

9.6: Developing Your Personal Decision-Making Skills

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what you can do to avoid making poor decisions.
2. Learn what a project premortem is.

Perform a Project “Premortem” to Fix Problems Before They Happen

Doctors routinely perform postmortems to understand what went wrong with a patient who has died. The idea is for everyone to learn from the unfortunate outcome so that future patients will not meet a similar fate. But, what if you could avoid a horrible outcome before it happened by identifying project risks proactively—before your project derails? Research suggests that the simple exercise of imagining what could go wrong with a given decision can increase your ability to identify reasons for future successes or failures by 30%. A “premortem” is a way to imagine and to avoid what might go wrong before spending a cent or having to change course along the way.

Gary Klein, an expert on decision making in fast-paced, uncertain, complex, and critical environments, recommends that decision makers follow this six-step premortem process to increase their chances of success.

1. A planning team comes up with an outline of a plan, such as the launching of a new product.
2. Either the existing group or a unique group is then told to imagine looking into a crystal ball and seeing that the new product failed miserably. They then write down all the reasons they can imagine that might have led to this failure.
3. Each team member shares items from their list until all the potential problems have been identified.
4. The list is reviewed for additional ideas.
5. The issues are sorted into categories in the search for themes.
6. The plan should then be revised to correct the flaws and avoid these potential problems.

The premortem technique allows groups to truly delve into “what if” scenarios. For example, in a premortem session at a *Fortune* 50 company, an executive imagined that a potential billion-dollar environmental sustainability project might fail because the CEO had retired.

Key Takeaway

There are a number of ways to learn about decision making that can help make you more effective. If the decision is important, conduct a premortem to anticipate what might go wrong. When a decision is going to involve others, be proactive in getting them to buy in before the decision is made. Individuals and groups can suffer from decision-making traps and process losses. Understanding that you can spot and avoid these traps is important in helping to make you a more effective manager.

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- **Located at:** <https://2012books.lardbucket.org/books/management-principles-v1.1/s15-05-developing-your-personal-decis.html>.
License: CC BY-NC-SA: Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike

This page titled 9.6: Developing Your Personal Decision-Making Skills is shared under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by Anonymous.