

# STEP 1

Imagine a future where things have gone wrong

 10 mins

## OUTCOME

Identified flaws and avoided optimism bias by thinking imaginatively

## INSTRUCTIONS

Before you start: Start with a quick overview or recap of the project. (5 minutes)

1 The team chooses a date in the future. They imagine that the project has failed and what that failure looks like. (5 minutes – group discussion)

2 Choose one of the descriptions of how the project failed and when, and write this in the activity template.

3 Individually, team members write down every reason they can think of for the failure (one per sticky note), as detailed as possible, without fear of being impolite.

When writing your 'reason for failure' think about:

- What went wrong and why?
- What were the possible causes?
- Were there warning signs?

**You know you're done when** the team has a collection of sticky notes which provide a narrative of the project going wrong in a way that would cause the failure state.



## PRO TIP

*"It can be very liberating to voice the team's concerns very early on and in a safe space. Pre-mortems are often a great team building exercise"*

**Elena Berrocal Capdevila**  
Customer Experience Unit  
Department of Customer Service

## PROJECT CONTEXT

WHAT WENT WRONG? WHY?

FUTURE FAILURE DATE

WHAT DOES THE FAILURE LOOK LIKE

## STEP 2

Group the reasons for failure into themes

 10 mins

### OUTCOME

A shared understanding of the breadth of risks that could cause the project to fail.

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Ask someone in the group to volunteer to:
  - Identify and read one sticky note out at a time.
  - Move the sticky note into groups and write a draft theme name based on the team's discussions.

The team should all:

  - Identify patterns and suggest a draft theme name as each sticky note is being considered.
  - Suggest when a sticky note can be grouped with something already moved on the board.
  - Suggest splitting up draft themes and re-grouping if too many sticky notes are in any one group.
- 2 Once all cards are grouped you can use any remaining time to individually read through the board and flag if any remaining sticky note needs to be moved, or any theme renamed.



#### PRO TIP

*"The pre-mortem is a group brainstorming exercise. Make sure you make space for those who are usually quiet to speak-up and share their ideas"*

**Elena Berrocal Capdevila**

Customer Experience Unit  
Department of Customer Service

**You know you're done when** the team has grouped the reasons for failure into themes.

## STEP 3

### Prioritise the the list of risks you've grouped

🕒 15 mins

#### OUTCOME

A prioritised list of risks that could cause the project to fail.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Take turns at picking up a theme from the previous step and placing it where you think it sits in order of priority.
- 2 As each one is placed discuss as a group whether you think the placement is right or wrong. Also consider where each theme should sit relative to other themes you've prioritised.  
  
*Your discussion about how high to prioritise each theme might cover:*
  - likelihood the type of risk would happen,
  - how easily it might be avoided,
  - how hard it might be to know if it was happening,
  - your ability to recover if it did go wrong.  
*Talking through these points before they happen can be very useful so give each risk enough time [while making sure you don't miss any!]*
- 3 When you've reached a consensus on placement, it's the next person's turn to plot the theme of their choosing.
- 4 Keep taking turns until all the themes from the previous step have been ranked in priority order.

**You know you're done when** the group agrees on how risks are prioritised.



#### PRO TIP

*"Try not to get too stuck on making your list ordered accurately. The value of this step is the discussion about what is most important to address."*

**Elena Berrocal Capdevila**  
Customer Experience Unit  
Department of Customer Service\

HIGH PRIORITY

LOW PRIORITY

## STEP 4

### Identify risks and assign people responsible

🕒 15 mins

#### OUTCOME

Actions identified that will help your project avoid the failure state described at the start.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Before you start: Add the themes to the left-hand column in order of priority

- 1 As a group discuss who to assign to Theme and fill in this column first.
- 2 Next, work through each row and list the potential actions that will help address the risk, along with a due date.
- 3 Once you've been through all the themes listed and built up your risk management actions list, use the remaining time to sharpen them up with any other actions that might better resolve the risk.

**You know you're done when** the team has actions to take away to improve your project approach.



#### PRO TIP

*"You can run a pre-mortem early on in a project, and again as many times as required. Using it helps you recognise warning signs quicker and bridges short and long term thinking."*

**Elena Berrocal Capdevila**  
Customer Experience Unit  
Department of Customer Service

Risk Management table

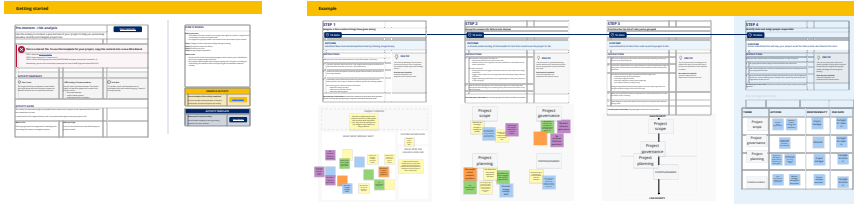
THEME	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	DUE DATE



# Premortem - risk planning

Use this activity to conduct a pre-mortem of your project to help you proactively visualise, identify and mitigate project risk.

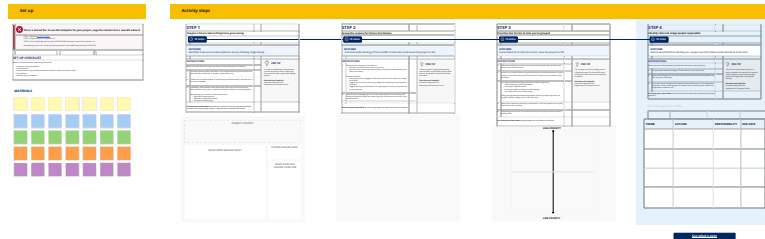
Onboarding



Activity

## Set up

## Activity steps



Next Steps

## Actions & Resources



