

Leadership Blind Spot Matrix(TM)

Identifying What Leaders Cannot See

A behavioural framework that maps the four critical blind spots that derail experienced leaders: overconfidence in pattern recognition, filtering of dissenting voices, temporal discounting of emerging risks, and attribution errors in success analysis.

Purpose

The Leadership Blind Spot Matrix(TM) helps boards, sponsors and senior teams decide where experienced leadership is most likely to misjudge a project. It maps four recurring failure patterns - pattern overconfidence, dissent filtering, risk discounting and attribution errors - so organisations can design challenge mechanisms that compensate for them before they distort commitments, reporting or escalation.

Components

1. Pattern Overconfidence

Over-reliance on past experience in novel situations

2. Dissent Filtering

Systematic exclusion of challenging perspectives

3. Risk Discounting

Underestimating emerging threats due to present-focus

4. Attribution Errors

Misattributing success to skill rather than context

How to use it

Apply the matrix at project initiation and at each major review. For pattern overconfidence, ask what is genuinely novel about this project and whether the leadership team's track record was earned in comparable conditions. For dissent filtering, test whether critics inside the team have a protected route to decision-makers, and examine what happened to the last person who raised bad news. For risk discounting, force emerging, low-probability threats onto the agenda with named owners rather than letting present pressures crowd them out. For attribution errors, review past claimed successes and honestly separate skill from favourable context. Where a blind spot is identified, assign a structural counterweight: an independent reviewer, a red team, or a mandated devil's advocate with direct board access.

Worked example

Theranos is the clearest case in PIA's catalogue. Pattern overconfidence applied at the top: Elizabeth Holmes and senior leadership pursued a miniaturised blood-testing device despite persistent scientific evidence that the technology did not work as claimed. Dissent filtering was systemic - reporting based on whistleblower accounts and the subsequent trial documented employees with doubts being marginalised or pushed out, while a board heavy on prestige and light on diagnostics expertise provided little challenge. Risk discounting showed in the rollout of testing through Walgreens partnerships while internal validation was incomplete. Attribution errors completed the picture: media acclaim and a multibillion-dollar private valuation were treated as proof the approach worked, rather than as context generated by fundraising and narrative. The fraud conviction of Holmes in 2022 confirmed the blind spots were structural, not incidental.

Limitations

The matrix describes behavioural tendencies, not diagnoses of individuals; applying it to named leaders from public records risks oversimplifying motives and ignoring constraints they faced. Blind spots are also easier to identify after failure than during it, and structural counterweights such as red teams only work if leadership genuinely tolerates being challenged. The framework guides safeguards; it cannot guarantee them.

Relationship to PMOS

PMOS, once available, is planned to encode the matrix as an automated governance prompt: escalation data, dissent logs and review attendance will be monitored for the four blind-spot signatures, flagging projects where challenge mechanisms appear to be weakening. Today this remains an aspiration, not a shipped capability.

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This document is the canonical reference version of the framework.