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By [Heidi Adkisson](#)

Regardless of your professional field, the quality of the decisions you make ultimately determines the quality of your work. Earlier in my career there was a lot of emphasis on rational decision-making — sometimes elaborate ranking or ordering systems designed to identify the optimal course of action. But the shortcomings of this approach were brought into particular relief by the book Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work by Chip and Dan Heath. Published in 2013, it is one of those business books that had real sticking power for me.

The principles in the book are based on the authors' review of the latest work in psychology on the various biases, irrationalities, and emotions that disrupt our decision-making processes. All the rational evaluation in the world isn't going to help you if the information you choose to evaluate is colored by confirmation bias (more on that in a minute).

As a designer, I was particularly interested in applying their WRAP framework to making better design decisions. WRAP consists of four elements:

- Widen Your Options
- Reality Test Your Assumptions
- Attain Distance Before Deciding
- Prepare To Be Wrong

Widen your options

The problem:

People often narrow their frames, which causes them to miss other possible options. There is a

common misconception that rigorously comparing options is the same as seeing the bigger picture. It's not.

What you can do:

- Multi-track the process — Have multiple people work on the same problem independently. This approach has been shown to be more effective than group brainstorming, which is subject to a variety of group effects, including group-think.
- Try the vanishing options test — Imagine that none of the options you are considering are available. What else could you do?

Reality test your assumptions

The problem:

We have an overwhelming tendency to select information that supports pre-existing beliefs, attitudes, and actions. This is known as confirmation bias.

What you can do:

- Seek out relevant data — This might seem obvious, but in the heat of the moment it can be overlooked. Sometimes the perception of a problem (our biggest problem is X) is not borne out by data (support call volumes indicate problem Y is causing more difficulty).
- Ask disconfirming questions — What problems might this solution have? I use this technique to envision users interacting with a solution, imaging where it might go wrong for them.
- Conduct small tests along the way — With or without formal user testing in your plan, it's still important to think creatively about how you can do frequent, small validations. Sometimes it's a matter of doing an ad-hoc usability test with a colleague or a subject-matter expert.

Attain distance before deciding

The problem:

You will make a choice, but short-term emotion will often tempt you to make the wrong one.

What you can do:

- State the core priorities and return to them frequently — Any well-planned design project should have clear design priorities and objectives. The problem is that these are sometimes agreed to at the beginning of a project and are not revisited regularly to keep decisions on-track.
- Think about what your successor would do — This might seem like a strange suggestion, but I've found it very helpful to imagine that another designer is coming in and reviewing the decisions made in the project. What would he or she think? This forces a certain external perspective.

Prepare to be wrong

The problem:

Once you make a choice, you will often be overconfident about how the future will unfold.

What you can do:

- Using prospective hindsight, work back from a certain future — For example, the product has been released and the product was poorly received. Why were users unhappy?

The process is as important as the decision

The people that will live with the consequences of a decision should ideally feel like they've had a voice in the process. Obviously, this isn't possible in all circumstances, but it's an important factor to consider. Listen to what other people have to say. State their positions back to them to make sure you understand them. And acknowledge the decisions flaws — there will always be some — but highlighting them helps people understand that these were considered.

> *Heidi works in Interaction Design and is a Partner at Blink. She divides her leisure time between classical music, cooking, and the Seattle Mariners.*