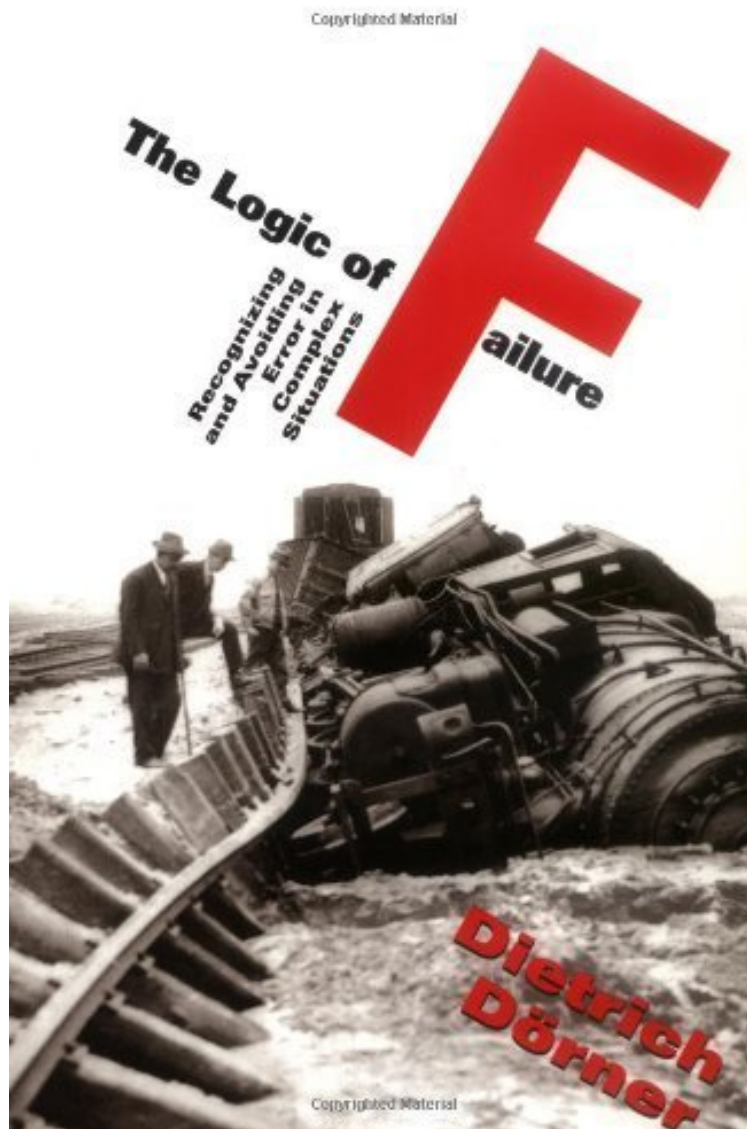


# The Logic Of Failure: Recognizing And Avoiding Error In Complex Situations

*Dietrich Dorner*

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**Dietrich Dorner : The Logic Of Failure: Recognizing And Avoiding Error In Complex Situations** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Logic Of Failure: Recognizing And Avoiding Error In Complex Situations:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. When unconventional thinking becomes common knowledgeBy Michael Burnam-finkThe Logic of Failure is a popular translation of what appears to be some pretty hefty scholarly

literature (I think-didn't bother to actually check 30 years of literature in German), that is hindered by becoming largely accepted wisdom. Dorner is a cognitive scientist who based this book on a series of studies of how people interacted with computer models: desertification in the Sahel, the economy and politics of a small town, predator and prey interactions. These studies, along with some examples drawn from recent events like Chernobyl and military history, are used to explain failure a consequence of a lack of understanding of complex systems. Complex systems, interconnected networks with time-delays, buffering units, hidden keystone variables, and unclear indicators, are everywhere in the real world. Unfortunately, human minds tend to think linearly and concretely. Dorner documents several pathological thinking styles he encounters in his experiments. Some people over-correct, making dramatic changes while chasing a pointer that drowned out any data in induced oscillations. Some people get lost chasing irrelevant details, asking for more information rather than acting. And some people get trapped in methodism, following a predetermined course of action in complete disregard of the information coming in. Against this, Dorner advocates for having a clear mental model of a system, discrete objectives, and a holistic sense of possible higher-order effects. Make small changes, seek steady states, and do not try and race a chaotic system. He points towards 'wisdom' with maddening vagueness. If there's a major problem with this book, it's that it's been overtaken by the zeitgeist. Dorner's methods are now children's toys rather than cutting edge science. We all 'get' networks and complexity, but we still lack the language to truly understand them.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Complex Systems ndash; Recognizing Them and Meeting Their Challenges By The F7 PawnHerr Dorner gives us an important book that provides insights into human shortcomings in recognizing and dealing with complex situations. It's not that we're not smart, but our cognitive processes are in turn, petulant, impatient, and lazy. Happily, Dorner provides some assistance in meeting the challenge of complex situations; so, this volume has both theoretical and practical applications. This work has important implications for military strategists, statesmen, and public policy practitioners. Dorner warns that youth and intelligence, well-intentioned though it may be, often come up woefully short when arrayed against complex systems. He notes, contrary to Hollywood's heroic and misleading imagery, that experience and the ability to learn from one's mistakes, fare comparatively better. These are timely admonitions to those who would try to "turn the world in the palms of our hand," to use Al Stewart's apt phraseology. Despite the heavy subject matter, the writing is crisp and lucid; kudos to whomever translated it from German.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A very relevant read By Andrew Morgan In this book Dr. Dorner does a fantastic job of identifying and illustrating the complexities of life interactions. What at first may seem simple rarely is so due to a significant number of often overlooked issues. I believe that what makes this book an indispensable aid in the process of decision making and leadership are the insights that Dr. Dorner draws from the many hypothetical scenarios that he creates to display the 'Logic of Failure.' This is a must great read for all in leadership but it has relevance for everyone because life is about decision making!

Why do we make mistakes? Are there certain errors common to failure, whether in a complex enterprise or daily life? In this truly indispensable book, Dietrich Dornier identifies what he calls the logic of failure—certain tendencies in our patterns of thought that, while appropriate to an older, simpler world, prove disastrous for the complex world we live in now. Working with imaginative and often hilarious computer simulations, he analyzes the roots of catastrophe, showing city planners in the very act of creating gridlock and disaster, or public health authorities setting the scene for starvation. The Logic of Failure is a compass for intelligent planning and decision-making that can sharpen the skills of managers, policymakers and everyone involved in the daily challenge of getting from point A to point B.

From Publishers Weekly The Chernobyl atomic-plant explosion, observes Dorner, was entirely due to human error involving the breaking of safety rules by a team of experts who reinforced one another's puffed-up sense of competence. This German psychology professor believes people court failure through sloppy or ingrained mental habits, whether the mistakes involve cleaning dead fish out of a garden pool, adding rooms to a schoolhouse, launching economic development programs in Africa or forecasting oil prices or the scope of the AIDS epidemic. Things go wrong, according to Dorner, because we focus on just one element in a system complicated by interrelationships; we apply corrective measures too aggressively or too timidly; we ignore basic premises, overgeneralize, follow blind alleys, overlook potential side effects and narrowly extrapolate from the moment, basing our predictions of the future on those aspects of the present that bother or delight us the most. This ingenious manual will assist problem-solvers in all fields. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Things going wrong is an all-too-common modern management experience. Pressed for time, an administrator makes a hasty decision that remedies the problem but creates myriad new problems for someone else. Dorner (psychology, Univ. of Baumberg, Germany), an authority on cognitive behavior, questions whether or not our habits of thought measure up to the systemic demands of profound problems such as environmental degradation, nuclear weapons build-up, terrorism, and overpopulation. Using computer-simulated "real world" scenarios, he measured his test subjects' problem-solving performances over time, and, not surprisingly, discovered that people court failure in predictable

patterns?from simple confusion and misperception to short attention spans and unwillingness to change tactics. All is not lost, however, for Dorner suggests that despite the repeated failure, we can learn to recognize defective management behaviors and correct them. Dorner's "only the facts" approach is refreshing; he offers clear arguments, convincing evidence, and well-reasoned conclusions. One of the best management titles of the year, this is a necessary addition to both psychology and management collections of all types.?

David R. Johnson, Fayetteville P.L., Ark. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus sA challenging, though preliminary, look at the difficulties of decision making, exploring how and why bad decisions are made. From Grdquo;del's incompleteness theorem to chaos and quantum theory, much of 20th-century thought has focused on underscoring the inextricable complexities of the universe and, thus, the inevitable inadequacies of knowledge. Now Drdquo;rner (Psychology/Univ. of Bamberg), a winner of Germany's highest science prize, the Leibnitz Award, makes his own contribution to the study of complexity by demonstrating just how difficult and problematic decision making can be. Happily, his methodology is both elegant and revealing. He has constructed a series of computer simulations in which the test subject might take on the role of mayor of a small town or district commissioner in charge of an arid region in Africa. Carte blanche is given to the subject struggling to deal with problems arising from such matters as population, resources, unemployment, and crop yields. Some people fail spectacularly, and some do a pretty good job, and the reasons are nearly always the same and surprisingly simple, at least in the abstract: ``What matters is not, I think, development of exotic mental capabilities . . . There is only one thing that does in fact matter, and that is the development of our common sense." Drdquo;rner adds that we must also learn to think in terms of time (both forwards and backwards) and the complex interrelationships within systems. Of course, models are always suspect because they tend to be reductive. But if Drdquo;rner is right, the implications here are substantial, for he has created a basic blueprint for testing decision making skills and a broad model for improving them. The corporate types who quest perpetually after the latest management techniques will almost certainly seize upon Drdquo;rner's work. But this is not so much a ``how-to" guide as a provocative and important road map for years of future scientific experiment and investigation. (88 bw illustrations) -- Copyright copy;1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.