Adaptive Execution System — Shock List

A starter set of plausible changes to test a plan against. Print, cut along the cards, and draw one in Step 3. Use only shocks that are realistic for your world — or write your own on the blank cards. One shock at a time, applied to every assumption.

PEOPLE

A key person is pulled away

Your most critical person is reassigned to an incident or another project for a week.

PEOPLE

Someone leaves mid-flight

A core team member resigns or goes on unplanned leave before the work is done.

TIME

The deadline moves up

The delivery date is pulled forward by two weeks — same scope.

TIME

A round of work is lost

A holiday, outage or dependency delay wipes out several days you'd counted on.

PRIORITY

The top priority flips

Leadership reorders what matters most; today's number-one drops down the list.

PRIORITY

A new must-do lands

An urgent, unplanned piece of work is forced into the current cycle.

SCOPE

Scope is added late

A stakeholder adds a requirement after the plan was agreed.

SCOPE

The brief changes

What 'done' means shifts — the target the plan was built around moves.

DEPENDENCY

A dependency slips

Something you're waiting on (an API, an approval, another team) is late.

DEPENDENCY

An assumption fails upstream

A system, supplier or partner you relied on changes how it works.

MONEY

The budget is cut

Funding for the work is reduced part-way through.

EXTERNAL

The ground shifts

A market, regulatory or organisational change reshapes what the plan must achieve.

YOUR OWN

Write a plausible change

A realistic shift for your team — something that has happened before, or easily could.

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Facilitator note. These are starters, not a fixed list — the best shocks are the ones your team has actually lived through. A good shock is plausible (not a freak event), specific, and outside the plan's control. Draw one, read it as if it just happened, and check every assumption against it. Run a second shock if time allows.

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