

Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics



Simplification Process:

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

© 2005–2016, Future Think LLC. All rights reserved. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies. futurethink clients may make one attributed copy or slide of each figure contained herein. Additional reproduction is strictly prohibited. Information is based on best available resources. Opinions reflect judgment at the time and are subject to change. To purchase reprints of this document, please email innovate@futurethink.com.



WHY THIS TOOL?

Designed to follow the Complexity Diagnostic and precede selection of Simplification Metrics, this tool provides solutions to complexity in every area of your organization. With more than 70 simplification tactics at the ready—from Google’s Bureaucracy Busting sessions to Airbnb’s Meeting-Free-Wednesdays—teams are armed with real-world ways to attack complexity and move your business toward a simplified state.

HOW IT WORKS

SUGGESTED AUDIENCE: • Relevant for all levels of staff

SET-UP VARIATIONS:

- Variation #1: Do the exercise individually, skipping STEP 4 (group discussion)
- Variation #2: Do the exercise as a group; break into teams and assign each one an area of the business for which to choose tactics

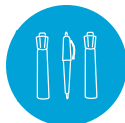
RECOMMENDED TIMING:

Step 1. Choose at least 3 business areas:	5 mins.
Step 2. Review tactics within business areas:	10 mins.
Step 3. Choose at least 2 tactics per area:	20 – 40 mins.
Step 4. Proposal of tactics + group discussion:	20 – 40 mins.
	55 – 95 mins.

SUGGESTED MATERIALS:



Worksheets
(enough for each participant + a few extra)



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



Whiteboard or flipcharts

Contributors: Maurice Boland, Michael Bungay Stainer, Carter Busse, Daphne Carmeli, Louis Carter, Jyot Chada, Mayuri Ghosh, Adam Grant, James P Kelleher, Ayuko Mueller



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

STEP 1: CHOOSE AT LEAST 3 BUSINESS AREAS

Refer to your completed Complexity Diagnostic for easy identification of which business areas to focus on. If you haven't yet used the Diagnostic tool, review the 11 business areas below and circle at least 3 that create the most complexity for you or your team.

ORGANIZATIONAL		INDIVIDUAL	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision/Communication • Org. Structure • HR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy/Planning • Operational • Products/Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings • Emails/Calls/Voicemail • Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations • Value of Staff Time

STEP 2 + 3: REVIEW + CHOOSE AT LEAST 2 TACTICS PER AREA

Read every tactic in your areas of complexity, and check the box beside all the simplification tactics that would be most effective for your organization. Keep big-picture goals in mind as you choose individual tactics. For example, if Strategic Planning is an area of complexity and your goal is to finalize your annual strategic plan more quickly, choose a tactic that supports this goal.

ORGANIZATIONAL AREA:

VISION/COMMUNICATION

Change the language, change the mindset. Communication from senior leadership to employees should be simple and concise. Eliminate jargon and clichés from messaging, and encourage authentic statements that do not need decoding. Simplification—in word and in deed—is key to shifting employees' mindsets from fear to freedom and from dependence to empowerment.

Give it the kindergarten test. Can you explain your document/presentation/proposal/contract to a 5-year-old? Keep distilling the work until it's as simplified as possible.

Stop posting everywhere. Take a tip from consulting firm Box of Crayons and focus your social media efforts on the 1 or 2 channels that are most relevant to your business.

ORG. STRUCTURE

1-sheet wonder. If your organizational structure requires 5 slides and a color-coded legend to understand, simplification is needed. Challenge your team (or invite the entire organization) to submit 1-sheets of a simplified org. structure.

Align each group's goals with simplification. To embed simplification throughout your entire organization, establish a set of universal metrics (i.e. reduce meetings by 20%; kill at least 10 stupid rules annually, etc.) that apply to every group within the org. structure and keep everyone accountable for simplifying.

Empower direct reports with decision-making. Charge each person on your team to make 2 decisions this week without you. At your next status meeting, discuss which decisions they made on their own. Expand this behavior to 3, 5, and 10+ decisions per week, and tie decision-making to individual performance or to a simplification metric for your department.

HR

Define roles by outcomes, not tasks. Task-based job descriptions focus on processes, not results, so redefine the roles in your organization for outcome-focused measures of success. For example, "write 3-5 press releases per month" could become "generate 20+ press mentions per month." This approach shifts the focus from "how" to "what." It flexes employees' creative problem-solving muscles and empowers them to concentrate on what actually matters: results.

Reduce performance assessment criteria. Healthcare company Abbott reduced the number of assessment items in performance reviews—with a huge impact on the business.



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

HR (cont.)

- Eliminate (or rethink) annual performance reviews.** Follow Accenture's lead and do away with paperwork-heavy performance reviews. Instead of reserving feedback for a once-a-year exercise, managers at this professional services company now provide employees with more frequent and less formal reviews for real-time improvement. Pro tip: Link assessment criteria to strategy so employees understand how their performance impacts the business from a strategic viewpoint.
- Use tweet-sized feedback loops.** After completing a benchmark event or milestone, send a mini-review to participants requesting Twitter-length answers (140 characters or less) about team or initiative performance, critical skills, and advice on what should be improved next time around.
- Re-examine transfer policy.** Make the transfer policy work for employees, like the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas did. Staff challenged its rule that employees can't be transferred to another area of the business prior to 6 months from hire date. Now staff can transfer whenever a talent fit arises.
- Shorten employee onboarding.** Kill long-winded orientations by offering on-demand learning during an employee's tenure. Focus orientation on just the basics with a brief Q&A meeting 2-4 weeks after start date, when employees have a better grasp on their responsibilities.
- Establish flex/unlimited vacation.** Reduce HR and senior staff hours spent managing vacation days by eliminating the need to manage it like delivery service Deliv did. If time off affects an employee's performance or work quality, empower managers to adjust policy for that individual.
- Limit hotel rate, not hotel choices.** To give its business-traveling employees more flexibility on hotel price and location, pharmaceutical company Novartis added 40 hotel chains to its travel policy.

- Host a Simplification Jam.** Like IBM's Idea Jam, which engages more than 300,000 employees around the world in far-reaching exploration and problem solving, invite your organization (and external stakeholders like customers or clients) to propose ideas for simplifying complex areas of your business.
- Reward + recognize simplifiers.** Publicly reward employees who make a successful case for killing a project, task, or policy. Positive reinforcement isn't a new concept, but it has the proven power to spread the value of simplification throughout your business.

STRATEGY/PLANNING

- Make simplification a mandatory element of strategic planning.** For every new strategy that's added to the annual plan, remove an initiative that was rolled over from last year. Identifying what teams should *stop* doing in the coming year is just as essential as outlining what they need to start doing.
- Finalize annual strategic plan within a quarter (or less).** Filing away your strategic plan until next year is just as ineffective as failing to make a plan at all. Put it into action within 90 days to ensure that your company meets its strategic goals.
- Keep score.** Track your organization's strategic performance throughout the year with a balanced scorecard or similar system.
- Eliminate approval committees** by empowering a single expert with the authority to make and move decisions forward according to a set timeframe.

OPERATIONAL

- Kill stupid rules** like HBO did. When the cable network conducted this exercise for the first time, more than 100 stupid rules were identified and eliminated to free up time and reduce bottlenecks. Through a Google Doc, the group continued suggesting more stupid rules to kill and other parts of the organization adopted the practice. Rule-killing spread organically throughout the company and has become a best practice.



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

OPERATIONAL (cont.)

Cut the contract clutter. Reduce the length of your contracts from 100 pages to 20, like one of GE's groups did. Invite legal and business units to a joint session with the goal of reducing the contract length or finding ways to template or streamline the contracts that are most frequently used.

Open an express lane. Stop bottlenecking in your business by announcing that all actionable items meeting established criteria should be given a green light. The only items that do *not* belong in the express lane are those requiring additional review or approvals.

Stop demanding receipts for items on expense reports that cost less than \$75 (or specify the amount that's right for your business).

Increase discretionary spend limits to minimize forms and constant approvals. Monitor and adjust policy only if necessary.

Set contract pricing minimums/maximms to speed deals. German pharmaceutical company Boehringer-Ingelheim established proposal-pricing minimums and eliminated the need for sign-offs on every proposal. As long as pricing minimums are met, no manager sign-offs are needed so deals move forward faster.

Get outside-in solutions. Pair people together from different areas of your organization to brainstorm solutions to each other's operational challenges. Fresh eyes and ears can offer a new perspective (instead of 1000 reasons why X doesn't work or why Z is impossible).

Track down duplicate work. Dialog with other divisions to determine whether any redundant work is being conducted in a silo. If so, decide if that work should be eliminated in one group, centralized, or shared.

Conduct a vendor audit. Review all your current vendor relationships to assess if a decrease in vendors and consolidation of services could reduce your paperwork and/or ensure lower prices.

Channel similar tasks to 1 source. European franchise PizzaExpress shifted the task of slicing cocktail lemons from wait staff to the kitchen, which is more experienced with the duty and completes it more efficiently. By simply changing who sliced lemons, the company saved significant hours, which translated into significant financial savings.

Implement the 1-over-1 rule. Reduce approval layers to 2 signatures—your boss and their boss—like GE did.

PRODUCT/SERVICE

Eliminate or divest like Sprint does. When the telecommunications company recognized that the “Welcome Call” in its marketing program wasn't adding value to the business, the service was eliminated. With this single decision, Sprint cut \$22MM from its operating budget. Review your own offerings regularly (and objectively), and phase out products, services, or projects that waste valuable resources so you can make space for innovation. To incentivize this behavior enterprise-wide, reward people for identifying portfolio areas without strong ROI.

Want breakthrough ideas? Stop asking for them. Trade yawn-inducing prompts like “Who has a big idea for our next new product?” for provocative thought-starters that seem outrageous in theory but are potentially transformative in action. For example, “start a business that competes with my current employer” is an idea that could certainly get you fired. But in the context of this tactic, it can start a valuable conversation about crisis aversion. A competing venture would likely exploit your company's biggest weakness, opening up discussion about what can be done now to transform flaws into strengths. Review the list below for thought-starters.

- If you were guaranteed immunity, what are some ideas that would get you fired?
- Name 3 free solutions to this problem.
- Name 3 solutions that wouldn't require any time investment.
- What ideas do you have that would give the CEO a panic attack?
- What would our competitors *never* expect us to do?
- Name 3 small changes that you would love to implement today.
- What 1 thing would you change to solve this problem?



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

PRODUCT/SERVICE (cont.)

- Keep it simple** like Google does. Ranked one of the top companies in the world on the Global Brand Simplicity Index, Google intentionally keeps the features of its search engine—and every other offering—as minimal as possible for its users.

INDIVIDUAL AREA:

MEETINGS

- Kill stupid meetings** like Sprint did. Upon review of every meeting held in 1 year—from standing and weekly status meetings to events, off-sites, and team gatherings—Sprint eliminated 30% of them. Conduct your own meeting audit and do away with meetings that don't add value or have outlived their original objective.
- Just say no.** After performing a meeting audit to determine the cost of time and resources for all of its meetings, professional services company Accenture empowered its managers to decline meetings without guilt or fear.
- Institute Meeting-Free Wednesdays** like Airbnb did to encourage uninterrupted time for valuable work.
- On your feet.** Stand-up meetings are less comfortable for attendees, which typically reduces the meeting's length.
- Set a timer.** Place a cap on meetings like HBO's division for Domestic Network Distribution did. A designated timekeeper limits meetings to 1 hour, which keeps sessions focused and mindful of attendees' time.
- Rethink default modes.** Adjust your Outlook or iCal default settings from 1 hour to 30 mins. for new events. Manually adjust only if a meeting will require more than 30 mins. to achieve its goal.
- Start meetings with goals...and end with action items.** Require that every meeting agenda includes the meeting's goal *and* is sent to invitees in advance. Similarly, require that next steps be defined at the meeting's conclusion.

- Establish meeting etiquette** and post it on your intranet and in conference rooms to encourage efficiency, punctuality, and preparedness among attendees.
- Simplify meeting materials.** By limiting preparation for quarterly financial meetings to 1 – 2 PPT slides, Novartis shortened both the length of these meetings and advance prep time for every level of staff.

- End meetings 15 minutes before the hour.** Standardize the 45-min. meeting, enabling employees to make their next meeting or call in a timely manner.

EMAIL/CALLS/VOICEMAIL

- Institute email-free time zones.** UK-based multimedia production company Ten Alps banned morning emails so employees could allocate time for ideating and imagining instead of inboxing.
- Unsubscribe** to every e-letter that adds zero value to your life.
- Enact email quotas.** In organizations where email is overwhelming, an employee may receive more than 200 emails in a single day. Extreme simplification measures call for a daily email quota—starting with yourself—that limits sending or replying to a maximum of 20-30 emails per day. Once that quota is met, your inbox is closed for the day. From this level of simplification, an organization-wide awareness of what's being sent and received is gained, and over time, excessive emailing habits are curbed.
- Limit cc recipients** to 3 people inside your company, which is how Ferrari got its employees to “talk more, write less.”
- Use Slack or WhatsApp messaging** to decrease the volume of internal emails.
- Utilize NNTR.** For email topics that are FYI and don't require a response, type NNTR (No Need To Respond) in the subject line. By utilizing this tactic, a business unit at Merck reduced email volume within its group by 20%.



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

EMAIL/CALLS/VOICEMAIL (cont.)

- Reply to non-urgent emails at a slow or set time** of day.
- Distill your message into the subject line** and leave the email body blank.
- Pick up the phone** to resolve any topic that isn't decided after 3 emails.
- No-scroll emails.** Summarize key points or action items for recipients in the body of your email. Lengthy or dense information should be relegated to attachments only.
- Eliminate voicemail** like Coca-Cola and JPMorgan Chase did. By cutting an outmoded means of communication for the majority of its staff—client-facing teams chose to retain it—JPMorgan Chase saved more than \$8MM.
- Limit internal calls to 12 mins., 25 mins., or 50 mins.** Benefits of untraditional end times include more time awareness and fewer tangents. Calls of these lengths are designed to provide buffer time afterward to handle any action items requested during the calls.
- Embrace airplane mode.** To focus on valuable work, place your smartphone in airplane mode, move it into a drawer, and check your messages only once per hour.
- Shift weekly calls to bimonthly.** HBO's division for Domestic Network Distribution modified the frequency of its weekly touch point calls for senior leadership to bimonthly, saving time and increasing the quality of information exchanged.

REPORTS

- Crowd-source the complexity.** Are reports your No. 1 cause for complexity? Crowd-source solutions to the issue and implement these ideas. Publicly recognize and reward employees with winning ideas to incentivize more simplification.

- Audit your reports.** Is your department contributing to valuable reports or have some of them outlived their usefulness? Is duplicate information already compiled by another division? Analyze all the reports to which your team contributes for opportunities to streamline or eliminate.

PRESENTATIONS

- 3 core ideas only.** Research suggests that audiences only remembers 3 points from any presentation they encounter, so save time by distilling your work into 3 core ideas and building your narrative or CTA around them.
- No PPT meetings.** By allowing only 1-page executive summaries, individuals are pushed to provide only the most essential information.
- Utilize Google Docs** for finalizing presentations and proposals among multiple authors/stakeholders.
- Use simple formatting and fewer graphics.** Reduce time investment—and staff headaches—for presentations by limiting graphics to 1 per page and avoiding custom colors and fonts.

VALUE OF STAFF TIME

- Hold simplifying sessions.** Host a formal exercise (like Killing Complexity) where team members are invited to identify tasks that are complex or don't add value to the business. Along with participants, leaders help brainstorm ideas on how to eliminate, outsource, or simplify these tasks in the session.
- Equip managers with outcome-focused solutions.** Train managers to resolve gripe sessions by asking "What do you hope to achieve through this dialog?" This tactic redirects a conversation from "My colleague always gets first choice when choosing holidays" to "I want to pin down my summer holidays, and I need you to review my request this week so I can plan my vacation." By encouraging employees to phrase their complaints as wishes, an issue like "I hate the new hire process" becomes "I wish the new hire process included only 1 level of approval and could be done in 3 days or less."



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

VALUE OF STAFF TIME (cont.)

- Morning priorities = better choices all day.** When you make a conscious effort each morning to focus on specific goals, your afternoon is less likely to be derailed by distractions or unplanned matters.
- Put valuable work on the calendar.** Reserve 2-3 hours each day for work that is most valuable to your stakeholders.
- Eliminate 1 current activity before adding a new one.** This golden rule of simplification emphasizes respect of employees' time and thoughtful examination of existing responsibilities.
- Cut the crap by committee.** U.K.-based audio retailer Richer Sounds founded a Cut-the-Crap Committee, where managers reduce bureaucracy by limiting unproductive systems and paperwork.
- Turn Fridays into Finishdays.** Designate Friday afternoons for wrapping up the week's unfinished business.
- Introduce blackout periods.** To encourage employees to spend time thinking and ideating instead of attending meetings or answering emails, a department at Fidelity wraps CAUTION tape around their cubicles at designated times each week, and Intel implements dark periods from 1– 5pm on Fridays.
- Hold Bureaucracy Buster sessions** like Google does. Participants are given the freedom to identify and eradicate barriers to productivity and efficiency.
- Who benefits from this process?** Before simplifying a process or procedure, break it down into steps and identify who benefits from the information. If the answer is consistently "no one," eliminate it altogether.
- Replace a main process with its workaround.** If staff has created a workaround to speed a certain process, consider making it the new protocol. Define your criteria for what constitutes a better solution—X amount of time saved? Y amount of money saved?—and implore employees to find workarounds for other complex processes.

STEP 4: PROPOSAL OF TACTICS + GROUP DISCUSSION

As a group, discuss the following:

1. Which tactics did everyone select? Do we agree on which tactics should be implemented?
2. Will each of our tactics have a high impact on our areas of complexity?
3. Do our tactics directly connect to our goals? If so, write in tactics for each area below. If not, keep discussing until tactics are aligned with goals.

COMPLEXITY AREA #1: _____

Tactic #1. _____

Tactic #2. _____

Tactic #3. _____

Tactic #4. _____

Tactic #5. _____



Simplification Tool

Simplification Tactics

STEP 4 (CONT.)

COMPLEXITY AREA #2: _____

Tactic #1. _____

Tactic #2. _____

Tactic #3. _____

Tactic #4. _____

Tactic #5. _____

COMPLEXITY AREA #3: _____

Tactic #1. _____

Tactic #2. _____

Tactic #3. _____

Tactic #4. _____

Tactic #5. _____

COMPLEXITY AREA #4: _____

Tactic #1. _____

Tactic #2. _____

Tactic #3. _____

Tactic #4. _____

Tactic #5. _____

SOURCES

Accenture performance reviews: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/07/21/in-big-move-accenture-will-get-rid-of-annual-performance-reviews-and-rankings/>

Deliv unlimited vacation policy: future**think** interview with CEO Daphne Carmeli

IBM Idea Jam: <https://www.collaborationjam.com/>

PizzaExpress and Ten Alps: <http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/nov/17/creative-simple-business-management-leadership-tips>

Richer Sounds: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/205590>

Google: <http://www.hrzone.com/talent/acquisition/google-innovation>

Airbnb: Employee contribution

Ferrari: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/04/ferrari-puts-brakes-staff-emails>

Coca-cola: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-22/coca-cola-disconnects-voice-mail-at-headquarters>

JPMorgan: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-06-02/jpmorgan-says-don-t-leave-message-at-the-tone-as-voice-mail-dies>