Post-mortem meetings...Without Blame

Post-mortem. A word that conjures up fear and dread in the best of us. The idea of a post-mortem meeting can make our teams (and ourselves) defensive...even before the meeting begins! How do we remove the negative conations around post-mortem meetings and focus on how to integrate them into every project, in a way that focuses on continuous learning and improvement? What can we do (and say) differently to use these meetings as growth opportunities and not blame sessions?

Key Learnings:

•How to structure the post-mortem meeting to make it an opportunity for growth, improvement and empowerment
•How to avoid the blame game in post-mortem meeting
•Tips on getting the team involved in the meeting rather than defensive about the meeting
•Why post-mortem meetings are a crucial step in closing out our projects.

Julie Reaume
Director of Development, MindMuze

Case Study

Dan was the Project Manager on a project that did not go well. Deadlines were missed, it went over-budget, his team had to work evenings and weekends, and in the end it did not meet the client's expectations.

Case Study

Dan is now informed there will be a Post-mortem meeting with the client in 2 weeks on this project. He is asked to compile a report noting the factors that led to project to it's current state.

Dan begins to panic...he is not the type to point fingers at anyone. He just wants his projects to go well. **Now he has to document this!**

It's All in the Wording…

"How do I *survive* this meeting"

A True Project Manager

Project Managers don't do the job they do for the accolades – those go to their team.

The opposite happens when a project goes south...

Case Study

So, back to Dan...Here are his concerns

1. They are going to blame me.

2. I'm going to have to blame team members.

3. I have to admit to failure.

Write it Down!

Dan's worry is that he has to do this report. Ironically this is what will make this meeting successful and give him the control and structure he needs. Without proper documentation and a defined agenda this meeting will not go in the right direction.
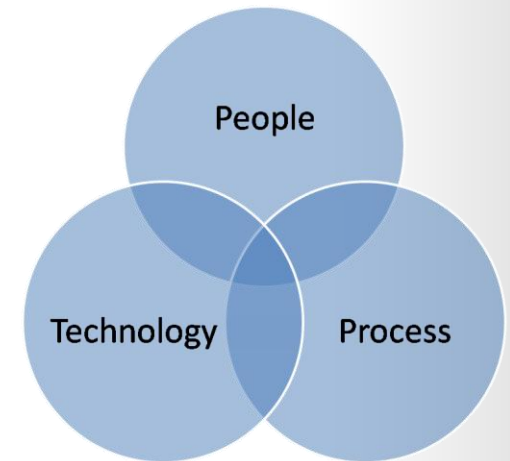
It WILL turn into a group of people blaming each other with no outcome.

So where does Dan start?

People

Technology   Process

Blame, Blame, Go Away

Reinforce that this meeting is NOT for punishment but for learning – and don't punish people for being honest later...

Include people – when people are present, others are more diplomatic and look for the lesson learned and are not so quick to scapegoat.

Your goal is to document what went right and what went wrong and why. You have nothing to *prove* and a lot to *learn*.

Blame, Blame, Go Away

Your client's input is critical...don't be afraid of it.

If the client goes down the blaming road, ask leading questions:
"How do you feel this should have been handled?"
Get them talking not accusing.
Yes/No questions are not the most effective.

Listen - don't jump to defense, no matter how difficult that may be!

Share it!

Case Study

The meeting...
The client began with finger-pointing...Dan's developer got defensive

Dan re-directed everyone back to the agenda and focused on going through his report.

He asked leading questions, and started to get insightful responses – and even some acknowledgment of positive aspects of the project.

A list of proposed solutions was the take-away with a clear delivery date.

Questions? Comments?

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Phone: 1.877.581.3942
Email: Info@ThoughtRock.com