Successful PLM programs are led by a business sponsor with IT support, not the other way around. The executive sponsor should be able to clearly articulate the strategic imperative using language that resonates with all of the affected business functions. Strong sponsorship is critical to overcoming inevitable obstacles and typically short corporate attention spans.

PLM is a business enabler. While I appreciate innovative information technology groups that have a strong business orientation, most IT organizations are not suited to sponsor and lead a PLM implementation. The leadership should come from the business community. A business sponsor with line accountability is ideal to ensure an orientation to value and avoid the over-engineered solution problem. That typically means sponsorship should not come from the engineering function either.

The selection of a sponsor may be the most important factor in PLM program success. Given the time, budget and resource commitments required by these programs, it is certain that hurdles will be encountered. A sponsor that sits at the executive table and is treated as a peer by business unit heads is more likely to possess the powers of persuasion necessary to overcome these obstacles.

The sponsor must also be engaged by the program and tasked with clearing the way for the team to do their job with minimum organizational friction. An active executive sponsor will remove impediments to progress before the program team encounters them, but it is up to the program team to manage the sponsor and be clear about their needs. A good sponsor can make up for missteps and mistakes.
About the Author

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For the past 30 years, Bill has helped executives in technology-driven industries transform their competencies to deliver results. He is a highly regarded consultant, speaker, and writer on the topics of innovation strategy, product development, portfolio management, technology commercialization, and the software systems that enable innovation. Keep up with Bill’s latest research and thoughts on innovation and the rising role of the Chief Innovation Officer at www.TheChiefInnovationOfficer.com.