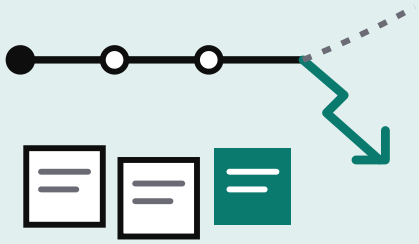
Method

Premortem

A short meeting in which the team assumes the project has already failed and each person writes down why, to uncover risks before starting.



In Spanish
Pre-mortem

Origin
Klein (2007)

Output
A ranked list of risks in the plan, with changes to avoid them

What it's for

It helps you say out loud what could fail once a plan is decided: imagining failure as a fact gives permission to say it.

Key elements

Failure as a fact
The question isn't what could go wrong, but why it went wrong.

Everyone writes alone
First in silence, so nobody gets carried along by what others say.

It ends in changes
The most worrying risks become adjustments to the plan.

How it's done

1

Present the plan and announce that, months later, it failed.

2

Each person writes the reasons for the failure, and then they are read one by one.

3

Adjust the plan to prevent the most important risks.

Applications in design

When to use it

Before launching a project, a product, or a research plan, once there is a concrete proposal.

Avoid

Turning it into a session of complaints or blame.

Don't fall for it

Listing risks isn't enough: decide who takes care of each one.

Connections

Related to

- Five whys
- Six Thinking Hats
- Design sprint

Authors and works

1989	**Deborah J. Mitchell, J. Edward Russo and Nancy Pennington**	Studied how explanations change when you imagine something has already happened; it is the idea the premortem builds on.
2007	**Gary Klein**	Proposed the premortem as a meeting at the start of a project in which the team imagines its failure and explains the causes.

Sources

Original sources

- Klein, G. (2007). Performing a project premortem. Harvard Business Review, 85(9), 18–19.
- Mitchell, D. J., Russo, J. E., & Pennington, N. (1989). Back to the future: Temporal perspective in the explanation of events. Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 2(1), 25–38. View source (https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.3960020103)

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.