CreativeHuddle

CANVAS

TIME
45 minutes

GROUP
Up to 12 people

Teamwork

Pre-Mortem

Imagine the plan has failed, then fix the causes while there's time.

THE IDEA

Teams spot more risks when they imagine a plan has already failed. Picture the day it fell apart, write down why, rank the biggest risks and agree what to change while there's still time.

Materials. This canvas, printed large or on a shared online whiteboard, and sticky notes.

1 The plan

Start here.

What plan are we testing?



It's _____ and the plan has failed.

2 Why it failed

Write one specific cause on each sticky note.

3 The biggest risks

Place each cause on the grid.

MORE LIKELY ↑	
KEEP AN EYE ON THESE	ACT ON THESE FIRST
NOTE AND MOVE ON	HAVE A PLAN READY

MORE DAMAGING →

4 What we'll do now

Take the top-right corner first.

RISK	WHAT WE'LL CHANGE NOW	EARLY WARNING SIGN	WHO

5 Before we commit

Say what's still unsaid, and set a date to check the warning signs.

Anything still unsaid

We'll check the warning signs on

The pre-mortem comes from Gary Klein (Harvard Business Review, 2007), building on research into prospective hindsight by Deborah Mitchell, Jay Russo and Nancy Pennington (1989).

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WORKED EXAMPLE

TIME 45 minutes

GROUP Up to 12 people

Teamwork

Pre-Mortem

Imagine the plan has failed, then fix the causes while there's time.

THE IDEA

Teams spot more risks when they imagine a plan has already failed. Picture the day it fell apart, write down why, rank the biggest risks and agree what to change while there's still time.

Materials. This canvas, printed large or on a shared online whiteboard, and sticky notes.

1 The plan

Start here.

What plan are we testing?

Launch our new brand by 30 June 2027.



It's *1 July 2027* and the plan has failed.

2 Why it failed

Write one specific cause on each sticky note.

- *The partners couldn't agree on the designs, so sign-off slipped to May.*
- *Our designer was on another job until March.*
- *Ben got pulled onto client work and nobody else drove it.*
- *Clients saw the new logo on LinkedIn before we told them.*
- *The website ran over budget, so we cut the case studies.*
- *Launch week clashed with two big client deadlines.*
- *People kept using the old proposal template.*
- *Nobody owned the switch-on day.*

3 The biggest risks

Place each cause on the grid.

MORE LIKELY ↑

KEEP AN EYE ON THESE	ACT ON THESE FIRST
Old templates, *Clashing deadlines*	*Ben pulled away*, *Sign-off slips*, *No switch-on owner*
NOTE AND MOVE ON	**HAVE A PLAN READY**
Designer busy	*Clients hear it second-hand*, *Website over budget*

MORE DAMAGING →

4 What we'll do now

Take the top-right corner first.

RISK	WHAT WE'LL CHANGE NOW	EARLY WARNING SIGN	WHO
Sign-off slips	*Book the partners' sign-off for 31 March now.*	*First designs arrive late.*	*Aisha*
Ben pulled away	*Tom takes one of Ben's clients until July.*	*Ben misses two brand Fridays.*	*Sam*
No switch-on owner	*Dev owns launch day, with a checklist.*	*No checklist by 1 June.*	*Ben*

5 Before we commit

Say what's still unsaid, and set a date to check the warning signs.

Anything still unsaid

Dev worries the new look feels too corporate for our smaller clients. We'll test it with two of them in February.

We'll check the warning signs on

Fri 26 February

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