



## DESCRIBE THE FAILURE

What important stuff did we not do?

What unimportant stuff did we do?

What current problems remain?

What new problems emerged?

## SYMPTOMS

**How** will we know we failed?

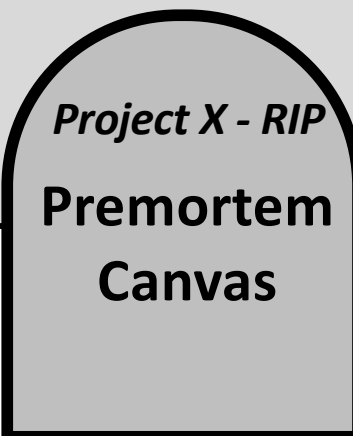


If we don't do \_\_\_\_\_, it's a fail.

**When** did we realize we'd failed?

If the only thing we do is \_\_\_\_\_ it's a win.

**Why** do these outcomes constitute failure?



Who knew we'd fail?

Who is surprised we failed?

Who is glad we failed?

Who is sad we failed?

Was there something we lacked?

Was it not well coordinated?  
Communicated? Supported?

What got in the way?



## LIST THE CAUSES

What did we do that caused us to fail?

What did we *not* do that caused us to fail?

What did others do that caused failure?

What did others *not* do that caused failure?

What incorrect assumptions did we make?

## UPDATED GOALS



## RISK MITIGATION

# PREMORTEM INSTRUCTIONS

*A Premortem is a method for problem exploration and framing. It involves imaging a future scenario in which the proposed activity fails to achieve its objective, describing the failure, then identifying the causes of the failure. This activity gives teams insight into priorities and success criteria, uncovers hidden assumptions, and identifies potential pitfalls.*

## WHEN TO USE THIS TOOL

At the beginning of an activity, or any time the definition of success is being determined or assessed.

## WHY TO USE THIS TOOL

To gain clarity about “what success looks like.”

To uncover hidden assumptions about activities, outcomes, success and failure.

To identify potential causes of failure.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Invite the project team to imagine it is 2 years in the future and the current project, activity, or initiative has utterly failed. Use the questions in the Premortem Canvas to explore the nature and causes of the failure. The objective is not necessarily to fill out the entire Canvas or to answer all the questions. Rather, use the questions as prompts for a group discussion.

**STEP 1: Describe the failure.** Using vivid detail, describe what it would look like if your project fails completely. Focus on outcomes and attributes, not behaviors or causes. Don't hold back or self-edit. Use extreme language and explore the worst-case scenarios. Who is sad we failed?

**STEP 2: List the causes.** Assemble a list of potential causes for the failure. Consider a wide range, including action, inaction, assumptions, priorities, distractions, people, organizations, and processes. Include anything that might be a contributing factor.

**STEP 3: Update goals and risks.** Compare the description of future failure with the team's current definition of success (goals, objectives, etc.) and the team's current action plans. Discuss whether successfully accomplishing the team's goals and activities would prevent the future failure scenario. Discuss which causes are avoidable and whether the team is taking appropriate steps to mitigate or prevent them from being realized.