SEVEN Bytes

WHERE DID WE GO WRONG…

At the end of a project or implementation of a major decision, it is common to have a review meeting or 'post-mortem' to identify what could have been done better, what lessons have been learned, or even why it failed. But by then, it's often too late to benefit from the insights, and people may be defensive about their own contributions or reluctant to criticise others.

FEAR OF BEING THE NAYSAYER

In many cases, the difficulties encountered during the course of the project could have been identified in advance; say as part of a pre-launch risk analysis, where team members are asked to speculate on what might go wrong. But initial optimism for the initiative can discourage people who see potential weaknesses from speaking up, lest they be seen as doom-mongers or lacking commitment.

THE VALUE OF PRE-MORTEMS

To overcome this obstacle, psychologist Gary Klein has proposed holding a 'pre-mortem' at the start of a project. After the project plan briefing, the leader tells the team to imagine that the project has failed spectacularly. Each team member spends some time independently thinking of and writing down as many reasons as possible for what went wrong and why. Reasons are shared and recorded so that the leader can revise and strengthen the plan.

2020 HINDSIGHT - IN ADVANCE

The pre-mortem technique differs from typical risk analysis by getting participants to imagine that the failure has already occurred. This 'prospective hindsight' seems to overcome their inhibitions about raising critical issues without blame and has been shown to be better at identifying reasons for future outcomes than conventional methods. It also counteracts excessive 'gung-ho' optimism that ignores real difficulties, while making team members feel valued for their insights.

SEVEN

PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK