder dissatisfaction
Stakeholders	CEO, Project sponsor, Project manager, Staff, Suppliers, Marketing, Security, Engineering lines
Milestones	Confirm team → Build matrix → Identify gaps → Release new plan → Close project
Budget	No procurement required
Approvals	CEO, Sponsor, Steering Group, Project Manager

The business case was then converted into manageable steps using the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) (Table 2). By dividing the project into four stages, the WBS made sure that sponsor oversight governed every step of the process, from the first diagnosis of the delay to the planning of corrective actions, the implementation of improvements, and, finally, closure. Tasks like developing a risk register, training employees on the new procedure, and negotiating approval procedures with the CEO were all part of each phase. Regaining control of the delayed project required the sponsor to systematically monitor progress and step in at crucial checkpoints, which was made possible by the WBS's hierarchical structure.

Table 2: Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

Phase	Task Code	Task	Description
Phase 1	1.1	Opening meeting	Explain project conflicts and agreed outputs
	1.2	Confirm team	Agree on job assignments
	1.3	Negotiate/review creation process with CEO	Review and understand creation process
	1.3.1	Negotiate/review approval process	Understand approval process
	1.4	Gather data	Collect information about delays
Phase 2	2.1	Build metrics	Develop statistics/charts
	2.1.1	Create map	Understand current process
	2.1.2	Identify causes/gaps	Diagnose reasons for delay
	2.1.3	Identify new process	Propose improvements
	2.2	Create work instruction	Develop new procedure
	2.3	Create RACI	Define roles
	2.4	Create risk register	Manage risks
	2.5	Train new process	Train staff
Phase 3	3.1	Apply new process	Implement improvements
	3.2	Review data	Collect and analyze new process results
	3.3	Modify	Fix issues as needed
Phase 4	4.1	Close project	Finalize if deliverables are met

The conventional Gantt chart was replaced with a timeline table to handle scheduling (Table 3). In addition to assigning responsibilities and specifying start and end dates, this schedule permitted task overlap when expediency was required. For instance, in order to reduce the recovery window, data collection and process mapping were carried out concurrently with cause identification. Time compression techniques and the sponsor's proactive involvement in making sure dependencies were properly managed were highlighted in the timeline. This table illustrates how a quicker recovery plan without sacrificing quality was made possible by sponsor involvement.

Table 3: Project Schedule (Timeline) for Korek Telecom

Phase	Task No.	Task Description	Start Date	Finish Date	Responsible Roles
Phase 1	1	Opening meeting	1/12/2024	1/12/202	All

ISSN 2714-7444 (online), https://acopen.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

Academia Open
Vol. 11 No. 1 (2026): June
DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

				4	
	2	Confirm team and attendance	1/12/2024	1/12/2024	All
	3	Negotiate/review creation process with CEO	1/12/2024	2/12/2024	PS, PM
	4	Negotiate/review approval process with CEO	1/12/2024	3/12/2024	PS, PM
	5	Gather data	4/12/2024	7/12/2024	PM
Phase 2	6	Build metrics	8/12/2024	9/12/2024	PM
	7	Create process map	10/12/2024	11/12/2024	CEO, PS, PM
	8	Identify causes and gaps	12/12/2024	13/12/2024	PS, PM
	9	Identify new process	12/12/2024	13/12/2024	All
	10	Create work instruction	15/12/2024	16/12/2024	PM
	11	Create RACI for new process	17/12/2024	18/12/2024	PS, PM
	12	Create risk register	19/12/2024	20/12/2024	PS, PM
	13	Train new process	21/12/2024	21/12/2024	PM
Phase 3	14	Release new process	20/12/2024	21/12/2024	All
	15	Gather/review new data	21/12/2024	22/12/2024	PM
	16	Modify process	23/12/2024	24/12/2024	All
Phase 4	17	Close project	24/12/2024	25/12/2024	All

A RACI matrix (Table 4) was created in order to make accountability clear. For every significant task, this tool designated who was in charge, accountable, consulted, and informed. The sponsor's central leadership role was reinforced by their positioning as (Accountable) for crucial tasks, while the CEO retained oversight and approval authority. By establishing clear decision-making processes for the executive, sponsor, project manager, and steering group, the matrix reduced ambiguity. In matrix organizations, where role overlap can cause confusion, this was especially crucial. The sponsor's pivotal role in the recovery process was highlighted by their accountability for deliverables like data analysis and process mapping.

Table 4. RACI Matrix

Activity/Deliverable	Project Sponsor	CEO	Project Steering Group	Project Manager
Collect/review data	A	R	I	—
Analyze causes/solutions	—	R	A	I
Map process	—	R	C	I
Develop business case	—	R	C	I
Agree on improvements	—	R	C	I
Initiate work instruction	—	R	A	I
Build metrics	—	R	A	I
Release new plan process	C	R/A	R	A/I
Develop methods for control	I	R	A	I
Modify process	—	R	A	I
Key: R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed				

In order to foresee and reduce risks to the recovery plan, a Risk Register was created (Table 5). This included risks like limited technical expertise, staff resistance to change, and incomplete data. Every risk was given a responsible owner, evaluated for impact and likelihood, and accompanied by mitigation techniques like executive briefings, training sessions, or contingency buffers. Promoting risk mitigation was greatly aided by the sponsor, especially when it came to executive support and stakeholder alignment. The project team made sure that uncertainties were actively managed rather than allowed to impede the recovery process by institutionalizing risk management.

Table 5: Risk Register

Risk ID	Description	Likelihood	Impact	Risk Level	Mitigation Strategy	Owner	Status
R1	Staff resistance to process changes	High	High	High	Conduct change management workshops; involve staff in planning stages	Project Manager	Open

ISSN 2714-7444 (online), https://acopen.umsida.ac.id, published by Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo

R2	Lack of executive support	Medium	High	Med-High	Engage sponsors early; provide regular executive briefings	Project Sponsor	Open
R3	Inaccurate/incomplete data	High	Medium	Med-High	Use data validation; triangulate with stakeholder interviews	Data Analyst	Open
R4	Delays due to overlapping initiatives	Medium	Medium	Medium	Align timelines; prioritize critical changes	PMO/Scheduler	Open
R5	Limited technical expertise	Low	High	Medium	Provide training and up skilling programs	HR/Training Lead	Open
R6	Departmental misalignment	Medium	Medium	Medium	Cross-functional team meetings; improve internal communication	Functional Managers	Open
R7	Budget overrun	Low	High	Medium	Add contingency buffer; regularly review estimates	Finance/PM	Open
R8	Failure to achieve quality improvement	Medium	High	High	Define SMART metrics; apply continuous monitoring	Sponsor/Team	Open

Following a qualitative assessment, risk-reduction measures were created, enabling the team to keep an eye on and address issues like staff resistance, a lack of management backing, and inaccurate data. The study made sure that uncertainties were systematically managed by incorporating sponsor-led governance and structured tools into the methodology. This improved the reliability of project execution as well as the validity of scholarly analysis.

Finding and Discussion

1. Findings

The case study of Korek Telecom demonstrated how proactive project sponsorship can aid in the recovery of a postponed project in times of high uncertainty. Without consulting outside experts, the sponsor-led recovery plan concentrated on streamlining internal procedures and bringing the project into compliance with organizational standards. The sponsor served as the primary leader and coordinator in the well-balanced matrix organization. A revised business case, a thorough Work Breakdown Structure (WBS), a project schedule (Timeline), a RACI matrix for accountability, and a risk register for scope control were among the major deliverables of the plan, which was organized around a 25-day timeframe. The phased recovery plan was described in the WBS (Table 2), starting with team confirmation and concluding with project closure. The sponsor was able to keep an eye on developments and make sure that they were in line with recovery objectives thanks to this organized breakdown.

The updated project timeline after sponsor intervention is shown in the project schedule (Table 3). A conscious acceleration strategy is reflected in the overlap of execution tasks and the compression of planning activities. The claim that sponsor participation facilitated quicker decision-making and resource mobilization is supported by this timeline. Accountability was redistributed, with the sponsor taking responsibility for a number of crucial deliverables, as shown in the RACI matrix (Table 4). This change helped the team understand expectations and reaffirmed the sponsor's operational role. Key threats, such as opposition to process change and problems with data quality, were recognized and categorized by the Risk Register (Table 5). The sponsor and project team improved control over project outcomes and decreased uncertainty by allocating ownership and mitigation strategies.

Furthermore, the sponsor modified communication tactics for a remote environment and followed Tuckman's team growth model. Because of COVID-19, communication was conducted through emails and video conversations. By acting as a mediator between the CEO and the project manager, the sponsor prevented a blame culture and restored alignment. Internal stakeholders reported improved morale and increased confidence in the updated plan by the project recovery phase's conclusion.

2. Discussion

The study's conclusions highlight the significance of active project sponsorship as a determining element in the recovery of postponed projects. The sponsor had a direct impact on decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and process improvement rather than giving the project manager exclusive authority. This active involvement confirms prior research that highlights the sponsor's role as a strategic leader [1], [5] while extending it by showing how sponsor-led tools can be operationalized during crisis recovery.

From a theoretical perspective, the study adds to the body of knowledge on project management by showing that sponsorship is operationally transformative rather than just symbolic. Both strategic direction and daily operational oversight are provided by sponsorship, as demonstrated by the sponsor's role in structuring the WBS (Table 2), leadership in risk identification (Table 5), and consolidation of accountability in the RACI matrix (Table 4). This contradiction advances current discussions about whether sponsors should be directly involved in execution or act at a high level [16]. In practice, the case offers a number of insights for companies dealing with delays brought on by crises. First, teams can refocus and speed up recovery without compromising quality by using structured sponsor-led tools like risk registers, WBSs, and updated business cases. Second, the team's confidence is restored through sponsor-led communication and accountability realignment, which combats the drop in morale and clarity that usually follows project setbacks. Sponsor involvement in scheduling (Table 3) and risk mitigation is particularly important for telecom companies operating in unstable environments because it guarantees process consistency and organizational resilience in the face of outside disruptions.

However, there are limitations to the study. The analysis may not be as generalizable to other industries or national contexts because it is based on a single case within Korek Telecom. Furthermore, causal relationships cannot be statistically established because the qualitative nature of the research prioritizes depth over breadth. Lastly, even though the project recovered in the allotted 25 days, longer-term effects like the sustainability of process modifications were not assessed. Therefore, sponsor roles in a variety of industries and cultural contexts should be the focus of future research, especially in fields that are highly susceptible to external shocks. The generalizability of these results could be examined through comparative analyses

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DOI: 10.21070/acopen.11.2026.13832

of sponsor-led recovery in energy, construction, and IT projects. The operational impact of sponsorship on recovery timelines and stakeholder confidence may also be confirmed by quantitative research employing survey or performance data. In summary, this study demonstrates that project sponsors can serve as operational leaders who reorganize procedures, reduce risks, and rebuild confidence in times of crisis rather than merely endorsing projects at the executive level. Sponsors can turn postponed projects into chances for process improvement and organizational learning by fusing strategic oversight with hands-on intervention.

Conclusion

This study looked at how important project sponsorship was to Korek Telecom's resolution of a postponed internal project. In order to realign project objectives and rebuild team confidence, the sponsor's leadership in putting tools including a rewritten business case, WBS, Project schedule, RACI matrix, and risk register into place was crucial. The results support the body of research on the value of risk management, team cohesion, and project sponsorship. Organizations can benefit from enhancing the sponsor's position, especially in crisis management and change management, according to practical implications. Future studies might examine sponsor influence in various contexts and industries. In the end, successful sponsorship is a leadership function that promotes recuperation, adaptability, and project accomplishment.

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