

Tool: Address the Planning Fallacy

Professor Nozick recommends four strategies to address the planning fallacy: that is, the tendency to underestimate how long work will actually take. You can save this tool and use it to guide your efforts at improving your ability to estimate activity durations.

Strategy One: Ask Someone Else

The planning fallacy is focused on you looking at how much time it will take you to do something. When you ask the next person, that personal bias evaporates. Asking someone else to give their estimated duration is a very useful mechanism to try to get a more accurate and less biased estimate of how long something will take.

Strategy Two: Use Historical Data

You can make comparisons very explicit in your assessment by relying on historical data. How long have similar activities taken in the past? Using historical data removes that personal bias, reducing the effects of the planning fallacy.

Strategy Three: Use a "Pre-mortem"

Using a "pre-mortem" process is a very useful way to structure the discussion of how long something will take to complete. For example: instead of saying to a team member, "How long will this take?" You could say, "Imagine this task takes this amount of time. What do you think would cause that extended duration?" The process of anticipating likely causes of interruptions and delays will give you a more accurate estimate.

Strategy Four: Processes

Having sound processes for monitoring progress and encouraging honesty in the identification of issues by team members is a very important piece of addressing the planning fallacy. This will give you the chance to implement interventions as effectively and as quickly as possible.