MINDTHEORY

The Planning Fallacy

Why Everything Takes Longer Than You Think

1 What is Planning Fallacy?

The planning fallacy is a common cognitive bias where we underestimate how much time, effort and resources a task will take, even when we have done similar tasks in the past.





We focus on the best-case scenario and ignore possible delays, challenges and unexpected problems.

COMMON IN

- Work projects
- Studies
- Personal goals
- Health & fitness
- Travel plans
- and many other areas...

2 Inside View vs. Outside View

The planning fallacy happens because we use an inside view instead of an outside view.

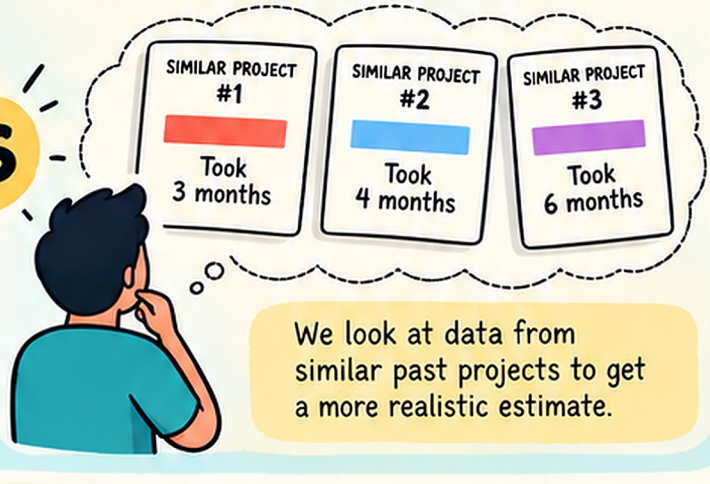
INSIDE VIEW
(Our Own Plan)



We focus on the details of our own plan and assume everything will go smoothly.

VS

OUTSIDE VIEW
(Look at Past Experience)



We look at data from similar past projects to get a more realistic estimate.

3 3 Practical Fixes

You can't eliminate the planning fallacy, but you can reduce its impact with these simple strategies.

1 Premortem
Imagine It Has Already Failed



- Imagine it's the future and your project failed.
- Ask: What went wrong?
- List possible challenges in advance.
- Plan how to prevent or handle them.

2 Reference Class
Use Real-World Examples



- Look at data from similar past projects.
- See how long they actually took.
- Use the average (or a realistic range) for your estimate.
- Learn from others' experience.

3 Buffers
Add Extra Time and Resources



- Build extra time into your plan (e.g., 20–50% more).
- Account for unexpected problems.
- Keep some extra resources (time, money, energy).
- Be flexible and adjust as you go.

A more realistic plan leads to less stress, better decisions and higher chances of success.