

S is for Simplify

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Welcome!

This edition of Elements is dedicated to "S" for Simplify.

Simply put, it includes:

- Thoughts on simplification
- Three cases - a leader, a manager, and an empty nester
- Simplification starting with known and unknowns
- Quotes on simplification
- New article on Virtual Teams
- Conferences & Trainings

Yours in simplicity,

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"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." Albert Einstein

Simplification: Success or Mess?

With a few key strokes or control touches we have access to overwhelming amounts of information. How can we know so much, yet still get so stalled or stuck? There is a huge disconnect between information and the application of that information. Simplification is a key step in turning information into knowledge, and then using it for real and practical purposes for individuals, teams, and corporations. If I put into application everything I read I would be rich and skinny and happy all the time, in addition to solving world peace! This disconnect can be found in many contexts, such as leading, managing, advancing a career, getting a job, being healthier, running a business, building skills, and changing behaviors. At times we get stuck searching for that one key piece of information or answer that will make it all easier and have things work out for us. The search for answers in a complex sea of information can itself be pulling us under. So can the inability to make use of and apply the information we do find. The cure is simple - Pick one:

- **Simplify now and take action**
- **Take action and simplify**

It almost doesn't matter how you simplify. Just be flexible and open to revising or changing the simplification plan as you go along. The art of simplification is a key skill for leaders. A great leader has the ability to boil something down to its resonating "essence," while not oversimplifying so much that it loses its importance or ability to "connect." Simplification creates an easy-to-understand connection to what is important.

Simplification is how we align ourselves to goals, direction, and vision. With simplification, daily decisions and actions become easier because there is now a framework to contain them that puts all the pieces in alignment.

Leaders simplify intangible things like ideas, concepts, and direction. And while some of the same tools and techniques used for simplifying tangible things (such as your house and office) can be applied to intangible ones, some can't. The skills required to simplify are paraphrasing, categorizing, organizing, and the ability to see the big picture and the details both at the same time. Simplification boils down information to its essence and captures it in key and memorable phrases.



Getting Started 3 Simplifications

The biggest challenge in simplifying is simply getting started! The more that is known about the desired direction or outcome, the easier it is. Simplifying when there are unknowns is important and can be done. In an "unknown" scenario, simplification is based on recognizable patterns, values, or visions. Here are three examples of simplification that highlight varying degrees of what is known and unknown.

"Skill-Based" Simplify: IOU

Chris is an overwhelmed, experienced and successful manager with a new company, new culture, new technology, and new direct reports. He gets over 200 work-related emails a day, the office is abuzz with people rushing here and there, and the project is in chaos. He has confidence in his ability to manage the project and do the job; it's similar to what he has done before. His real goal, though, is to find work he loves, particularly because he is not interested in climbing the corporate ladder. Chris says he will recognize that he has found work he loves when he is so engaged that he will stay at work late enough to fall asleep while doing it. He has experienced that kind of work twice in his life already - once, when he was young and building model airplanes, and later in life when developing software. He can't define exactly what this ideal job title would be or what the work would look like, though, and in the meantime he has to continue to make a paycheck to support his family. He believes that the job he has currently taken may provide a opportunity to eventually find that ideal work he is passionate about. He knows from his past performance that he tends to keep his head down and deliver quality results. He also knows that when that special opportunity does come along, he wants to be ready for it and to be able to influence anyone and everyone to see that he should get it. His fear is that he will get absorbed by the current job and not recognize that opportunity when it does arise, or be able to move himself into it at that point. By simplifying where he wants to go, he is able to keep that focus in front of him daily. His simplification boiled down to three letters: I-O-U. He is actively working on this plan in the context of his job. Here is how Chris simplified:

- I = Influencing Skills
- O = Future Opportunities
- U = Managing Up

He owes it to himself. By focusing on IOU, he has simplified the chaos, which won't go away, yet allows him to trust that he can manage the job as it is. He has hope, and is building skills that will help him now and in the future. By keeping a clear path ahead of him at all times, being aware of where he wants to go in the future, he has reduced the current chaos and stress. His current job and desired future now both benefit by Chris being clearer and calmer, with his goals and circumstances simplified and in alignment.

"Becoming a Leader" Simplify: FELT

Pat is an extremely successful manager who is competent and respected by all. She is never quite able to get ahead of the daily work and embrace her desired career and industry changes. Pat had been a manager for over 15 years in the same company. Her first job was there and over the years she has been promoted up to one of the top positions. The problem is that because she is the expert, it is quicker to do things herself. She has no time to mentor her staff or get ahead of the needed changes in the industry. After taking a hard look at herself, and having some eye-opening conversations with others, she realized she needed to step up and become more of a leader, to spend more time daily in working toward future changes. Specifically, she had to get out of the day-to-day activities and learn how to delegate, how to mentor her staff to find their own answers, and how to create a new direction for the group and the company. A mentor of hers suggested she spend at least 10% of her work time thinking about and planning for the future.

Her simplification was FELT.

- Focus = a reminder that she needed to spend time daily on future-based activities
- Empower = others to learn what she knows
- Lead = create vision and move towards change
- Teach = others how to do it

FELT also reminded her that leading and delegating don't have to be in the loud command-and-control style of the organizational culture. They can be handled with a lighter touch, smooth and soft and quiet, like felt.

"No Clear Direction Ahead" Simplify: CAVE

Grace, the empty nester, is faced with too much house, yard, and a collection of stuff from the past 25 years. There are also lots of unknown future directions flickering around in her life. She is self employed and interested in many things, and has roots in her community. Her main job in life so far, raising her kids, has mostly been accomplished. They no longer live at home and seem almost completely launched into their adult lives. The world is her oyster now. She can live anywhere in the world she wants since her business allows that flexibility. It's her time now, and she calls it Part Three. Part One was getting married and having a corporate career. Part Two was getting divorced and raising kids and starting her business. The business is currently doing great and has the potential to grow exponentially in a handful of interesting ways, which would add to her fulfillment. The important relationships in her life are caring and supportive. The unknown is - What's Next? Where will she live? In what direction will she decide to take her business? She is concerned that there is no clear

direction for the next 5 years or beyond. Having worked with a coach for 10+ years, she has a strong understanding of her values and beliefs, and where they help her and where they cause her to get stuck. She wants to enjoy her time now and not get hung up on an unknown future. Her simplification strategy for now is CAVE. This reminds her to make a CHOICE and take daily ACTION based on her VALUES. She is also committed to EXPLORING more of her interests and potential opportunities - to taking some risks outside her physical and emotional comfort zones, and so break out of the CAVE that she feels she is in. This simplification allows her to move forward using the focus of her daily, weekly, monthly and yearly goals in support of her values. While a specific path and destination are not yet clear, she has confidence that by living a life based on her values a promising path and direction will emerge.



Simplification Quotes

Shorter, though, doesn't mean less responsibility, less insight or less power. It means less fluff and less hiding. **Seth Godin**

As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler; solitude will not be solitude, poverty will not be poverty, nor weakness. **Henry David Thoreau**

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.
Leonardo da Vinci

The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.
Hans Hofmann

Simplicity is an acquired taste. Mankind, left free, instinctively complicates life. Katherine **F. Gerould**



Article and Events

Article:

[Top 6 best practices for Virtual Project Teams](#)

Conferences:

[Lead, Coach, or Manage? Which Hat to Wear and When](#)
PMI Mass Bay Professional Day, at Bentley in Waltham, MA May 5th

[PMI NJ Chapter, at Edison, NJ on May 7th](#)

Public Trainings:

For more information and to register go to:
www.corpedu.com

Free Webinar:

[Coaching for Project Manager, May 9th 2:00](#)

Working in a Matrix Organization
Chelmsford, MA - May 10
Waltham, MA - September 20

Effective Communication and Influencing Skills

Waltham, MA - May 14, 15
Chelmsford, MA - August 20, 21
Waltham, MA - November 29, 30

Coaching Skills for Project Managers
Chelmsford, MA - June 12
Waltham, MA - October 15

Leadership and Communication Skills for Project Managers
Waltham, MA- July 12
Chelmsford, MA - November 20

Facilitation Skills for Project Managers
Waltham, MA, August 2
Chelmsford, MA December 14

Leading & Developing High Performing Teams
Chelmsford, MA - July 23, 24
Waltham, MA - November 27, 28

