

## Premortem exercise

Unlike a [postmortem](#) whose focus is on learning from what *actually went wrong* in a project, the focus of a premortem is on anticipating everything that *could* go wrong and using that information to plan future mitigation strategies. And when we say everything, we mean it. So think big and small, and most of all be open and honest with yourself and your team.

**Overview:** This activity consists of three parts:

1. Create an exhaustive list of failure scenarios your project might face from your individual and collective brainstorming.
2. Fine tune this list by selecting five to ten challenges that your team thinks have the greatest impact and probability.
3. Write up mitigation strategies in the worksheet for the challenges you listed as most important.

**Roles needed:** Facilitator, notetaker

### Part 1. “Brainstorming Session of Doom”

*What if the internet breaks tomorrow...our company goes bankrupt...a monster eats our lead?*

In this first exercise, really challenge yourself to think big – write down every single problem that has even the remote chance of derailing your project.

*“Good ideas are always crazy until they’re not.” - Larry Page*

Individual Brainstorm (10 minutes)

- Come up with an exhaustive list of potential challenges that could arise for your team’s project. Think big and small, no problem is off-limits!
- *Note: Do not brainstorm any solutions, you will have the opportunity to do so later on.*

Group Sharing (25 minutes)

- Set the tone – create a space where your team can feel motivated and comfortable sharing ideas. Check out the [Manager Actions for Psychological Safety](#) for some tips.
- Assign a notetaker who will write down everyone’s ideas from this session, noting any that repeat.
- Go around and have everyone share with the team every idea they came up. No judgment. Laughter *definitely* allowed.
- *Note: New ideas are always welcome at any stage – if you hear something that sparks an idea, share it with your team and write it down!*
- Review your final list together, and write it down below.

## All possible failure scenarios

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The paper itself is a clean, off-white color.

## Part 2. Selecting realistic problems

Select five to ten challenges that your team thinks has the greatest impact and probability.

### Group Discussion (30 minutes)

- Consider the following questions as you prioritize your list of 5-10 most important challenges.
  - Which issues should you be *most* worried about?
  - Which problems are *most likely* to happen?
  - Which of these challenges, do you have control over?
  - Which will have the greatest negative impact?
- *Note: In some cases, you might have an issue that has a high probability of occurring, but a low impact or a low probability of occurring but a high impact. Consider using [this framework](#) to help your team prioritize.*
- Write your top five to ten risks below.

## Our Top 5-10 Risks

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 3. Next steps

Now that you have your list of risks, it's time to come up with solutions for your top 5-10 risks.

### Mitigation plans for our biggest problems

Use the following framework to document the most important risks and how you plan to address them.

#### Risk:

Owner(s):

Low - High

Probability	
Impact	

#### Risk Outcomes/Scenarios:

#### Possible Mitigations:

#### Final Mitigation Plan: