# DMAIC: Breaking the Cycle of Recurring Project Problems Talking Points

## Slide 1

Here are concise **talking points for Slide 1** of your presentation, titled **“DMAIC: Breaking the Cycle of Recurring Project Problems”**:

**🎯 Slide 1: Title Slide – *DMAIC: Breaking the Cycle of Recurring Project Problems***

**1. Welcome & Introduction**

* Welcome the audience and introduce yourself (Kimberly Wiethoff, Agile Program Manager and author of *Managing Projects the Agile Way*).
* Briefly share your background in Agile, Lean, and continuous improvement.

**2. Set the Stage**

* Ask: “Have you ever felt like your team is stuck in project Groundhog Day?”
* Highlight the frustration of recurring issues in Agile projects: testing delays, approval bottlenecks, scope creep, or constant rollover of user stories.

**3. Purpose of Today’s Talk**

* Introduce DMAIC as a **structured, data-driven approach** that helps Agile teams permanently resolve persistent delivery problems.
* Emphasize that this method complements Agile, it doesn’t replace it.

**4. What to Expect**

* Walk through each step of DMAIC: Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control.
* Share real-world examples and practical tools for immediate use.
* Discuss how to embed DMAIC into existing Agile ceremonies.

**5. Why It Matters**

* Move beyond reactive firefighting.
* Empower teams to become true problem solvers.

## Slide 2

Here are the **talking points for Slide 2** titled **"The Problem: Project Groundhog Day"**:

**🌀 Slide 2: The Problem – *Project Groundhog Day***

**1. Frame the Problem**

* “Let’s talk about a familiar scenario—one many of us have experienced.”
* “You fix an issue in one sprint, only to see it resurface in the next. Sound familiar?”

**2. Examples of Recurring Pain Points**

* Walk through each bullet briefly:
  + **Testing delays** → "Despite planning, QA always lags behind dev."
  + **Approval bottlenecks** → "Decisions pile up, waiting for one person or group."
  + **Story rollover** → "We consistently miss our sprint goals."
  + **Scope creep** → "New requests sneak in and destabilize the sprint."

**3. The Real Issue**

* These aren’t one-time problems—they’re *patterns*.
* Agile alone often addresses symptoms but lacks the structure to solve *root causes*.

**4. The Impact**

* These recurring problems lead to:
  + Demoralized teams
  + Missed deadlines
  + Wasted effort
  + Frustrated stakeholders

**5. Segue to the Solution**

* “If you’ve tried retrospectives, extra meetings, or more planning—and the issues keep coming back—then it’s time for a deeper, more structured approach.”

**6. Transition**

* “That’s where DMAIC comes in. Let’s look at how this method helps us break the cycle once and for all.”

## Slide 3

Here are the **talking points for Slide 3**, titled **“Introducing DMAIC: Beyond Agile Problem-Solving”**:

**🧩 Slide 3: Introducing DMAIC – *Beyond Agile Problem-Solving***

**1. Bridge the Gap**

* “Agile is great for continuous improvement—but it doesn’t always give us the *depth* we need to fix persistent problems at the root.”

**2. Why Agile Alone Isn’t Enough**

* Agile retrospectives are valuable, but often focus on immediate symptoms rather than systemic issues.
* Teams may identify what went wrong, but not always *why* it keeps happening.

**3. What Is DMAIC?**

* Introduce DMAIC as a **Lean Six Sigma framework** tailored for process improvement.
* Highlight that it's structured, data-driven, and outcome-focused.

**4. Walk Through the Phases**

* Briefly define each phase:
  + **Define** – Clearly state the problem and goal.
  + **Measure** – Gather data to understand the current performance.
  + **Analyze** – Identify root causes using structured techniques.
  + **Improve** – Design and test targeted solutions.
  + **Control** – Ensure the improvements stick.

**5. How DMAIC Complements Agile**

* DMAIC doesn’t compete with Agile—it *enhances* it.
* It gives Agile teams the tools to move from “fixing” to *solving*.

**6. Transition**

* “So how do you know when it’s time to use DMAIC? Let’s talk about that next.”

## Slide 4

Here are the **talking points for Slide 4**, titled **“When to Use DMAIC in Agile Environments”**:

**⏱ Slide 4: When to Use DMAIC in Agile Environments**

**1. Recognizing the Patterns**

* “Sometimes, teams say things that sound like normal challenges—but if you hear them repeatedly, they’re red flags for deeper issues.”
* Share a few familiar quotes:
  + *“We never finish all the stories we commit to.”*
  + *“Testing is always the bottleneck.”*
  + *“Stakeholder feedback comes too late.”*
  + *“We’re constantly reworking the same feature.”*

**2. These Aren’t One-Off Problems**

* Emphasize: “These statements point to *patterns*, not isolated incidents.”
* Patterns signal **systemic issues** that require structured problem-solving—not just more retrospectives.

**3. Common DMAIC Use Cases**

* Quickly run through scenarios where DMAIC fits:
  + **Recurring blockers** – The same impediments slow progress every sprint.
  + **Quality issues** – Bugs, rework, or high defect rates that persist.
  + **Communication breakdowns** – Handoffs and feedback loops that consistently fail.
  + **Resource constraints** – Team members overloaded or misaligned sprint after sprint.

**4. The Takeaway**

* “If the same issue comes up more than twice—it’s time to stop firefighting and start investigating.”
* DMAIC gives you the structure to resolve these challenges **once and for all**.

**5. Transition**

* “Let’s dive into how each DMAIC phase works—starting with Define.”

## Slide 5

Here are the **talking points for Slide 5**, titled **“Step 1: Define”**:

**🔍 Slide 5: Step 1 – *Define***

**1. Set the Foundation**

* “The Define phase is where it all starts. If you skip this or stay vague, everything downstream gets fuzzy.”
* Emphasize: **Clear problem definition = clear solution path.**

**2. Key Activities in Define**

* Walk through each:
  + **Articulate the recurring issue** – Be specific and measurable.
  + **Identify relevant stakeholders** – Who is impacted and who needs to be involved?
  + **Establish boundaries** – What’s in scope and what’s not?
  + **Define success** – What does ‘solved’ actually look like?

**3. Share the Example**

* Use the example from the slide:  
  *“Our team consistently carries over 40% of stories into the next sprint, impacting delivery timelines and team morale.”*
* Point out why this is a strong definition:
  + It’s **quantified** (40%)
  + It describes **impact** (timelines, morale)
  + It’s **actionable**

**4. Common Pitfall**

* Warn: “Avoid vague definitions like ‘we’re not productive enough’—you can’t fix what you can’t define.”

**5. Action Tip**

* Encourage the audience to revisit old problem statements and ask: *“Is this specific enough to measure?”*

**6. Transition**

* “Once we’ve defined the problem clearly, the next step is to gather data and measure what’s really happening.”

## Slide 6

Here are the **talking points for Slide 6**, titled **“Step 2: Measure”**:

**📊 Slide 6: Step 2 – *Measure***

**1. Why Measure?**

* “This is where we replace assumptions with data.”
* “Measurement helps us determine whether the issue is systemic or just a one-off.”

**2. Three Key Measurement Areas**  
Walk through each:

* **Quantitative Data** – “These are your hard metrics—your sprint reports, Jira boards, defect rates.”
  + Examples: sprint velocity trends, defect counts, cycle time, story point completion rates.
* **Qualitative Data** – “This reveals what the numbers don’t—team sentiment, stakeholder friction.”
  + Examples: surveys, retrospectives, interviews, observations.
* **Baseline Establishment** – “You need to know where you’re starting from to measure improvement.”
  + Look for patterns, trends, and visualizations.

**3. Visualization Matters**

* “Use charts, graphs, dashboards. It makes your case clearer to leadership and the team.”

**4. Example Talking Point**

* “Imagine you’re investigating high story rollover. You measure 3 months of sprint data and find the rollover rate averages 42%. That’s your baseline.”

**5. Action Tip**

* “If you don’t have clean data, start capturing it now. Even a basic Excel tracker is better than flying blind.”

**6. Transition**

* “With your problem clearly defined and your baseline measured, it’s time to investigate *why* the issue is happening. That’s the Analyze phase.”

## Slide 7

Here are the **talking points for Slide 7**, titled **“Step 3: Analyze”**:

**🧠 Slide 7: Step 3 – *Analyze***

**1. Purpose of Analyze**

* “Now that we know what’s happening and how often—it’s time to figure out *why* it’s happening.”
* “This step moves us from symptom management to true root cause discovery.”

**2. Use Proven Techniques**  
Briefly explain each tool listed:

* **5 Whys** – “Keep asking ‘why’ until you get past surface-level answers.”
  + Example: Why are stories rolling over? → They’re too big → Requirements unclear → Not enough backlog grooming.
* **Fishbone (Ishikawa) Diagram** – “Visually map causes across categories like People, Process, Tools, etc.”
* **Pareto Chart** – “Helps you focus on the 20% of causes leading to 80% of issues.”
* **Value Stream Mapping** – “Used to identify bottlenecks and waste across your workflow.”

**3. Key Message**

* “Don't jump to solutions too early. If you misdiagnose the problem, your fix won’t stick.”

**4. Example Reinforcement**

* Walk through a quick analysis:
  + Symptom: Story rollover
  + Root Cause: Lack of backlog refinement and unclear acceptance criteria

**5. Action Tip**

* “Use a combination of data and team insights. Data tells you what, the team helps you understand *why*.”

**6. Transition**

* “Once you’ve identified the real root cause, it’s time to design and test improvements that address it directly—without overcomplicating things. That’s next.”

## Slide 8

Here are the **talking points for Slide 8**, titled **“Step 4: Improve”**:

**🛠 Slide 8: Step 4 – *Improve***

**1. Shift from Insight to Action**

* “Now that you’ve uncovered the root cause, it’s time to act on it.”
* “But improvement doesn’t mean implementing the most complex solution—it means implementing the *right* one.”

**2. Step-by-Step Breakdown**  
Walk through each part of the Improve phase:

* **Brainstorm Solutions** – “Encourage the team to generate a wide range of ideas. You might be surprised by the insight from different roles.”
* **Prioritize Interventions** – “Use impact vs. effort matrices. Start with quick wins—solutions that are low effort but high impact.”
* **Pilot Changes** – “Don’t overhaul everything. Test improvements on a small scale to manage risk.”
* **Evaluate Results** – “Compare outcomes to the baseline data from the Measure phase. Did it make a difference?”
* **Refine Approach** – “Use feedback loops to tweak and optimize before full rollout.”

**3. Real-World Tip**

* “Don’t try to fix *everything* at once. Focus on one key issue, validate the result, then build momentum.”

**4. Example**

* “In our story rollover case, the team introduced weekly refinement meetings and added a ‘Definition of Ready’ checklist—simple but powerful changes that reduced rollover from 40% to under 15%.”

**5. Action Tip**

* “Make improvement part of the sprint—not an extra task. Integrate it into your ceremonies and workflows.”

**6. Transition**

* “So what happens after things get better? You make sure they *stay* better. That’s where the Control phase comes in.”

## Slide 9

Here are the **talking points for Slide 9**, titled **“Step 5: Control”**:

**🔒 Slide 9: Step 5 – *Control***

**1. Why Control Matters**

* “Improvement is only a win if it lasts. Without a Control plan, old habits return under pressure.”
* “This phase is about **sustainability**—making sure your fix sticks.”

**2. Key Activities in Control**  
Walk through each one:

* **Create new process documentation** – “Codify what’s changed so it becomes part of your operating rhythm.”
* **Add checklist items to ceremonies** – “Make improvements visible and repeatable in daily standups, grooming, reviews.”
* **Establish monitoring metrics** – “Continue tracking performance to catch regression early.”
* **Update team training** – “Ensure new team members understand and follow the improved process.”
* **Build verification into retrospectives** – “Ask: Are we holding the gains? What’s slipping?”

**3. Example Reinforcement**

* Refer back to the story rollover example:
  + “The team tracked carryover rates in retrospectives. Improvements held steady under 15% for multiple sprints.”

**4. Key Message**

* “Control is not about perfection—it’s about consistency.”
* “If it’s not monitored, it will eventually unravel.”

**5. Action Tip**

* “Keep your control actions lightweight but visible. A simple dashboard or KPI tracker can go a long way.”

**6. Transition**

* “Now that we’ve walked through all five DMAIC phases, let’s look at how this works in real project environments—and how you can start integrating it into your Agile practices today.”

## Slide 10

Here are the **talking points for Slide 10**, titled **“Real-World Example: Story Rollover Crisis”**:

**✅ Slide 10: Real-World Example – *Story Rollover Crisis***

**1. Set the Context**

* “Let’s walk through a real example of DMAIC in action—one many of you will relate to.”
* “A Scrum team was consistently rolling over 40% of their stories each sprint.”

**2. Step-by-Step Recap of the DMAIC Process**

* **Define** – “Clearly stated the problem: 40% of stories were carried over each sprint, frustrating stakeholders and affecting delivery timelines.”
* **Measure** – “Collected 3 months of Jira data, tracked story completion rates, and surveyed the team. This built a solid baseline.”
* **Analyze** – “Used 5 Whys and retrospectives to uncover the root cause: poor backlog refinement and unclear acceptance criteria.”
* **Improve** – “Implemented two lightweight but impactful changes: weekly backlog refinement sessions and a ‘Definition of Ready’ checklist.”
* **Control** – “Tracked carryover rates during retros. Within two sprints, rollover dropped from 40% to under 15% and stayed there.”

**3. Key Takeaway**

* “This wasn’t a massive process overhaul. These were *targeted*, *data-informed*, and *sustainable* changes.”
* “DMAIC gave the team a clear path forward—and the results were measurable.”

**4. Invite Reflection**

* “Think about your own team—do you have a ‘story rollover’ problem in disguise? What patterns could DMAIC help you break?”

**5. Transition**

* “Now let’s talk about how you can use DMAIC tools directly within your existing Agile ceremonies.”

## Slide 11

Here are the **talking points for Slide 11**, titled **“DMAIC Tools for Agile Project Managers”**:

**🧰 Slide 11: DMAIC Tools for Agile Project Managers**

**1. Introduce the Value**

* “DMAIC isn’t something separate from Agile—it’s a toolkit that integrates seamlessly into what you’re already doing.”
* “These tools help Agile project managers move from reactive to proactive—solving *root causes*, not just patching symptoms.”

**2. Highlight the Survey**

* “This slide is based on input from over 200 Agile project managers who successfully used DMAIC for process improvement.”
* “They identified the most effective tools for each phase of the process.”

**3. Match Tools to Phases**  
You can highlight a few examples across phases:

* **Define:** SIPOC diagrams, problem statements
* **Measure:** Jira dashboards, burndown charts, surveys
* **Analyze:** 5 Whys, Fishbone diagrams, Pareto analysis
* **Improve:** Impact/effort matrix, A/B testing, pilot plans
* **Control:** Dashboards, checklists, process audits, retrospective tracking

**4. Emphasize Simplicity**

* “You don’t need fancy software. Most of these tools can be implemented with what you already have—Jira, Excel, Miro, or even a whiteboard.”

**5. Practical Advice**

* “Start small. Use just one or two tools per phase to build familiarity.”
* “The goal isn’t more documentation—it’s *clarity* and *accountability*.”

**6. Transition**

* “Next, I’ll show you how to weave these tools directly into your Agile ceremonies, so DMAIC becomes part of your team’s rhythm.”

## Slide 12

Here are the **talking points for Slide 12**, titled **“Integrating DMAIC with Agile Ceremonies”**:

**🔄 Slide 12: Integrating DMAIC with Agile Ceremonies**

**1. Reinforce the Message**

* “DMAIC doesn’t require you to change your framework—it enhances what you’re already doing in Scrum or Kanban.”
* “Think of it as a continuous improvement engine that fits into your existing Agile ceremonies.”

**2. Ceremony-by-Ceremony Integration**  
Walk through how each Agile event can support a DMAIC phase:

* **Sprint Planning**  
  → “Use insights from *Define* and *Measure* to guide what gets prioritized.”  
  → “For example, if story size or clarity is a recurring issue, address it during planning.”
* **Daily Standups**  
  → “Track progress on improvement actions identified in *Improve*.”  
  → “Use this time to surface any blockers tied to root causes you’re tackling.”
* **Sprint Review**  
  → “Share progress on DMAIC outcomes with stakeholders—don’t just demo features.”  
  → “It reinforces transparency and shows you’re addressing systemic delivery issues.”
* **Retrospective**  
  → “This is where DMAIC shines. Use *Analyze* tools like 5 Whys or Fishbone diagrams.”  
  → “Evaluate *Control* mechanisms—what’s working, what needs reinforcing?”

**3. Tip for Agile Leaders**

* “Make DMAIC part of the team’s language—ask: ‘Is this a Define phase conversation, or are we ready to Improve?’”
* “Small mindset shifts lead to big performance gains.”

**4. Call to Action**

* “Pick one ceremony where you’ll integrate a DMAIC technique this week.”
* “Make process improvement visible and deliberate—not accidental.”

**5. Transition**

* “Let’s wrap up by looking at common pitfalls to avoid—and best practices to keep your DMAIC effort on track.”

## Slide 13

Here are the **talking points for Slide 13**, titled **“Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them”**:

**⚠️ Slide 13: Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them**

**1. Set the Tone**

* “Even with a structured approach like DMAIC, it’s easy to fall into traps that undermine your effort.”
* “Let’s look at the most common mistakes Agile teams make—and how to stay clear of them.”

**2. Pitfalls to Watch Out For**  
Briefly explain each one:

* **Rushing through the Define phase**  
  → “Teams jump to solutions without fully understanding the problem. A vague problem leads to vague fixes.”
* **Collecting insufficient data**  
  → “If you don’t measure, you’re guessing. That leads to misdiagnosed problems.”
* **Fixing symptoms instead of root causes**  
  → “It might feel good to ‘do something,’ but if it’s not addressing the cause, the problem will return.”
* **Implementing too many changes at once**  
  → “Teams overwhelm themselves. Stick to one or two targeted improvements and test their impact.”
* **Neglecting the Control phase**  
  → “This is one of the most skipped steps. Without Control, your gains won’t last.”

**3. Best Practices to Counter Pitfalls**

* **Take time to align with stakeholders** – “Buy-in from the beginning avoids resistance later.”
* **Set clear metrics before you start** – “Know how you’ll measure success.”
* **Use multiple analysis tools** – “Different angles help uncover the real root.”
* **Test one solution at a time** – “That way, you know what worked.”
* **Integrate Control into Agile ceremonies** – “Make sustainability a habit, not an afterthought.”

**4. Action Tip**

* “If you’ve done a DMAIC effort and didn’t see results—ask yourself if one of these pitfalls was in play.”

**5. Transition**

* “Let’s wrap up with the big takeaways from today—and how you can start applying DMAIC on your next sprint.”

## Slide 14

Here are the **talking points for Slide 14**, titled **“Key Takeaways”**:

**🧭 Slide 14: Key Takeaways**

**1. Bring It All Together**

* “Let’s recap the core ideas you can walk away with today—whether you’re a Scrum Master, Agile Coach, or Project Manager.”

**2. Recap Each Key Message**

* **✅ Move from reactive to proactive problem-solving**  
  → “Agile helps us move fast. DMAIC helps us move smart.”  
  → “Don’t just manage the problem—solve it.”
* **📊 Leverage data to drive decisions**  
  → “Let data replace assumptions. Metrics give you the power to see clearly and act with confidence.”
* **🔄 Integrate with existing Agile practices**  
  → “You don’t need to overhaul your framework. DMAIC fits right into your sprint planning, standups, reviews, and retros.”
* **🛡 Build sustainable solutions**  
  → “Lasting change requires structure. The Control phase ensures improvements hold—especially under pressure.”

**3. Final Reflection**

* “DMAIC turns persistent problems into solvable challenges.”
* “You now have a proven framework to break the cycle of Groundhog Day projects—and turn your Agile team into true problem solvers.”

**4. Call to Action**

* “Pick one recurring issue your team faces today. Apply just the *Define* and *Measure* steps—and see where it leads.”
* “Start small. Start structured. Start solving.”

**5. Invite Engagement**

* “If you’d like templates or tools to get started—or want to share your experience applying DMAIC—connect with me on LinkedIn or visit *Managing Projects the Agile Way*.”