

Pre-Mortem Risk Matrix

Prospective Hindsight for High-Stakes Projects

Why this works: Research by Gary Klein shows that prospective hindsight increases the ability to **correctly identify reasons for future outcomes by 30%**.

By framing the failure as a "certainty" rather than a "possibility," you bypass the team's Optimism Bias and the fear of being seen as "negative."
You aren't being a pessimist; you are being a historian of the future.

Read this verbatim to your team at the Kickoff Meeting

"I want everyone to close their eyes. I want you to fast-forward six months.

We have launched the project. And it has been a total, catastrophic failure. It is an embarrassment. Clients are angry, the budget is blown, and we missed every deadline.

Open your eyes.

You have 5 minutes. Take your sticky notes. Write down exactly why this happened. What broke? Who dropped the ball? What external factor did we ignore?"

THE PROTOCOL STEPS

- Silence** (5 Mins): Everyone writes individually. This prevents "Groupthink" where the loudest voice dominates.
- The Harvest** (10 Mins): Go around the room. Stick every failure mode on the whiteboard. No debating. Just capture the "Disaster."
- The Filter:** Group the duplicates. Identify the Top 3 "Project Killers."
- The Vaccination:** For those Top 3, assign a specific Preventative Action and an Owner today.

THE FAILURE MODE (What killed us?)	PROB. (L/M/H)	IMPACT (L/M/H)	THE VACCINATION (The specific preventative action we take TODAY)
<i>Example: The Engineering team got pulled into a legacy support issue.</i>	HIGH	HIGH	<i>Secure a written agreement from the CTO ring-fencing 50% of Engineering capacity for this sprint.</i>
1			
2			
3			

Need Help with This? Reach out.
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