

# Using design-thinking to address escalating commitment risks in decision-making

Tim Cooke - Radford University - December 2021

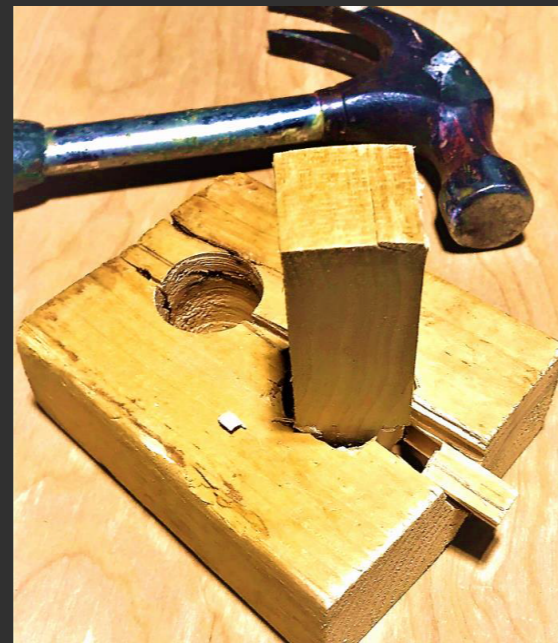
Why do we try to force square pegs into round holes?

Humans make plans for all sorts of endeavors throughout their lives, but what happens when there is reason to believe the plan will not work? Plan-continuation bias (PCB) is the cognitive desire to maintain a plan, even as information rolls in indicating the plan is in trouble. Escalation of commitment (EoC) is the realized manifestation of continuing with a plan. PCB therefore takes place before a decision, and EoC is the result of that decision and subsequent action.

1. *A plan is in place* - Fit a peg into a hole
2. *Adverse information arrives* - Peg will not fit, the hole is round and the peg is square.
3. *PCB is the voice in a person's head telling them to stick with the original plan* - The peg needs to fit into that hole...
4. *EoC is the act of sticking with the plan* - Hammer that peg in if necessary!

Imagine you are going out for supplies ahead of a dangerous storm and you find the storm arrived early--do you still go out? Imagine your testy boss wants you to proceed with a project plan you know will never work--do you tell them and risk getting chewed out or just do as your told and suffer the struggle toward inevitable defeat? It turns out that numerous psychological, sociological, and contextual factors all play into the ultimate decision on whether to escalate commitment, or to de-escalate and change the plan. So, why do we try to force square pegs into round holes? It's complicated...

This study used design-thinking methods to analyze existing literature on EoC and PCB, to brainstorm and speculate on other possible causes and associations, and to develop a prototype quick reference guide to aid managers new and old in understanding decision-making and how to make better decisions in the future.



This study was conducted across six phases. Three phases were completed by the student researcher alone and three phases involved engaging with 10 managers of various experience.

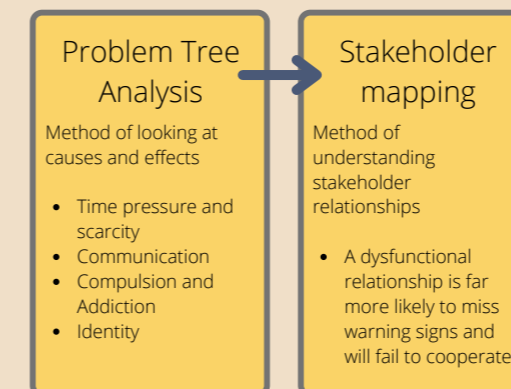
Each phase built on the efforts of the last and different design-thinking methods were used to tease out new information each time.

Much of the challenge does not necessarily revolve around the question of "why do we stick with plans are not working?" but instead is rooted in "what does it take to change a person's mind?"

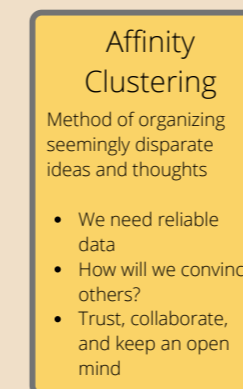
The purpose of this study was to apply design-thinking methods to better understand decision-making that can lead to plan-continuation bias and escalating commitment in a management setting.

## Student Researcher (alone)

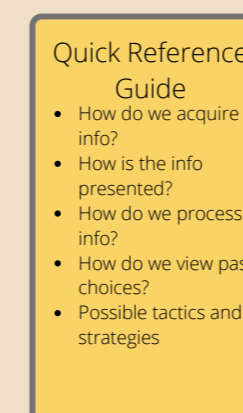
### Phase 1 - Initial DT exploration



### Phase 3 - Analysis of Phase 1&2

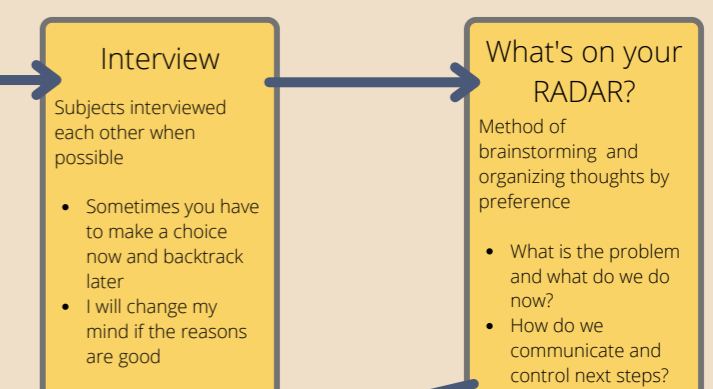


### Phase 5 - Prototype

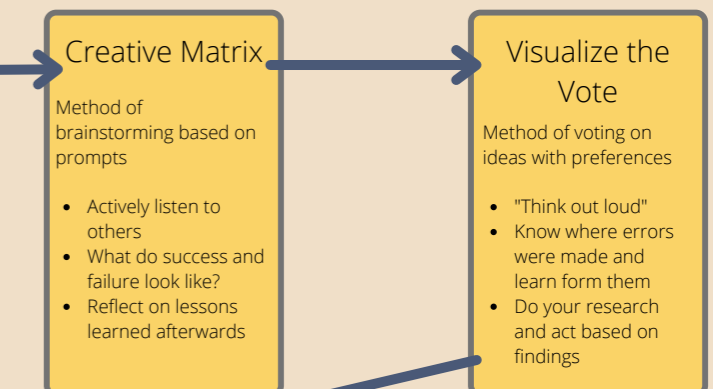


## Student Researcher with Subjects

### Phase 2 - Workshop 1



### Phase 4 - Workshop 2



### Phase 6 - Follow up

