

As-Is Case Studies: Cognitive Deconditioning Across Cybersecurity, Deradicalization, and Cognitive Warfare

The As-Is method is a cognitive deconditioning technique that reduces emotional triggers to neutral facts, restoring rational control.

Introduction

Today's buzzwords are "cybersecurity" and "misinformation," but prevailing discourse typically overlooks what bridges these issues: the human mind. Social engineering accounts for at least 90% of cyber attacks¹, while misinformation is filtered through and interpreted by the recipient's mind.

The *As-Is model* recognizes that information is processed through a mind stocked with learned associations from social and cultural conditioning—conditioning that determines how a person perceives any given stimulus. For example: For some individuals, a person with a tattoo is neutral or even respectable; for others, it is reprehensible (religion; cultural experience) or traumatic (personal experience; social). The same instance applies to computer hacking. White-hat hacker Jessica Clark uses a "crying baby" background audio² that instinctively triggers the empathy of employees from certain cultural backgrounds.

This is System One—the instinctive, bottom-up response impelled by embedded conditioning. The *As-Is method* changes this response through a simple in-the-moment technique called cognitive labeling, where employees break down emotional triggers into "As-Is fragments", or simple, neutral facts. This process shifts brain activity away from emotion centers (e.g., the amygdala) and toward prefrontal control areas,³ displacing impulsive reaction with cognitive control. The method grants individuals true agency over their responses—and potentially saves businesses from disastrously costly breaches.

The *As-Is model* applies this approach to all human-hacking adjacent fields, including deradicalization and cognitive warfare, as demonstrated in the case studies below. Though the contexts differ, the neural mechanism is identical in each case.

¹ "100+ Latest Social Engineering Statistics: Costs, Trends, AI [2025]," *Sprinto Blog*, Oct 24, 2025 <https://sprinto.com/blog/social-engineering-statistics/>.

² Oracle Mind. (2016, May 1). *This is how hackers hack you using simple social engineering* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc7scxvKQOo>

³ E.g., Taylor SF, Phan KL, Decker LR, Liberzon I. Subjective rating of emotionally salient stimuli modulates neural activity. *Neuroimage*. 2003 Mar;18(3):650-9;
Critchley H, Daly E, Phillips M, Brammer M, Bullmore E, Williams S, Van Amelsvoort T, Robertson D, David A, Murphy D. Explicit and implicit neural mechanisms for processing of social information from facial expressions: a functional magnetic resonance imaging study. *Hum Brain Mapp*. 2000 Feb;9(2):93-105.;
Cunningham WA, Johnson MK, Raye CL, Chris Gatenby J, Gore JC, Banaji MR. Separable neural components in the processing of black and white faces. *Psychol Sci*. 2004 Dec;15(12):806-13.

1. Case Study: Deradicalization

Case Context: Between 2022 and 2023, I hosted digital workshops for my "As-Is" program on *Uniting the Cults*⁴, an online platform founded by Rami Rustom to deradicalize individuals leaving high-control groups and extremist, conflict-ridden religions. One day, a Jordanian Muslim told me about his friend, Ali, who was actively campaigning for Azerbaijan in its conflict with Armenia, despite knowing nothing about the geo-political conflict. Ali's support was rooted entirely in a "System 1" association with the symbols on the Azerbaijani flag: the crescent moon and stars.



Azerbaijani flag

The Mechanism of Conditioning: Ali's limbic system and hippocampus retrieved stored data from his embrainments to trigger his unconscious and instinctive response:

- **Stimulus:** Visual representation of a crescent and stars.
- **Neural Association (Hippocampus):** Stored data identifies these as symbols of Islam.
- **Identity Link (Insula):** Direct connection to self-representation ("I am Muslim").
- **Amygdala:** Generates involuntary loyalty and a sense of immediate urgency.
- **Response:** Involuntary loyalty to the entity displaying those symbols.

The As-Is Intervention: By applying the As-Is methodology, Ali deconstructs the emotionally charged national symbol into its "As-Is fragments" - neutral facts:

- A crescent moon.



- Three stars.



Why As-Is helps: By viewing the symbols as neutral geometric shapes rather than identity markers, the subject bypasses the "identity hijack." This cognitive distance prevents the individual from being manipulated into conflicts that can potentially cause unintended damage to his own life and innocent individuals.

⁴ <https://unitingthecults.com/projects>

2. Case Study: High-Control Group Recovery

Case Context: For almost two years, I tested the *As-Is method* by responding to posts for help from people who had left cults and extremist religions, showing them how to apply As-Is to their particular issues. One of these people - let's call him Ed - experienced persistent, involuntary fear of divine punishment despite identifying as an atheist. This fear was anchored in a specific mental image of a "vengeful God" ingrained during his time in a high-control group.



The Stimuli

The As-Is Intervention: To break the phobic loop, the subject was prompted to view the image through a purely phenomenological lens, stripped of its theological title:

- An man with beard
- One arm raised
- Draped in a sheet

Why this matters: By reducing the "vengeful deity" to a "bearded man in a sheet," the subject realizes the association is a cultural construct. This process shifts the neural response from the fear-driven amygdala to the analytical prefrontal cortex, effectively dissolving the phobic conditioning.

3. Case Study: Cognitive Security in Phishing Defense

The Observation: This is a hypothetical situation. During a red-team security assessment, a subject ("Target A") receives a fraudulent call from an individual posing as a potential client. The attacker utilizes a "crying baby" background audio track. Upon hearing the audio, the subject reports an immediate physical response—increased heart rate and an urgent, "visceral" need to bypass standard verification steps to help the caller.

The Mechanism of Conditioning: The sound of a crying baby is a powerful evolutionary stimulus designed to trigger a "System 1" response.

1. **Stimulus:** High-pitched, rhythmic acoustic distress signals.
2. **Neural Pathway:** The sound bypasses logical processing and directly stimulates the amygdala, triggering an involuntary sympathetic response (urgency/empathy).
3. **Cognitive Hijack:** This "bottom-up" arousal impels the individual to prioritize the emotional crisis over logical security procedures, such as verifying the caller's identity.



System One: Employee "hears" this

The As-Is Intervention: The subject is trained to apply the **As-Is** framework the moment an emotional spike is detected. By shifting focus to the acoustic properties of the sound rather than its social meaning, the subject deconstructs the trigger:

- **As-Is Fragment 1:** *female voice with high-pitched inflection.*
- **As-Is Fragment 2:** *sounds of baby crying.*

Cognitive Shift: By reducing emotional stimuli to these cognitive elements, the subject engages the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) to shift neural activity from the amygdala to the prefrontal cortex (PFC).



System Two: As-Is helps employee think of it like this

The Result: Representation determines cognition. If the situation is represented as: "*crying baby/ overwhelmed/ **please** help me,*" embrainments that include the learned obligation to help the overwhelmed "mother" and sympathy for her situation dominate. If represented as: "*A claim with these [particular] sounds,*" evaluation dominates.

The shift in neural activity neutralizes the "distress" signal, enabling the subject to maintain executive control and successfully follow security protocols, denying the attacker's request.

Conclusion: The *As-Is* framework provides a mechanical defense against "human hacking." By reducing emotion-based stimuli to neutral, objective fragments, employees can mitigate the "amygdala hijack" and maintain the cognitive security necessary to protect sensitive information.

4. Case Study: Cognitive Warfare

The Observation: Following the Middle East tensions of October 10, 2023, a subject ("Cyrene") posted an inquiry on *r/Tbilisi* regarding Jewish life in Tbilisi. In response, several



users posted the Palestinian flag emoji.

This provocative content was designed to trigger an instinctive "System 1" response - specifically, to make the subject feel unwelcome and isolated.

The Mechanism of Conditioning: Upon viewing the provocative symbol, Cyrene's amygdala initiated an immediate stress response (anger). Simultaneously, her default mode network (DMN) begins to ruminate: "*Idiots! What does this have to do with my question?*" Trolls have succeeded in their objectives: to cloud subject's judgment and manipulate her behavior.

The As-Is Intervention: I walked Cyrene through the *As-Is* steps. To regain control, Cyrene activated her ACC (which mediates between amygdala and PFC) by consciously focusing on the visual elements of the flag rather than its political weight.

- **As-Is Fragments:** Red, white, and green horizontal stripes intersected by a red triangle on the left.
- **Cognitive Shift:** By reducing the provocative symbol to its basic geometric and chromatic elements, she shifted neural activity from the emotional amygdala toward the reality-monitoring PFC.

The Result: This shift aborted the ruminative cycle and released focus-sharpening neurotransmitters (norepinephrine, acetylcholine and dopamine). Empowered by this analytical state, Cyrene could see the situation as-is and regained her executive agency. She posted the official flag of Tbilisi (white with a blue cross) to address - what she told them was - their "geographical error."



Conclusion: The *As-Is* methodology acts as a cognitive "firewall." By training the PFC to break down provocative stimuli into neutral fragments, individuals like Cyrene can thwart "bad actors" who seek to weaponize digital symbols for emotional manipulation. This ensures the user remains unaffected and maintains executive control in information-hostile environments.

5. Case Study: LLM Hallucination and Bias Mitigation

Note: This case study was provided by a Reddit correspondent following a review of the *As-Is* methodology. It is reproduced in its original form.



EJE.

To: me · Thu, Jul 25, 2024 at 11:43 PM ▾

I mentioned in my previous email that I did a quick "experiment" based on my so far limited understanding of the *As-Is* method. I did a quick write up and I want to attach it here for your review just to share my preliminary findings. Please

PROMPT

Describe Donald Trump

ChatGPT-4o Output

Donald Trump is an American businessman, television personality, and politician who served as the 45th President of the United States from 2017 to 2021. He was born on June 14, 1946, in Queens, New York City. Trump is known for his distinctive personality, characterized by a direct and often provocative style of communication.

Before entering politics, Trump was a prominent real estate developer and the face of the Trump Organization, a conglomerate involved in various industries, including real estate, hospitality, and entertainment. He gained national fame as the host of the reality TV show *The Apprentice*.

Trump's political career began with his campaign for the presidency in 2016 as the Republican nominee. His platform focused on issues like immigration reform, economic protectionism, and an "America First" foreign policy. He won the election against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, becoming the first U.S. president with no prior political or military experience.

During his presidency, Trump was known for his unconventional approach, frequent use of social media, and polarizing policies. His administration was marked by significant policy changes, including tax cuts, deregulation, and a strong emphasis on conservative judicial appointments.

He was impeached twice by the House of Representatives—first in 2019 over the Ukraine scandal and then in 2021 following the Capitol riot—but was acquitted both times by the Senate.

Trump's time in office was highly divisive, garnering strong support and equally strong opposition. After leaving office, he has remained a prominent figure in American politics and continues to influence the Republican Party.

AS-IS

Using the As-Is framework below, I attempt to see things as they are in reality, without emotional or ideological “filters.” I focused on the objective truths and avoided the subjective interpretations of Trump’s personality, his style of speaking, or the results of his policies that ChatGPT had included in the above output. Finally, I removed emotional and “suggestive programming” language from the description.

De-conditioned response using As-Is framework:

Donald Trump was born on June 14, 1946, in Queens, New York City. He served as the 45th President of the United States from 2017 to 2021. Before his presidency, Trump was involved in real estate development and was a key figure in the Trump Organization, a business conglomerate. Additionally, he gained fame as the host of the TV show *The Apprentice*.

Trump ran for president in the 2016 election as the Republican nominee and won against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. This victory made him the first U.S. president without prior political or military experience. His campaign focused on issues such as immigration, economic policies, and foreign policy.

During his presidency, Trump was known for his frequent use of social media and implemented various policies, including tax cuts, deregulation, and conservative judicial appointments. He was impeached twice by the House of Representatives: first in 2019 over issues related to Ukraine, and again in 2021 following events at the U.S. Capitol. The Senate acquitted him on both occasions.

After leaving office in 2021, Trump has remained active in Republican Party politics.

Conclusion

“As-Is” is not a decision-making framework, but should be used *prior* to decision-making in order to remove the overlays of subjective programming embedded into the output data. If the data above was used for decision-making, it is clear that the AI’s response was heavily biased toward one outcome. It is also apparent that training data contained biases that were propagated into the output.

Reviews

"F! That's a game changer... I have trouble regulating emotions, and [using the As-Is method] breaking emotions into facts is something I am going to try! Thank you. (u/raving_claw)

"This sounds powerful - and way bigger than just post-cult recovery. You could explore executives or high-performers stuck in limiting mental models (think: mindset coaching 2.0, but science-backed). Also, people in recovery from high-control relationships or even former military personnel adjusting to civilian life - both groups deal with deep conditioning and identity reformation." (EJE)

"I'm fascinated by you, your work and your story. The world desperately needs to hear your message, right now perhaps more than ever in recent memory... As-Is thinking has direct applications even for someone like me who, because of my bipolarity, is prone to extreme emotional fluctuations and black/white thinking ... Framing it as "deprogramming" might be too niche - but position it as rewiring identity at the neurological level, and now you're talking to mindset, trauma, and high-performance markets all at once.(Brooke; UK)

"I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for the fantastic recording session! the hate comments on my business podcast really got to me. I started doubting myself, wondering if I was doing something wrong. But using the As-Is method, I stopped reacting emotionally and just saw things for what they were. " (#dkLa)

I have many ideas for where the "As-Is" method/framework could be highly beneficial. For instance, I conducted an experiment using your method, and the results were eye-opening. The results could be used RIGHT NOW as a case study for presenting to large corporations to demonstrate how the deconditioning principles in As-Is MUST be used on their systems. (EJE)

I believe you've created something unique and valuable with the "As-Is method." I like how it's based on neuroscience and connected to the idea of neuroplasticity where it focuses on deconditioning rather than reconditioning. I also like that it can be practiced daily without seeing a therapist or counselor, kind of like the tai-chi / qigong exercises examples in your book. I believe it has potential for broad applications as well as in everyday life, and possibly areas that you haven't even considered yet. I'm excited to practice As-Is on my own, as I can already see areas in my life that could benefit lol. (Rami Runsom Founder of UTC)