🪦 Pre-mortem analysis: what and how?

🙄 What's a <u>pre-mortem analysis</u> exercise?

A pre-mortem meeting is a risk management workshop that's held before a project begins. During a pre-mortem, your team gets together and imagines a bleak future in which your project has failed. Then you brainstorm all the reasons why that might have happened so you can mitigate any risks.

The goal of a project pre-mortem meeting is to anticipate and prevent possible problems, rather than react to them after they have occurred. It's an opportunity to identify risks, vulnerabilities, and opportunities so you can address them proactively, reducing your risk of failure.

A pre-mortem is the project management opposite of a project post-mortem, in which you analyze all the reasons something went wrong when it's already too late to make a difference.

🤔 Why do we run pre-mortem analysis exercises?

You're about to start a project, and you know it has the potential to be a big success. But there are also many unknown variables threatening to derail the project. You want to make sure you're prepared for every possible thing that could go wrong. So you decide to run a pre-mortem with your team.

😅 Do we always run a pre-mortem analysis exercise?

Of course not. This is not needed in any initiative the team works on. This is a tool that the team should decide when it's interesting to use for tech initiatives with a high risk potential.

A good rule of thumb is: if you can envision an initiative that if things going wrong will very likely mean having POs and potentially hotfixes, then it's a good candidate for a pre-mortem analysis.

🎭 Setting the scene and the mindset for a pre-mortem

Before you start the meeting, explain to the team that the goal of the meeting is to imagine that the project has failed and then identify the reasons why that might have happened.

Make sure that everyone understands that this is not a negative exercise, but rather a proactive one. Encourage team members to think creatively and be open to all ideas.

🥊 How to run a pre-mortem exercise

1️⃣ A short description to the initiative and a link to the Notion in which it's documented.

> 📌 *This step of the process can be performed asynchronously with all the people involved working in the same document.*

- 🤩 What are we excited about this initiative?
  - ⏳ Have a glass half full mindset: What do we expect to go well?
- 😨 What are you worried about this initiative?
  - ⏳ Have a glass half empty: What do we worry will go wrong?

2️⃣ Imagine the failure of the initiative and anticipate the potential failure reasons
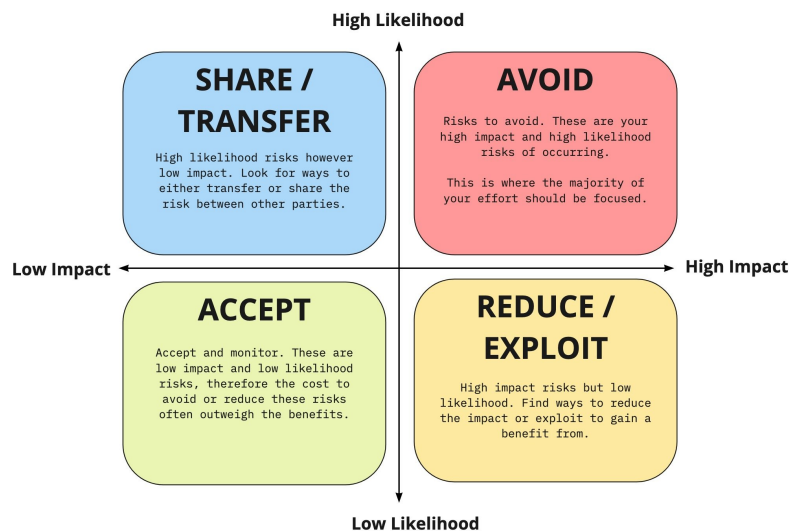
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- **What** could go wrong?

  - What are the key assumptions we have made to be sure that this initiative will not fail?

  - What happens if they are proven wrong?

- For each thing that you identify, be specific about the **failure reason**

- For each failure reason, evaluate how likely is that this happen

  - 💯 Highly likely: What issues are we highly likely to face?

  - 🤔 Likely: What issues are we likely to face?

  - 🤷 Possible: What issues could we possibly face?

- If you have many potential risks (more than 3), it might be useful to prioritise them considering the likelihood of happening and the severity of the risk.

PRE-MORTEM RISK MATRIX

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High Likelihood

SHARE / TRANSFER

High likelihood risks however low impact. Look for ways to either transfer or share the risk between other parties.

AVOID

Risks to avoid. These are your high impact and high likelihood risks of occurring.

This is where the majority of your effort should be focused.

Low Impact ← → **High Impact**

ACCEPT

Accept and monitor. These are low impact and low likelihood risks, therefore the cost to avoid or reduce these risks often outweigh the benefits.

REDUCE / EXPLOIT

High impact risks but low likelihood. Find ways to reduce the impact or exploit to gain a benefit from.

Low Likelihood

3️⃣ Develop a plan/strategy to eliminate or reduce to the minimum the potential failure reasons

> 📌 *Although this step of the process can be performed asynchronously, it's important to ensure that all the team is aligned and agree on the plan and next steps*

- For each potential failure reason, define **action point(s)** that you will consider in the scope of the initiative to eliminate or reduce to the minimum this potential failure reason to happen

- For each potential failure reason, **what's the easiest thing we could do to mitigate this risk?**
    - Document this plan and all the action points, next steps and owners
    - Ensure the defined plan has the buy-in of all the team
    - Ensure this plan is part of the initiative

🏁 Before you close the pre-mortem exercise, double-check some questions:

- Are there any big risks we haven't discussed yet but are important?
- Is there anything that could go wrong that we haven't even considered yet?