

Foolishness Through Faulty Thinking: Where We Go Wrong?

Five Fallacies In his 2005 edited text, Sternberg explains five common faulty thought systems that lead to foolishness. This is not foolishness in the honourable sense of the wise fool, but the kind of thinking – sometimes scarily common – that produces what would pass as the antithesis of wisdom.

The fallacies are as follows:

- 1. Why Would I Worry?** Worrying is pointless given I'm very clever, powerful . . . and whatever I do will come out OK.
- 2. Egocentrism** I'm the one that counts. My interests are important; yours are not on my agenda. Maybe I started out with good intent but now I'm looking out for number 1.
- 3. Omniscience** All I need to know is at my fingertips, if not on the tip of my tongue. I can get the information I need, although fortunately I generally already have it.
- 4. Omnipotence** I am in charge, what I say goes, there isn't an alternative to doing what I require or agreeing with me. So I can't be wrong and my judgements must be correct.
- 5. Invulnerability** Nobody can get to me. Whatever I do I'll be kept safe by my friends, relatives, staff, bodyguards. . .

You will find evidence of the above if you pick any activity that, to you, evidences a lack of wisdom, whether it's the suffering of people under corrupt regimes or the recent difficulties in the banking and financial arenas.

Enabling the body corporate One thing to note about the above five fallacies is their portrayal as the possession of the individual. Some research has demonstrated that the most successful companies are those led by adults who have achieved fairly 'late stage' (mature) development; in contrast the above characteristics have often been linked with children and adolescents although clearly it can be stage, not age, that's the issue. We are researching corporate wisdom because, from consideration of some of our larger global messes as well as more 'everyday' organisational challenges, further insight is clearly needed.

'It's not the things men know that cause problems; it's the things men know that are not true.'

References Sternberg R J (2005) *Foolishness*. In Sternberg R J and Jordan J (Ed) *A Handbook of Wisdom: psychological perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press