

The Premortem Technique: A Facilitator's Guide

Before the Session

- Invite participants to the premortem session by setting up a two-hour, face-to-face meeting with all project team members, key stakeholders and customer groups.
- Ensure all participants are familiar with the details of the overall project plan. Distribute copies to attendees as needed at least one week prior to the session.
- Identify individuals outside of the project team to serve as the recorder and the note taker for the session
- Ensure the room in which the session will be conducted contains a flipchart and plenty of blank paper and writing instruments.

During the Session

- Welcome the session participants and perform introductions.
- Ensure the note taker is prepared to record all key questions, discussion points, decisions and required actions.
- Distribute several sheets of paper and a writing instrument to each session participant.
- Pose the following situation to the session participants:
“Imagine that we are many months in the future. Despite this group’s best efforts, the project was a complete and absolute failure. Your role is to determine why and how the failure occurred. In the next 10 minutes, write down as many reasons for failure as you can generate.”
- At the end of the 10 minutes, ask each participant in the room to share one item on their list, with the recorder capturing each on sticky notes posted on the flipchart. Continue around the room until all ideas have been shared. Affinitize similar issues as applicable.
- With the session participants, eliminate any external factors over which the team cannot control. Prioritize the remaining problems based on the perceived severity of impact and likeliness to occur. Consider using [multivoting](#) to assist in the prioritization effort.
- With the remaining time, identify the preventative actions needed to mitigate the highest-priority failure modes. Assign owners and required timing to each set of actions.

After the Session

- Incorporate the risk mitigation activities into the overall project plan and follow-up on any outstanding items from the session notes.
- On an ongoing basis, review key project indicators to ensure effectiveness of risk mitigation activities.
- Celebrate project success!