

The Premortem

Preparing to Lead

- “In a postmortem, an autopsy is performed on a patient to try to learn why the patient died. But while it may be helpful to those who perform it and hear about the results, it does not help the central figure in the medical drama—the patient.”

Purpose

- The PreMortem Exercise may be used to identify potential barriers and vulnerabilities to project success before they occur. The PreMortem helps to build intuition and sensitivity to where future problems might be.

Step 1

- Imagine that we are 2 years into the future and, despite all of the team's efforts, the project has failed. Things have gone completely wrong on a number of fronts. Now, ask "What could have caused this?"

Step 2

- Generate the reasons for failure. Spend the next 10 minutes writing down all the reasons you believe this failure occurred.

Step 3

- Address the 2 or 3 items from your list that are of greatest concern and list what you specifically will do differently now that you have considered them.

Step 4

- Periodically review the potential problem list to resensitize yourself and the other members of the team to problems that may be emerging.