



The 7 Fatal Flaws of Thinking and How to Fix Them

By Peter Economy

Change presents us with great opportunity, but it can also create tremendous problems when our brains can't keep up.

It's no secret that the world around us is getting increasingly complex, and is moving faster than ever before. And while all this change presents us with great opportunity, it also creates tremendous problems.

According to strategy and innovation expert Matthew May - who authored the book, *Winning the Brain Game*, when problems get more complex, and the pressure is on to come up with solutions fast, "We leap to solutions that simply don't work. We fixate on old mindsets that keep us stuck in neutral. We overthink problems and make them worse. We kill the ideas of others, as well as our own. Worse, we keep doing these things, over and over again, naturally and instinctively."

The 7 fatal flaws of thinking (and how to fix them) include:

1. Leaping

When we leap to solutions, or jump to conclusions, or "brainstorm" in an instinctive or intuitive way, we very rarely actually come up with good solutions to the complex problems we are required to deal with all the time. Fix this by doing something Matthew May calls *framestorming* - framing the right questions to ask that will produce better solutions.

2. Fixation

It's really hard to "think different" when we're fixated on the same old thinking patterns, mental models, mindsets, biases, and assumptions. Fix this through *inversion* - completely reversing the status quo and taking your thinking off road.

3. Overthinking

We all know the feeling of overthinking something - complicating matters and creating problems that weren't even there to begin with. Fix this by *prototyping* - that is, by running simple, fast, frugal tests of prototype concepts that are roughly right.

4. Satisficing

Satisficing is when we accept solutions that are easy, obvious - and mediocre. Fix this natural tendency through the art of synthesizing - merging together the best parts of two opposing, but satisficing solutions. 1 + 1 can equal 3.

5. Downgrading

All too often, when confronted with a particularly difficult problem with no solution immediately in sight, we'll downgrade our goal to an easier one that we can achieve quickly. This means, of course, that we don't actually solve whatever serious problem it is that needs to be solved. Fix this by jumpstarting - rebooting and redoubling our focus to push past the place where you are stalled.

6. Not-Invented Here (NIH)

It's natural to reject, stifle, and dismiss ideas simply because we didn't think of them - and it's a very unproductive habit. Fix this by applying the term coined by Procter & Gamble: Proudly Found Elsewhere (PFE), and embrace the innovative thinking of others.

7. Self-Censoring

Self-censoring is the mindless act of rejecting our own ideas - often before we even voice them. According to Matthew May, this is the deadliest fatal flaw of thinking because it stifles our creativity. Fix this by self-distancing - attuning your attention in a mindful way to produce an unbiased perspective.

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While Peter Economy has spent the better part of two decades of his life slugging it out mano a mano in the management trenches, he is also the best-selling author of *Managing for Dummies*, *The Management Bible*, *Leading Through Uncertainty*, and more than 85 other books, with total sales in excess of two million copies. He has also served as associate editor for *Leader to Leader* for more than 10 years, where he has worked on projects with the likes of Jim Collins, Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and many other top management and leadership thinkers. [Sign up here](#) to always stay up-to-date with Peter's latest Inc.com columns, and visit him anytime at petereconomy.com.
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