Simplification Tool
50 Questions for Simplifying

Simplification Process:

- 1 – Awareness
- 2 – Identification
- 3 – Prioritization
- 4 – Execution
- 5 – Habit Formation

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WHY THIS TOOL?

This tool poses a series of questions that are designed to lead staff out of day-to-day complexity. Whether you’re seeking a starting point for simplification, solving an ongoing issue, or considering a new process or procedure, these questions serve as a litmus test for simplification. This exercise can either follow the Complexity Diagnostic, which reveals specific areas of complexity within your organization, or it can be used as a stand-alone tool for problem solving. As your organization embraces simplification, 50 Questions can become part of the decision-making process in every corner of your business, from meetings to outsourcing to messaging.

HOW IT WORKS

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE:

- Relevant for all levels of staff

SET-UP VARIATIONS:

- Variation #1: Do the exercise individually.
- Variation #2: Do the exercise as a group. Break into teams and assign each team an area of complexity.
- Variation #3: Leader chooses 5 questions in relevant areas of complexity and sends to participants for completion in advance of meeting. Solutions are then proposed and discussed in the group session.

RECOMMENDED TIMING:

- Step 1. Define simplification challenge: 5 mins.
- Step 2. Choose 1-3 areas of complexity: 10 mins.
- Step 3. Answer 5 questions within each area of complexity: 30 mins.
  - 75–105 mins.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:

- Colored whiteboard markers and pens (separating ideas by color will help organize your thoughts)
- Whiteboard or flipcharts

WORKSHEETS (enough for each participant + a few extra)

CONTRIBUTORS:
Maurice Boland, Michael Bungay Stainer, Louis Carter, Meredith Cherwony, Debra Clary, Mayuni Ghosh, Mike Gluck, Adam Grant, Ludger Hentschel, James P Kelleher, Peter Klein, Ayuko Mueller, Howard Prager, Bob Reinheimer, Marisa Ricciardi, Rowena Rothman, Erin Seuffert, Alexandra Yaghoobi, John Young
**STEP 1: DEFINE SIMPLIFICATION CHALLENGE**
Articulate the goal of this simplification session using as specific terms as possible. Examples could be “Increase productivity by granting X department access to Y data” or “Improve exchange of real-time information between marketing and sales.” If your organization’s complexity seems too overwhelming to specify, create a general challenge like “Simplify the daily and monthly processes used in our department.”

**MY/OUR SIMPLIFICATION CHALLENGE:**

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**STEP 2 + 3: CHOOSE 1-3 AREAS OF COMPLEXITY + ANSWER 5 QUESTIONS WITHIN EACH AREA**
Use your simplification challenge to determine which areas of complexity to focus on. For example, if your challenge is to “Increase productivity by granting X department access to Y database,” choose 5 questions in the Repeatable and Accessible areas of complexity. If you created a general challenge, focus on the Minimal and Valuable areas. When conducting this exercise as a group, break into teams and assign each an area of complexity.

Review all the questions in your chosen area of complexity and choose 5 that speak to the root cause of your challenge. (Or write your own brilliant simplification questions in the spaces provided.) In STEP 4, you will build your answers into solutions.

Is it **Valuable?**
(Use these questions to determine what’s necessary or worth your time.)

- 1. Which activities or tasks in my daily work add the most value for stakeholders (clients, partners, etc.)?
- 2. If a natural disaster struck our headquarters tonight, what’s the most crucial item of business that staff would pitch in to accomplish?
- 3. Which activities or tasks make me feel good about my job and give me the sense that I’ve truly contributed to the organization’s mission?
- 4. When I head to work, what do I most look forward to doing and why?
- 5. Which product or service drives the most enthusiasm, emotion, and purchases from prospective and current clients?
- 6. What is the most important activity for keeping employees or customers happy and engaged?
- 7. In terms of the 80-20 rule—where staff spends 80% of time on 20% of the work—how can I shift this ratio so I’m spending the majority of time on more valuable work?
- 8. I just won a trip that departs in 24 hours: What are the most important things I need to get done before I leave?
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 
  4. 
  5.
9. While I’m on that trip, what would I delegate to colleagues for follow-up and why? Would I classify those tasks as valuable or required/routine/time-sensitive?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUABLE</th>
<th>REQUIRED/ROUTINE/TIME-SENSITIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. If I divided my meetings into two columns—those that are worth my time and those for which an email update would suffice—what changes could I make right now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEETINGS WORTH MY TIME</th>
<th>MEETINGS THAT COULD BE EMAILS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Which of the above meetings could—and should—become an email today?

11. If I divided my work into tasks that delight me and tasks I find loathsome, what could be eliminated, changed, or accomplished in less loathsome ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DELIGHTFUL TASKS</th>
<th>LOATHSOME TASKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What changes could be made to 1 LOATHSOME task that would compel me to move it into the DELIGHTFUL column?

12. Which tasks take time or energy away from my critical goals?

13. If I could clone myself today, what’s the first thing I’d assign to him/her? What’s preventing me from delegating it to someone else today?

14. What one thing would I do to save this company $10,000 tomorrow?

15. What percentage of my day allows for unstructured time on work that matters? What could I change to increase my daily, unstructured time?
16. After itemizing my weekly tasks—including calls, meetings, and emails—which ones actually benefit my customers or clients?

**BENEFITS CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS**
1. 
2. 
3. 

**NO BENEFIT FOR CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS**
1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Which of the above tasks could be eliminated to restore more time for tasks that do benefit my clients/customers?

17. In what ways do my team members contribute to complexity? What advice do I have for changing those behaviors?

18. If we no longer offered this ____________ (product/service/process), would we be willing to pay for it? How much?

My customized question: ____________________________________________________________________________

My customized question: ____________________________________________________________________________

My customized question: ____________________________________________________________________________

Is it **Minimal?**

*(Use these questions to assess if something is streamlined or reduced to its simplest possible form.)*

19. What should I stop doing?

20. What can I start saying **no** to?

21. If I could kill any rule at work that holds me back from being more effective or productive, what would it be?

22. If a new CEO started at our company tomorrow, what processes would s/he immediately observe as the biggest time-wasters?

23. For every new thing we add to our product pipeline, what could be eliminated? (Which process? Meeting? Standing call?)

24. What would happen if this rule/process/etc. didn’t exist?

25. If I had to eliminate 25% of what I do every day, what would I eliminate and why?

26. In which situations does the company require multiple approvals for an action or expenditure when a single approval or auto-approval (within certain limits) would suffice?
27. If proposals for product/service/process enhancements are required to go through layers of review, how could we dramatically reduce these layers and speed up the process?

28. If I could limit the work I provide to other functions or teams, what activity would I like to stop doing immediately?

29. Could another individual (internal or external) do some of the work I do? If so, list these below:
   1.
   2.
   3.
   What's preventing me from delegating at least one of these tasks today?

30. How could we shorten this document/proposal/contract/presentation to 1 page?

31. What are the most complex aspects of my job?
   1.
   2.
   3.

32. What redundancies could be eliminated from my job right now?
   1.
   2.
   3.
   What's preventing me from removing at least 1 of these redundancies today?

33. What is the minimal amount of data we need to satisfy our objective? If we’re providing more, can we agree to stop doing this today?

34. If I had to get the same amount of work done in half the time, what would I do differently?

35. What is 1 small change I could make that would have a big impact? Is anything preventing me from proposing or implementing that change?

My customized question: ____________________________________________

My customized question: ____________________________________________

My customized question: ____________________________________________
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Is it **Understandable?**
(Use these questions to determine if communication on a topic is as clear as possible.)

- [ ] 36. Could I clearly explain this to anyone outside my business group?
- [ ] 37. What jargon could be eliminated from this document or message?
- [ ] 38. How can this message be distilled down to 1 sentence?
- [ ] 39. How could this communication be simplified so people actually read it and take the desired action?
- [ ] 40. Have we clearly established the person or team responsible for this deliverable and the corresponding deadlines?
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________

Is it **Repeatable?**
(Use these questions to decide if a task or process is as automated, templated, or scalable as possible.)

- [ ] 41. If we automated some or all of this task/process, who would benefit?
- [ ] 42. Can this process be easily replicated for other teams/markets?
- [ ] 43. What would make it easily repeatable for other people to use?
- [ ] 44. If significant training is required to learn this process, what could we modify so less training is required?
- [ ] 45. Can we create a template for this task or process so others can use it?
- [ ] 46. How much time or money could we save in a year by automating this?
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________
- [ ] My customized question: ____________________________________________

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