Identifying Risks using Project Pre Mortem

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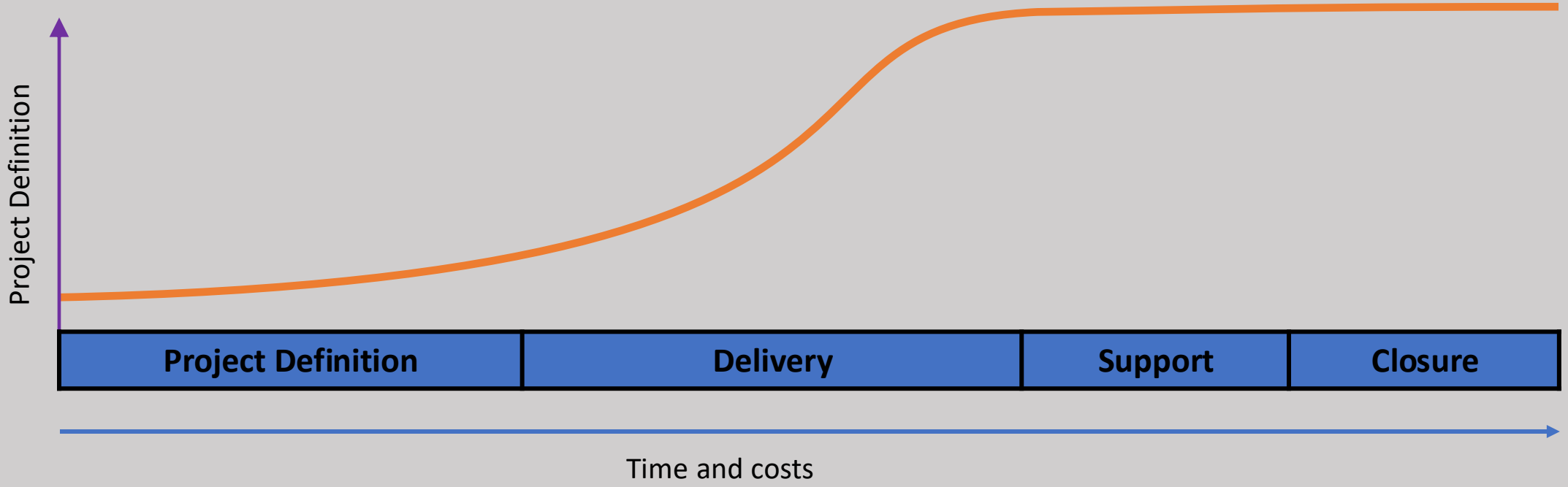
Definitions:

- Project - collection of activities managed in a systematic way to achieve a desired outcome/output
- Programme - collection of related projects when integrated together result in a desired outcome/output
- Portfolio - collection of unrelated projects/programmes, usually within a domain/business area, which have no direct dependencies on each other
- Risk - an event or series of events that may occur causing a negative impact on an activity/outcome
- Opportunity - event or series of events that may occur having a positive impact on an activity/outcome
- Lifecycle - framework comprising of discrete high-level stages required to deliver a desired output or outcome in an orderly/efficient manner
- Methodology - defined roadmap lists steps required to deliver a project/programme successfully provides governance, activities, processes, suite of deliverables
- Technical contingency, budget set aside to cover specific items in a risk register
- Management contingency, budget set aside to cover as-yet unidentified risks (unk-unks)
- Murphy's Law - whatever can go wrong, will go wrong
- Risk is not lost revenue, margin or bunce…..

The “Left Shift” Challenge



What is a Pre Mortem

- The pre mortem analysis technique is based on '**prospective hindsight**' - placing yourself in the future and looking back - helps teams effectively identify risks at the outset of a project
- Technique recommended by behavioural psychologists & neuroscientists as an effective way of combatting cognitive bias and reducing project risk.
- Used early enough, a technique to enhance the probability of project success
- Enables identification of risks/opportunities and to embed mitigation actions into the plan
- Safe space, liberates people to express themselves without appearing too negative or critical
- Encourages creative and out-of-the-box thinking
- Encourages dissenting opinions & avoids groupthink

- So what is all this magic?

- Pre mortem asks you to jump to the future, to the end of the project with one simple question:

The project has failed, why?

OR

The project has succeeded, why?

Pre Mortem Steps

Step 1: Introduction & purpose of meeting (5 mins)

- What is a Pre Mortem
- Why we are running one
- Explain there is no right or wrong answer

Step 2: Provide a Project Overview (10 mins)

- Focus only on project: Scope, schedule, budget, stakeholders, suppliers, milestones, deliverables, measures of success, benefits, complexity etc.

Step 3: Set The context (5 mins)

Use a script," *Please close your eyes, I'd like you to imagine your body moving through time to where the project has finished. Unfortunately, the project has been a failure, so many unexpected events hit us, and the project failed to deliver. Now, without leaving that future I'd like you to slowly open your eyes. I want you now to write down all the events which caused the failure".*

Step 4: Generate Reasons for failure (10 mins)

- Individually create a list of things that could go wrong.
- Capture anything - has a chance of causing project failure
- Identify obstacles that may prevent deadlines/milestones being reached

NB: Solutions are not allowed during this step

Step 5: Consolidate the lists (15 mins)

- Each person briefly describes each problem and places on the project timeline or whiteboard
- Continue until everyone has exhausted their lists

Step 6: Find Themes (10 minutes)

- Move ideas into clusters or themes that "belong together"
- Label the themes

Pre Mortem Steps

Step 7: Select the top ten (15 mins)

- Focus on show-stoppers - problems that if they are occur will have a critical impact to your project
- Pick problems likely to happen - don't waste time solving problems that aren't likely to actually occur
- Discard problems you have no control over - don't waste time on things outside your sphere of control

Step 8: Create a plan to counter/mitigate (20 mins)

- Once problems are out in the open, their solutions should become surprisingly simple
- Discuss each problem and create a solution to prevent it occurring
- Be specific and think about what could:
  - Avoid - eliminate a process or activity
  - Remove - removing the source of the risk
  - Reduce - reduce by levels of monitoring & control
  - Sharing - transferring or outsourcing
  - Accept - place it in the baseline
- Capture the solutions

Step 9: Agree Ownership (5 mins)

- Identify an individual for each potential problem and its solution

Step 10: Capture and share (10 mins)

- Take notes and agreements and circulate
- Add onto agenda for project meetings and risk review
- Agree next review dates

Step 11: Feedback & Closure (10 mins)

- Ask the team how they felt and anything that could be improved

Pre Mortem Steps

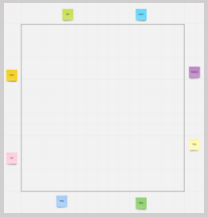
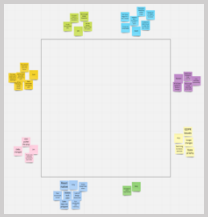
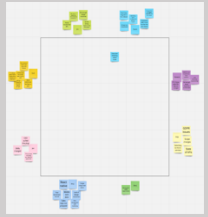
Introduction & purpose of meeting	Project Overview	Set the context	Generate Reasons for failure	Consolidate the lists	Find Themes	Select the top ten	Create a plan	Agree Ownership	Capture and share	Feedback & Closure

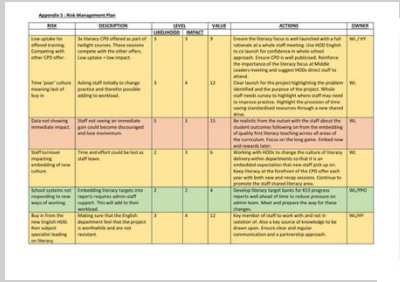
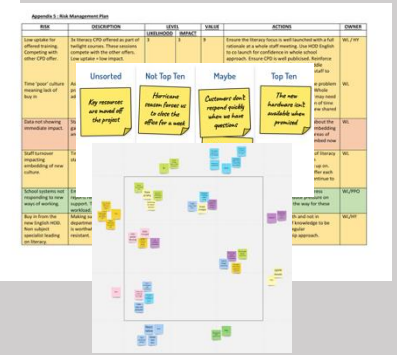
Facilitator + Support
~ 20 minutes

All
~ 70 minutes

Facilitator + Support
~ 10 minutes

Outputs

Please remember:

- Allow up to 2 hours of uninterrupted time
- White board & post-its or suitable tool
- Stakeholders should be present
- Mobile phones off or outside room
- Project Overview & script to set the scene

- Plan - unfactored risks with mitigation plans & owners
- Contingencies:
- Risk analysis – create mitigation costs & technical contingency
- Management contingency will need to be agreed 7

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Summary

- A pre mortem can be run for at P3M or businesses level with any methodology or lifecycle
- Pre Mortems can be run anytime, best value during the planning phase and revisited regularly
- Pre Mortem
  - Identify a wide range of potential problems
  - Reduce overconfidence and biases from stakeholders
  - Forge a culture of openness and ‘speaking truth to power’ for the team
  - Remember:
    - You get out of a Pre Mortem what you put in
    - You are brainstorming Doom, be creative and remember there is no right or wrong answer
    - Everyone has a voice and should be heard
    - Don’t try to find a solution too early, focus on what could go wrong
- The project will need to continually review the risks as part of BAU
- Never forget: this process is useless if you get all the way to creating a solution but don’t carry it out.

- Lastly To look for successes, at step 3 just think of why the project has succeeded

Any Questions?

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