Anti-Pattern Quick Reference

Six Patterns That Kill Agility — and How to Spot Them

Feature Factory Syndrome

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Planning focuses on "how much" not "why"
- Customer research is sporadic
- Teams resist removing backlog items
- Success = delivery speed, not impact

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Start planning with customer insights
- Score backlog items for customer value
- Schedule customer conversations weekly

☑ **Health Check**
"Can we explain why each feature matters to customers?"

Heavy Process Syndrome

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Identical workflows regardless of context
- Team complains about "process overload"
- Standardization > effectiveness
- Compliance monitored more than outcomes

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Let teams modify one process for 2 weeks
- Ask: "Does this improve customer outcomes?"
- Encourage process experiments

☑ **Health Check**
"Are we more focused on process than customer satisfaction?"

Fake Empowerment

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Leaders require approvals for most decisions
- Multiple approval layers slow everything
- Innovation/experimentation minimal
- Teams are increasingly risk-averse

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Clarify decisions teams own independently
- Shift from approvals to guardrails
- Create safe-to-fail experiment boundaries
- Recognize learnings, not just wins

☑ **Health Check**
"Do we feel trusted to make decisions without asking permission?"

Autonomy Without Alignment

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Teams can't connect work to company goals
- Duplication of effort is common
- Cross-team collaboration is accidental
- Business outcomes don't improve

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Have teams articulate goal connection
- Introduce cross-team alignment forums
- Balance autonomy with accountability

☑ **Health Check**
"Do we understand how our decisions connect to company goals?"

Zombie Agile

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Stand-ups = status reports, not collaboration
- Stories are specs, not conversations
- Retros happen, but nothing changes
- Agile terms used, values ignored

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Evaluate and modify one ceremony
- Focus retro on ONE actionable improvement
- Celebrate responding to change
- Use AI to detect recurring blockers

☑ **Health Check**
"Which of our agile practices actually help us deliver better value?"

Innovation Theater

⚑ **Red Flags**
- Innovation events happen, ideas don't ship
- No clear path from idea to production
- Leadership celebrates but doesn't fund
- Creative people frustrated by lack of follow-through

⚡ **Quick Actions**
- Commit to implementing ONE idea now
- Create a clear "idea to production" pathway
- Allocate 10% sprint capacity for experiments
- Track implementations, not events

☑ **Health Check**
"What's one experiment we could try this week to be 5% better?"

Remember: These anti-patterns often reinforce each other. Feature Factory + Heavy Process is common. Fake Empowerment + Zombie Agile go hand in hand. Start with your highest-scoring pattern but watch for connected issues. Use the **Anti-Pattern Assessment** to score your team quarterly.