With

The premortem, 'Thinking Fast and Slow', (extract) – Daniel Kahneman, (2011)

"The main obstacle is that ***subjective confidence is determined by the coherence of the story one has constructed, not by the quality and amount of the information that supports it.***

The best idea for 'taming over-optimism' was contributed by **Gary Klein**, my "adversarial collaborator"... He labels his proposal *the premortem*.

The procedure is simple: when the organisation has almost come to an important decision but has not formally committed itself, Klein proposes gathering for a brief session, a group of individuals who are knowledgeable about the decision. The premise of the session is a short speech:

"Imagine that we are a year into the future. We implemented the plan as it now exists. The outcome was a disaster. Please take 5 to 10 minutes to write a brief history of that disaster."

Gary Klein's idea of the premortem usually evokes immediate enthusiasm. After I described it casually at a session in Davos, someone behind me muttered, "It was worth coming to Davos just for this!" (I later noticed that the speaker was the CEO of a major international corporation.).

The premortem has two main advantages: ***it overcomes the groupthink that affects many teams once a decision appears to have been made, and it unleashes the imagination of knowledgeable individuals in a much needed direction.***

As a team converges on a decision – and especially when the leader tips her hand – public doubts about the wisdom of the planned move are gradually suppressed and eventually come to be treated as evidence of flawed loyalty to the team and its leaders. The suppression of doubt contributes to overconfidence in a group where only supporters of the decision have a voice. The main virtue of the premortem is that it legitimizes doubts. Furthermore, it encourages even supporters of the decision to search for possible threats that they had not considered earlier. The premortem is not a panacea and does not provide complete protection against nasty surprises, but it goes some way toward reducing the damage of plans that are subject to the biases of WYSIATI (What You See Is All There Is) and uncritical optimism."