

Assumption Matrix



Using the tool
Template
Example

Assumption Matrix

The Assumption Matrix tool helps you to systematically identify and evaluate the riskiest assumptions related to your solution or project. By categorizing assumptions based on their level of risk and certainty, you can prioritize which assumptions need further testing or validation to ensure the success of your initiative.

The Assumption Matrix is valuable if you are looking for a structured way to assess and address potential risks in your solution. It is particularly useful when you need to make informed decisions about where to focus your efforts and resources in the early stages.

To start using the Assumption Matrix, you must have a clear understanding of the solution project you are working on, as well as a list of underlying assumptions. It's important that participants are familiar with the context and objectives of the solution to effectively evaluate these assumptions.

Tips for use

You can use the tool both individually or in a group setting, depending on the complexity and the number of stakeholders involved. Using the tool in a group allows for a diverse range of perspectives, which can help in identifying assumptions that may not be immediately obvious.

To start with the tool, you need to prepare a large version of the Assumption Matrix on a whiteboard or flip chart.

How to Use

Ensure everyone is familiar with the solution directions and the project. Provide a brief overview of the Assumption Matrix and explain its purpose: to identify and categorize assumptions based on their risk level and the certainty with which they can be validated.

Step 1: Identify Assumptions

Begin by asking participants to brainstorm and list all assumptions related to the project or solution. These can include assumptions about customer needs, market conditions, technical feasibility, resource availability, or any other factors that could impact the project's success. Ask the participants to write each assumption on a separate sticky note.

Step 2: Introduce the Assumption Matrix

Explain the layout of the Assumption Matrix, which includes four quadrants: High Risk / Low Risk and Certain / Uncertain. The goal is to place each assumption into one of these quadrants based on its perceived level of risk and the certainty with which it can be validated.

Step 3: Place Assumptions on the Matrix

As a group, discuss each assumption and decide where it should be placed on the matrix. Consider the potential impact of the assumption being incorrect (risk) and how confident the participant is in its accuracy (certainty). Place high-risk, uncertain assumptions in the top right quadrant, and low-risk, certain assumptions in the bottom left quadrant. Continue this process until all assumptions are placed.

Step 4: Prioritize Assumptions for Action

Once all assumptions have been placed on the matrix, focus on the assumptions in the high-risk, uncertain quadrant. These are the most critical to address, as they pose the greatest threat to the success of the project. Discuss and agree on a plan to test or validate these assumptions as a priority. Lower-risk and more certain assumptions can be addressed later or monitored as the project progresses.

Step 5: Review and Adjust Regularly

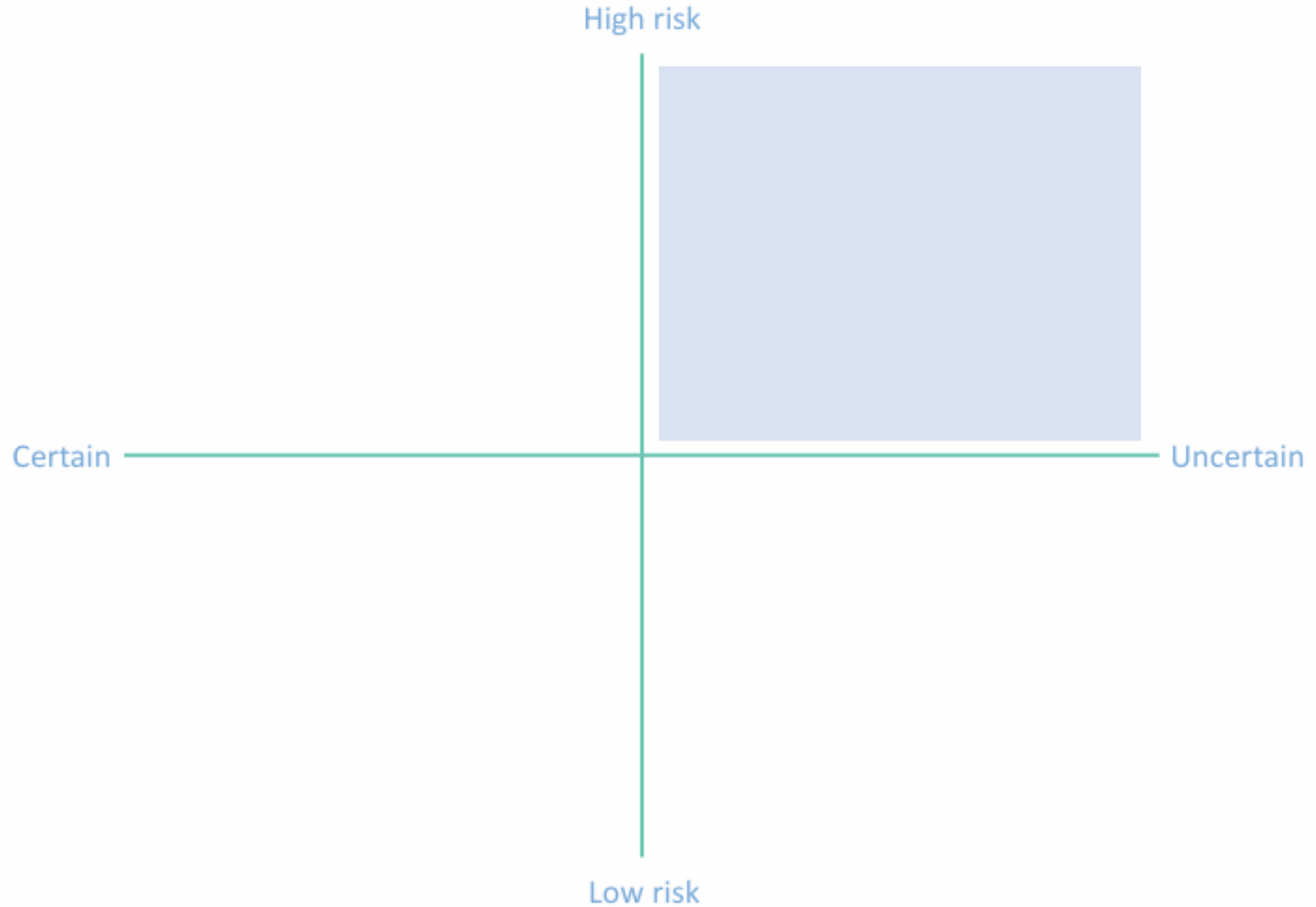
As the project evolves, regularly revisit the Assumption Matrix to reassess assumptions and their placement on the matrix. New information or changes in the project environment may shift the risk or certainty of certain assumptions, requiring adjustments to your prioritization and action plans.

The Assumption Matrix provides a clear, collaborative framework for identifying and prioritizing the riskiest assumptions in your project. By systematically evaluating assumptions and focusing on those that pose the greatest risk, you can proactively address potential issues and increase the likelihood of project success. Regularly reviewing and updating the matrix ensures that your team remains aligned and responsive to changes, ultimately leading to more informed decision-making and better project outcomes.

In the fictional case of Clearwater Bay, we will further explain how the tool works.

Assumption Matrix

name _____



date _____

Example Improving Safety in a Busy Water Area

Clearwater Bay is a bustling waterway frequented by both recreational users, such as swimmers and surfers, and commercial vessels transporting goods. The high traffic and diverse activities in the bay have led to several near-misses and safety concerns. The local authorities recognized the need to improve safety and reduce conflicts between different user groups.

To address these challenges, the Clearwater Bay Safety Committee decided to use the Assumption Matrix. The committee, consisting of harbor officials, recreational users, and shipping company representatives, needed to identify and prioritize the riskiest assumptions about proposed safety measures. By categorizing these assumptions based on their level of risk and certainty, they could focus on the most critical issues first.

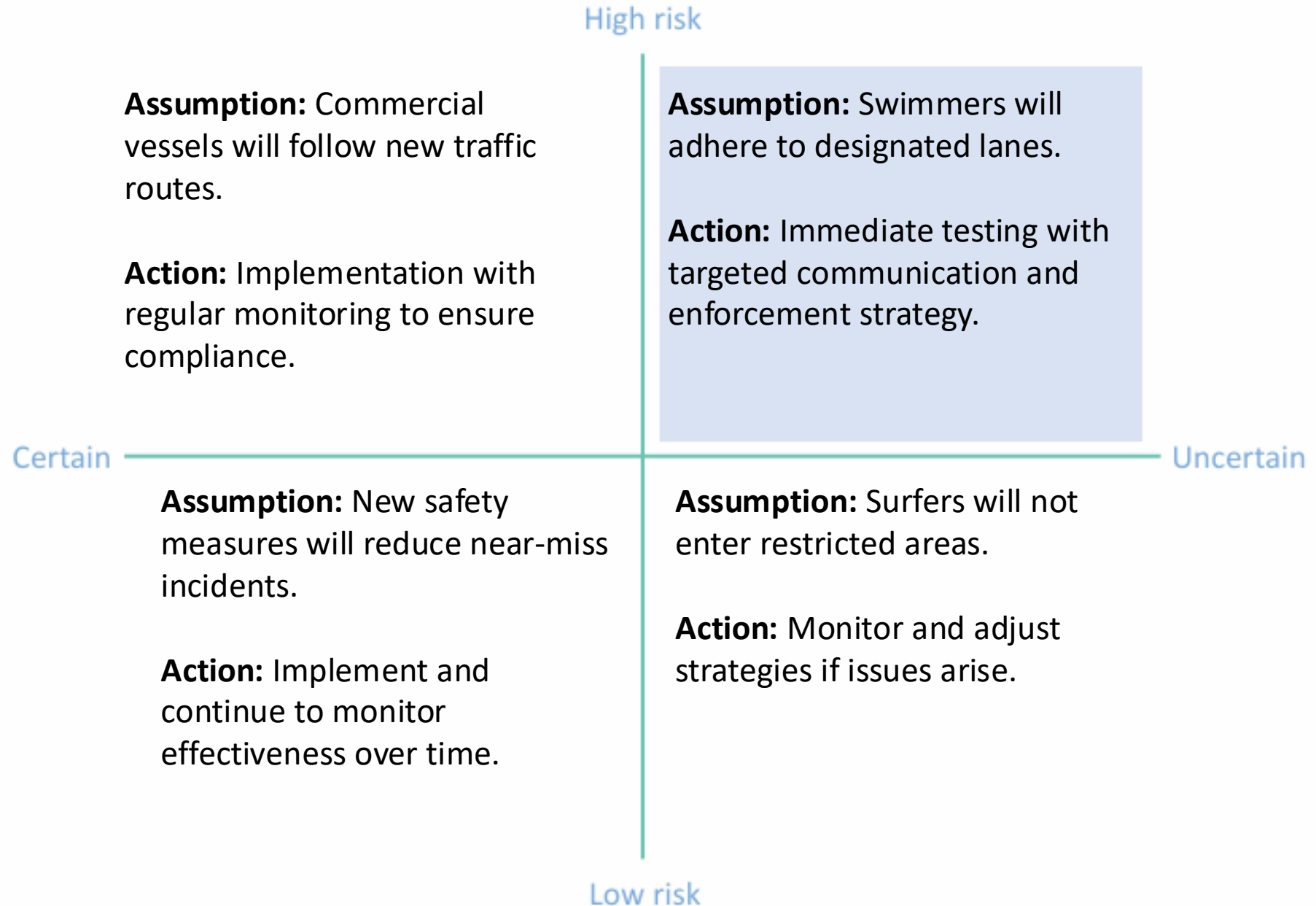
During a workshop, the committee brainstormed various assumptions, such as "swimmers will adhere to designated lanes," "commercial vessels can easily navigate new traffic routes," and "surfers will not enter restricted areas." Using the Assumption Matrix, they placed each assumption into one of four quadrants—High Risk / Low Risk and Certain / Uncertain.

The Assumption Matrix proved invaluable in this context. The committee identified that the assumption "swimmers will adhere to designated lanes" was high risk and uncertain, requiring immediate attention. They developed a targeted communication and enforcement strategy to test this assumption, which led to increased swimmer compliance and reduced accidents. Lower-risk assumptions, such as "commercial vessels can easily navigate new traffic routes," were monitored but not prioritized for immediate action.

By using the Assumption Matrix, the committee was able to focus on the most critical safety issues, leading to a more organized and safer environment for both recreational users and commercial shippers in Clearwater Bay. The tool's structured approach ensured that resources were allocated effectively, addressing the most pressing risks and ultimately enhancing safety in the area.

Assumption Matrix

name Clearwater Bay



date 9th of August