

Pre-Mortem Protocol

Based on the work of Gary Klein

The purpose of the pre-mortem is to find the weaknesses in a plan *in order to make it stronger*. It is worth doing not just before the start of implementation, but also mid-way through, when you have some data about how well the plan is working. (Therefore, it is also worth thinking about what data you will collect in order to know how well the plan is working.)

Steps

Form small groups (3-5 members). You will take turns in examining each other's plans. Each person has a turn to present and receive feedback on a plan. For each round, designate a presenter, a time-keeper, and a note-taker. Times are listed on the protocol, and the note-taker is charged with giving the presenter notes from the group's discussion at the end of the round (although the presenter may elect to take his/her own notes as well as, or in place of).

The pre-mortem asks you to imagine a fiasco: we are at some point in the near future, and it is clear that the plans have failed to deliver the intended results. As our kids would say, an epic fail. **Your task, then, is to generate likely causes of this failure**, which could be omissions, faulty thinking, quality control issues, or many other possible weaknesses.

1. Read through the plan as it currently stands. You may ask the presenter to walk you through it. Ask clarifying questions of the presenter so that you are clear on the theory of action behind the plan—leave the details for later. (5 minutes)
2. Individually, annotate the plan, identifying possible weaknesses and suggesting possible ways to strengthen the plan, *in order to forestall the epic fail*. (3 minutes)
3. Everyone in the group, except the presenter, shares what they noticed about the plan and its weaknesses, shares wonderings, and makes suggestions. The presenter listens, and the note-taker takes notes unless not needed by presenter. (5 minutes)
4. The presenter reflects on the feedback and thanks the other group members. (3 minutes)
5. Debrief the process and decompress. (Up to 4 minutes)
 - a. How well did this process work for you?
 - b. Were you able to make improvements to the plan?
 - c. How else might you use this strategy?