WORKSHEET + WORKED EXAMPLE

Spot Risks Before You Commit

A short list of risks, early signals, and decisions still worth changing.

20-30 minutes with others | Premortem

Use it in three moves

1. Choose a future date and imagine the plan did not achieve what mattered. This is an exercise, not a prediction.

2. Let people write possible reasons privately first, then share them without requiring everyone to agree.

3. Choose the concerns worth acting on. For each, name an early signal, a response, and someone who will watch it. Pausing the plan remains an option.

The plan we are considering

A date far enough ahead to see the consequences

Spot Risks Before You Commit

YOUR WORKING NOTES / CONTINUED

From that date: what went wrong?

Describe the cost to people as well as the missed outcome.

What does this change about the plan?

Choose: Still exploring / Proceed with changes / Pause for evidence / Do not proceed

What needs to happen before commitment?

One item at a time

Copy this page for additional items. Use one row, option, task, or possibility per copy. The web tool handles calculations and comparisons where included.

Possible reason

What would we notice early?

What could we change?

Who will watch and respond?

A question for me

What might someone hesitate to say in front of me?

See one way through

FICTIONAL WORKED EXAMPLE / NOT THE ANSWER TO YOUR SITUATION

The plan we are considering

Move community bookings to an online-only form.

A date far enough ahead to see the consequences

Three months after launch

From that date: what went wrong?

The system launched on time, but several regular visitors stopped booking because the front-desk route disappeared.

What does this change about the plan?

Pause for evidence

What needs to happen before commitment?

Ask front-desk colleagues and visitors what a usable booking route needs to include.

Example item 1

Possible reason: People who need help cannot complete the form.

What would we notice early?: More abandoned bookings and requests for help at the desk.

What could we change?: Keep an assisted booking route and test it with visitors.

Who will watch and respond?: Service lead with front-desk colleagues

Example item 2

Possible reason: The form creates duplicate bookings.

What would we notice early?: Staff find repeated names during the first week.

What could we change?: Trial a small set of bookings before the full move.

Who will watch and respond?: Bookings coordinator

The thinking behind it

Nic's writing on certainty makes room for the things our plans cannot settle. Listen especially for concerns from people with less power to stop the plan.

Psychologist Gary Klein popularized the project premortem in a 2007 Harvard Business Review article. A team imagines a project has failed and works backward to surface possible reasons while there is still time to change the plan.

Gary Klein on the premortem

Read The Search For Unapologetic Impracticality In Leadership: Part II - The Seduction of Certainty by Nic Payne