SIMPLIFYING

REALIZING PROJECTS WITHOUT HASSLE

(PREVIEW VERSION)

Jan-Peter Bogers

SHORTLIST
MANAGEMENT
BOOK OF THE
YEAR 2014.

Make it as simple as possible.
But not simpler.

Albert Einstein

Saturdaymorning, a conversation with Charlotte of almost nine years old.

She: What's the name of your book?
I: Simplifying.

She: What's it about?
I: At work grown-ups make things sometimes very complicated.
       And I am writing ... *(I am thinking how to explain this in a simple way)*

She: That it can be done simpler?
I: Yes, exactly.

She: What's the first sentence?
I: Make it as simple as possible. But not simpler.
       Do you understand?

She: Eurm... for example that you draw a house, very beautiful and in
       detail. Or you draw it in a common way. You could also just
       draw a few lines, but that isn't beautiful.

Exactly that!

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But of course it's not only in the Netherlands that people deal with complex projects. Worldwide everyone experiences the same energy drains in their projects. And we all make things unnecessarily complex every now and then. What would it be like if you could realize your projects and ideas in an easier, more effective and simpler way? Just by applying common sense and a couple of simplifying tools?

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Also freely available is an English translation of the Dutch preview version, which contains:
- the table of contents to get an overview of the book
- an introduction to Simplifying
- a chapter on rules (extra)
- 3 of the 27 tools in the book
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Table of Contents

PART 1 the theory

Chapters 1 to 3 of the book provide a brief introduction to Simplifying. They explain that simplifying is mainly a way of moving projects from vision to action. A way of achieving your goals in an easy, pleasant and of course simple way.

When we make projects unnecessarily complicated they get bogged down. When we make organizations unnecessarily complicated they become paralyzed. Energy drains and hassle take over, we lose focus and get stuck.

The simplifying method takes you from complicated to simple and from hassle to flow. It provides you with tools to regain focus, get a clear overview and, in addition, find the next steps to take to get a project up and running again. While simplifying you analyze the complexity and hassle of a project, you remove the energy drains, get to the essence of the project, set priorities and then start doing! New projects get a head-start by using the method – simplifying makes projects work for you.

The method is useful for individual professionals, teams and organizations. Whether you are the project leader or a team member, you can contribute to simplifying a project.

The third chapter explains the frequently used terms in the book. It also emphasizes that complexity and hassle aren't negative things in themselves. The book is about avoidable complexity and hassle: the types that cost energy and stand between you and your goals in a project.

Chapter 4 introduces the 5 general methods of Simplifying.

The first and most important method is **developing a mindset** for challenging yourself and others by asking the questions: *Can it be done more simply?* and *Is it complicated or are we making it complicated?* If there's one thing you should take away from this book, it's these two questions. You should ask them both when starting up a new project and when a project gets stuck. The other methods help you develop and sustain this mindset and act upon it.

The second method is **asking the 5 key questions**. They keep you sharp, focusing on the motivation (Why), results (What) and resources (How) of a project. They play an important role throughout the book and are frequently referred to. The key questions are:

1. Why are you doing what you're doing?
2. What do you *really* need?
3. Who do you *really* need?
4. What do you not need (yet)?
5. How can you find the right What and Who?

Of course you'll recognize these questions from traditional project management. A slight but essential difference lies in the emphasis on the words *really*. Often what we think we need at first is different from what we actually really, really need. This happens when a project gets complicated and we lose sight of what the main issues and side issues are. That is why the fourth question is typical of Simplifying. To get to the essence of a project, you have to dare to make choices and even skip some elements.

The third method is **analyzing the energy drains** in a project: the factors that cause delay, concerns and headaches. Having analyzed them, we start looking for creative options to bend them to our advantage. The energy drains are Money, Time, Rules, People, Ourselves and Complexity. They are further explained in part two.

The fourth method is **applying the tools**. The book contains 27 tools that help you to simplify projects. They are very practical and easy to use. Some tools help you focus, some help you to scrap side issues, perhaps temporarily, and others help you avoid hassle by creatively looking for alternative options to find your resources for the project. They are further explained in part three.

The fifth method is **using the 10-step plan**. Once you are familiar with using the other four methods, you won't need it, but some complex challenges may require a more structured approach. The 10 questions in the 10-step plan guide you through all the principles of Simplifying.

1. What is your idea, plan, dream or project?
   What does it look like once you've succeeded?
2. What do you need to realize your project?
   Both in concrete terms (e.g. wood or stones) and abstract terms (e.g. commitment).
3. Who plays a role in the project? Which people or parties?
   Who may or must have an opinion about the project?
4. Which energy drains do you expect?
   What makes the project complicated?
   What keeps you awake at night?
   Why?
5. What is the core or essence of the project?
   What does the project look like in its most simple version?
6. What do you really need to realize your project?
7. Who do you really need to realize your project?
8. What and Who do you not need (yet)?
9. How can you find the right What and Who?
10. Which tools from the toolbox can help you simplify the project?

After this it's just a matter of starting and doing the work!
From idea to action. Simple!

Chapter 5 zooms in more closely on hassle. Usually it starts like this: you (or your team) have an idea. Ideas are fun. They provide inspiration. You'll be doing or making something new. Starting an adventure. Next the idea becomes a plan. Plans are fun, too. They provide motivation. The first to-do list see the light of day. Finally you go from thinking to doing. But then... the plan becomes a project. Reality hits home. You need time and money. You come across regulations you weren't aware of. Of course, people will help you, but there will also be people who oppose you, have different interests, try to withhold you. All these factors become intertwined, you lose the overview and there it is: your project has become an energy drain full of hassle and complexity. Time to simplify!

When you start your own project, it's easier to simplify it then when your project is an assignment. In that case more people may be involved and you have less influence. When a project takes place in an organizational envi-

ronment it gets even more complex. Now structures, procedures and maybe politics can play a role. However it's possible to simplify at all levels. The most important part is to remember how and why the idea came about in the first place, to ask the key questions and get to the original essence.

Chapter 6 is about complexity. It briefly explains what makes something complex or simple. Projects get complex when many factors play a role, the various factors are related to and influence one another, the cause and effect of the actions that have to be taken aren't clear and when there's a high level of unpredictability within the project.

Having said that, projects are of course simple when just a few factors play a role, there isn't much interference between the factors and the outcome of actions is predictable. This keeps a project clear and easy.

Not all complexity can be avoided. Some projects just are huge and complex. Simplifying mostly takes care of unnecessary, avoidable complexity. Or complexity we accidently create ourselves. That's why this book starts with a quote by Einstein: *Make it as simple as possible. But not simpler.*

Chapter 7 discusses the benefits of Simplifying, partly based on research by Simon Collison (in his book *From complexity to simplicity*). The conclusion is that Simplifying:
- saves money, time and energy
- creates better motivated professionals and project members
- keeps the focus on results rather than processes
- creates more flexibility in organizations and projects.

Apart from this, Simplifying is creative, can be fun and makes things easier. We live in a complex world – let's not make it more complex than it needs to be!

Chapter 7 also gives some warnings about Simplifying. First of all, it isn't always simple. *"Keeping things simple is quite difficult. While making things difficult is quite simple"* - Berthold Gunster. Other warnings are that you should avoid oversimplifying, that simplifying is not the same as minimizing and that not everything can be simplified. Some things just are complicated. Last of all, there are people who suffer from fear of simplifying. They may have an interest in keeping things complicated and non-transparent.

Part one also contains **the case of A passport and a free bicycle**. It's about a borough clerk who transformed the organization from working based on procedures to working based on the essence of the organization: doing meaningful things for society. A nice example is that they were able to provide hundreds of schoolchildren with a new bike without extra costs, just by looking differently at money and procedures.

PART 2   the energy drains

Part two of the book zooms in on the energy drains and how you can take a different and often creative approach towards them. How you can bend them from energy drains to energy boosts.

Chapter 8   A different approach to Money

Money often gives hassle. There's never enough of it, everybody wants to have it and nobody wants to give it away. Often money is related to power and conflicting interests. In this chapter we focus on money as a *resource*, which broadens our possibilities for accomplishing a project. After all, who needs money to build a cottage? What you really need is wood, nails and a craftsman.

Chapter 9   A different approach to Time

Time is the equivalent of money. There's never enough of it, everybody wants to have it and nobody wants to give it away. Time is scarce, schedules are always fully booked and we all have different priorities. Time is also equitable: we all have 168 hours to spend per week. In this chapter we see that time is in fact about *activity*, *quality* and *priority*.

Chapter 10   A different approach to Rules

There's a good reason we invented rules and regulations. Often though, they no longer apply to the situations they were meant for, or their original function has become unclear. And then they can become obstacles to development and innovation. In the context of simplifying, rules also include laws, procedures and unwritten rules. In this chapter we compare rules to *reality* (the paper world to the real world) and learn how to take advantage of this knowledge. The rest of the book offers plenty of examples of how to work creatively with or around rules.

Chapter 11   A different approach to People

Well-disposed people are an asset. Uncooperative people, on the other hand, can substantially interfere with our projects. People represent the most troublesome energy drain, because they often decide on the money, time and rules. In this chapter we focus on the key question: Who do you *really* need for your project? Criteria for the right person fall into three categories: *position*, *talent* and *energy*. They're all explained in more depth throughout the book.

Chapter 12   A different approach to Ourselves

We operate in the centre of our projects with all their complexity and hassle and we're the ones who have to deal with it. Add to that our own pitfalls, insecurities and dilemmas. In this chapter we ask the key questions from part one in relation to ourselves. And of course we take an honest look: *Is it complicated or are we (or am I) making it complicated ourselves?*

Chapter 13   A different approach to Complexity

Basically this is the combination of the other 5 energy drains. And also their mutual dependence. The fact that everything in a project seems to be interrelated gets people caught up in their project and it becomes an inextricably entangled mass of thoughts and problems in their heads. In fact the whole Simplifying book is about looking through this complexity.

The toolbox is the most practical part of the book. The 27 ready-to-apply tools are categorized into 10 principles. They are easy to browse through and to experiment with. All the tools are explained, have some examples and a 3-step method for applying the tool. In this summary we will go through the tools quickly.

Chapter 14 Make it small

It may sound strange, but thinking small can bring you to great heights. By thinking small you temporarily remove all the frills from your project, leaving only the most important elements visible. Your project becomes transparent and easier to achieve. You can stop making it so complicated and get off to a quick start.

Zoom in

Simplifying to the extreme! You'll be looking for the tiniest form in which your project is still recognizable. For example, what is the smallest design for a museum? It makes you zoom in on the essence and when you've discovered (or rediscovered) that, you can quickly start realizing your plan. Later on you can return the plan to its original size.

Strip to the bone

Too much hassle and complexity can lead to inaction. While we use the previous tool mainly in the planning and preparation phase of a project, *Strip to the bone* is more likely to be useful in the implementation phase of a project. If you are losing sight of the overall picture, you scrap all the side issues in several rounds. What remains is what is essential and important.

The mini Action Plan

An action plan on a 7x7 cm format. No more, no less. *The mini Action Plan* consists of only a few steps (5 to 7) and has to fit on one single post-it. Every step has to be simple, actionable and accomplishable. And if every step is accomplishable, the whole plan will be accomplishable. One of the strongest tools of Simplifying.

Chapter 15   Make it big

Make it big challenges you to exaggerate all aspects of your project. This gets you to the essence of your plans or projects and makes it easier to set priorities. It tells you what you *really* need to reach your goals and which steps you have to take first.

Big Hairy Audacious Goal

Big Hairy Audacious Goals are almost unreachable, but very inspiring. Words like 'all', 'everyone, 'best' and large numbers do well in BHAG's. But sometimes a big ambition needs a small number. For example: tidying up a whole office building in just one day.

Million-Dollar Question

What would you do if you received an extra million dollars (or another huge amount) for your project, dream or idea? This suggestion makes you find out what you *really* need to realize it. And that is that you never need money, it's always just a resource to obtain something else. The MDQ helps you think in resources and gives you a broader and more creative vision of how you can accomplish your goals.

Groundhog Day

Named after a famous Hollywood movie. What if you knew you'd have to repeat the nightmare project you're currently working on at least another 10 times? How would you approach it differently? Would you change the structure of the project? And what can you learn from that right now?

Chapter 16   Make a choice

To choose is to lose. Or is it? A project can be designed in dozens of different ways. If you keep all options open, you have to take all of them into account. Including the ones that aren't relevant in the end. Making early decisions makes your project more comprehensive and simpler.

Limit your choices

On an average day you make a lot of irrelevant choices. Are there any choices you can avoid? Choices you keep making over and over again? Are there routines that can make you work (and live) more simply? Try to limit unimportant choices, so that you can use your brain power for the important ones.

Take decisive action

Sometimes everything in a project seems to be interrelated and you don't know where to begin. There are too many choices to make and each of them has an impact on other aspects of the project. It's time to take decisive action, find the easiest decisions and untangle your project.

Choose your battle

There's always some hassle you can barely control. The 3 golden rules of influence help you choose your battle. When should you fight to the end and when is it better to let go, accept and relax?

Chapter 17   Make it sharp

Accurancy and completeness can be a great good. They can also make things complicated. Make it sharp sets aside all the nuances and cuts straight to the chase. These tools challenge you to be clear, firm and compact. They are great to combine with the tools in chapter 16.

Black-and-white thinking

Lots of options? Bring them back to two. Ask yourself a yes/no question. Black or white? This or that? Dare to let go of options. It will help you stop your thinking from going round in circles and let you get to the core of your project and choices.

The quadrant

A visual way of *Black-and-white thinking*. Draw your limited options in a quadrant. Well-known examples are the Eisenhower diagram and the Leary Circle. It helps you find out what is really important in a project.

Clear language

Vague language makes our communication and by extension our projects more complicated. This tool challenges you to define words and expressions very clearly, even in an oversimplified way. And to formulate sharply defined propositions that make a debate or discussion sharp and clear as well. Of course you're free to reinstate the nuance later.

Chapter 18 Make it visible

In making things visible you can bring structure and overview to what seems chaotic.

Brown Paper

Brown paper sessions give an overview: you glue, staple and write everything you know and have collected about a project on a big sheet of paper. Use markers, post-its, paper copies, pictures, everything you have. Then start shifting and ordering. Or name categories. Go on until you have completely mapped your project.

Comprehensive illustrating

Draw your project or even better, have it drawn by someone else while you're talking about it. Since you can't draw every detail, you must make choices and the most important aspects of your project will automatically surface. What's more, you have to communicate clearly about what you want to have drawn.

Chapter 19 Deregulate

Deregulating is about dealing with rules, procedures and systems that seem to be an insurmountable barrier for your project. Rules can be ignored, worked around, changed, creatively interpreted or called into question.

Working around the system

This is about ignoring and circumventing the system. What is the official way to acquire the resources or people you need for your project? Can it be done faster, more directly and more simply by skipping procedures and intermediaries?

Permission or forgiveness

If you know there's hassle just around the corner when you follow the official procedures, or you expect people to create difficulties, you can either go ahead and ask for permission, or choose to just do what you intended and ask for forgiveness afterwards. There are some criteria though if you opt for the latter.

Guerrillas and ripple effect

This is a combination of the previous tools and is about circumventing the system on a larger scale. Together with a bunch of people, maybe colleagues, you start a movement of change, that gets bigger and bigger.

Chapter 20   Regulate

A collection of tools drawn from traditional project management. They all provide overview and transparency in projects and make them more simple as a result.

Backward planning

Usually we plan from start to finish and take steps in the order 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. *Backward planning* works the other way round. You determine the end result and the last things you need to achieve that. Then you know what you need for the previous step and so on. You eventually arrive at your starting point.

The project triangle

The project triangle comes in handy if you're highly dependent on a commissioning client. The angles of the triangle represent quality, money and time and you always have to stay in control of one of the angles. If the client wants to adjust his demands on two of the three (for example, he wants lower costs and higher quality), you have the third left for negotiation ("That means it will take us longer").

Chapter 21 The right people

People represent the most important energy drain or energy boost. They have their own interests, opinions, energy, priorities etc. Besides they make decisions on money, time and rules. So it's very important to be surrounded by the right people. The tools in this chapter help you find them from different perspectives.

The 7 roles
This tool evaluates people by their talents and expertise. They *are able to* help you. In every phase of a project you need different types of people. Their talent can be related to content or procedural. Sometimes you need an inspirer, sometimes a doer or a connecter.

The director and the doorman
This tool evaluates people by their role or position. They *are allowed to* help you. Sometimes the doorman can open doors for you with his key, but a director can hand you a metaphorical key with his influence.

Pits and machines
This tool evaluates people by their energy and motivation. They *are willing to* help you. If you throw a coin into a pit, it disappears. If you throw it into a machine, things start moving. Some people give you energy, others don't. Of course it's subjective, but all the more important to prevent hassle in your project.

Chapter 22 The right questions

It's an open door: getting the right answers starts with asking the right questions. Still, we often forget to do so and end up on the wrong track.

Why? Why? Why?
Asking why brings you to the question behind the question. Or to a deeper understanding. Asking it several times will bring you closer to the essence of your project, dream or goal.

The clever How

Can we? asks for a decision. The answer can only be yes or no. Or maybe. *How can we?* asks for options, ideas and possibilities. *The clever How* can also be a question about conditions. If someone tells you it isn't possible or desirable or just tells you *No!* you can ask: under what conditions would you say yes?

Dare to ask

The fifth key question in Simplifying concerns finding the right What and Who for your project. The dare-to-ask method (very popular in the Netherlands under the name Durftevragen) simply dares you to ask for help with your project wherever you like. It works on the principle that we truly want to help one another, you just need to ask.

Chapter 23   Do it!

The shortest summary of simplifying is: go and do it! The tools of this chapter are all about action, starting, stopping postponing.

A journey of a thousand miles

... begins with a single step. And once you've made that step, it automatically becomes clear what the next step should be. And the next and the next. What's more, every step gives you immediate feedback if you're going into the right direction. And it feels good being on your way.

The power of the experiment

Sometimes projects or processes are too scary to start with. For example change processes, for where will the change bring us? If you want people to start trying something new, it can help to do it as an experiment. Experiments are temporary and so less scary. We can always turn back time and undo the changes. This tool is handy to quickly create support.

PART 4   cases of simplifying

Chapter 24   The helicopter school

The founder and owner of a helicopter school tells about his journey
through the maze of rules and bureaucracy to start and expand his
school. A creative case about working around (and floating within) the
system.

Chapter 25   Jimmy's

A non-governmental initiative for young people started with lots of has-
sle from traditional organizations, their professionals and their different
interests. By setting a BHAG and starting doing with the right people,
they overcame their initial energy drains.

Chapter 26   The maritime museum

Refurbishing the Maritime Museum in Amsterdam was a huge and com-
plex project. Many stakeholders were involved with different interests
and opinions. The director of the museum tells about the choices he had
to make and how he tried to simplify it.

Chapter 27   The flexible civil servant

A case about how a young civil servant tried to change a local authority
from within. About uncooperative people and departments, finding the
right people and starting a movement of change by creating a ripple
effect.

Chapter 28   Hans is falling behind

An engineer finds simple solutions to shorten procedures and gains a lot
of time by using both logical and creative thinking. He investigates rules,
works around them, asks for forgiveness and sets a new standard.

Chapter 29 There's my iMac!

If your computers get stolen, but you know exactly where they are, does that make it easier for the police to help you? A case about rules and reality and the people and organizations involved.

Chapter 30 This book

My own case. Writing a book about Simplifying wasn't as simple as you might think. About how I sometimes didn't follow my own advice and sometimes did. An example of how you can be your own energy drain.

PART 5   more reading

This part gives some advise on books about simplifying or that support simplifying. Some in Dutch, some in English. Please e-mail me if you want a list of the books that are available in English.

I developed 10 extra tools after finishing the book. They can be downloaded for free on the website. At this moment they are only available in Dutch. I can provide you with a list of the extra tools if you wish.

Information about the online whereabouts of Simplifying:

mail@janpeterbogers.nl

www.janpeterbogers.nl/english
www.versimpelen.info/english

https://www.facebook.com/groups/simplifying

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Enjoy Simplifying!

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… focusing on the essence of projects, on the original idea and the motivation, and subsequently acting on it.

… organizing projects differently.

… a way of thinking, a different mindset about projects.

… a creative and refreshing vision on who and what you really need to accomplish a projec.

Simplifying is...

… unravelling a project that seems complex and, in doing so, making it comprehensiblet.

… getting projects into flow and acceleration.

… using creativity to avoid hassle and to make inevitable energy drains easier to handle.

…a challenge.
It isn't always as simple as it sounds.

CHAPTER 4   Five ways to simplify

Simplifying sounds very simple. But how do you get from complex to simple? And how do you prevent avoidable hassle and energy drains from bothering you? And what exactly will you do if a project or plan doesn't get off the ground or gets stuck along the road?

In this chapter you will find 5 methods or angles to simplify a project. All of them can be used at any given stage of a project; there is no prescribed or preferred order. By using them you will learn that it depends on the complexity of a project and on your own experience with simplifying which method comes in handiest in which situation. Sometimes you'll only find that out by trying the different methods. Learning by doing!

Method 1: Developing a different mindset

Simplifying projects and organizations is mostly a matter of mindset. It's the realization that we often make things more complicated ourselves, the conviction that we can avoid doing so and the attitude to keep investigating. The question that matches this mindset is: *Can it be done more simply?*

Method 2: Asking the 5 key questions

To answer the question *Can it be done more simply?*, it's important to know what the essence or long-term goal is of your project or organization: *What's it all about?* The 5 key questions will help you find the answer.

Method 3: Analyzing the 6 energy drains

An important part of simplifying is analyzing which components cause hassle in a project or organization, and whether the hassle is constructive or unnecessary. The 6 energy drains give your analysis focus. When you have clearly identified the hassle in a project, you can start looking for methods to change or avoid it.

Method 4: Applying the toolbox

The toolbox you'll find in this book is multifunctional. Some tools will help you answer the 5 key questions, i.e. discovering or rediscovering the essence of your project. Others will help you analyze the hassle, or help you resolve it. By using the tools and experimenting with them, you will also develop a mindset for simplifying.

Remember, you can use all the methods in any order, but if you need more structure, the 10-step plan gives you a step-by-step overview of what you can apply.

The 5 methods will be explained more thoroughly below.

Method 1: Developing a different mindset

The first method of simplifying is the easiest, but also the hardest to apply. It starts with the realization that we tend to make plans and projects more complica-ted than necessary, that we don't have to accept unnecessary complexity, and therefore that we want to simplify.

> **Simplifying is a mindset, a way of thinking**

Next you can ask yourself the question: can it be done more simply? And then do everything it takes to simplify a project that seems complex or gene-rates hassle, in such a way that it becomes clear and comprehensible again and the next steps to be taken present themselves automatically.

You can ask the broader question: can it be done differently? This is a very common question in creative thinking methods. You can also make the question more specific: can it be done more easily? More quickly? More enjoyably?

Method 3: Analyzing the 6 energy drains

The 6 energy drains are the main causes for delays and headaches in projects. An important part of simplifying is to analyze these causes and look for alternatives, often creative. In chapters 8 to 13 you will make extensive acquaintance with these energy drains and we will see how you can go about things differently. But for now, here is a brief overview.

1. Money
   Money often gives hassle. There's never enough of it, everybody wants to have it and nobody wants to give it away. Often money is related to power and conflicting interests.

2. Time
   Time is the equivalent of money. There's never enough of it, everybody wants to have it and nobody wants to give it away. Time is scarce, schedules are always fully booked and we all have different priorities.

3. Rules
   There's a good reason we invented rules and regulations. Often though, they no longer apply to the situations they were meant for, or their original function has become unclear. And then they can become obstacles to development and innovation. In this book, rules also include laws, procedures and unwritten rules..

4. People
   Well-disposed people are an asset. Uncooperative people, on the other hand, can substantially interfere with our projects. People represent the most troublesome energy drain, because they often decide on the money, time and rules.

5. Ourselves
   We operate in the centre of our projects with all their complexity and hassle and we're the ones who have to deal with it. Add to that our own pitfalls, insecurities and dilemmas.

6. Complexity
   Basically this is the combination of the other 5 energy drains. And also their mutual dependence. The fact that everything in a project seems to be interrelated gets people caught up in their project and it becomes an inextricably entangled mass of thoughts and problems in their heads.

CHAPTER 10   A different approach to Rules

> The best way to create chaos is to organize everything
>
> *Karel Boullart (philosopher)*

Rules are useful. They create order, transparency and a level playing field. If you want to start a restaurant, you must comply with certain regulations. You need permits for safety and quality. And that applies to every restaurant.

Within projects and organizations, rules provide frameworks, limits and direction. Rules may be laws, or rules that apply within a company or industry, or procedures you must adhere to.

Rules and hassle

Rules often give hassle. The energy drains money and time can make us suffer from having too little, but the main problem with rules is having too many! Rules can create obstacles that delay our projects or make us adjust or even cancel them. Although they should provide transparency, rules often create confusion instead. They can be complicated and open to different interpretation. And some rules collide with one another.

Some rules cost money, for instance licences. Others cost time because we have to delve into them and comply with them. That is time we cannot spend on the activities we'd rather be carrying out, such as decorating the restaurant or drawing up the menu.

Rules and people

Behind rules there are always people who make them and monitor them. They assess applications, check projects against the appropriate regulations and decide whether exceptions can be made to the rule. Those people also have their own opinions, interests and agenda, and regulations they have to comply with themselves.

Sometimes rules start to take on a life of their own. They exercise power over those who have to comply with the rules and those who must enforce them. These rules make nobody happy, but "they simply are the rules so there's nothing we can do."

In addition, a lot of unwritten rules exist within organizations. They can be customs, practices and procedures that everybody knows. It's hard to get a grip on those unwritten rules or to change them. They also take on a life of their own because they are not standardized. Usually

they are defined by the employees themselves, consciously or unconsciously. Rules of behaviour fall into the same category: how do you interact with each other?

A different approach to Rules
In this book, when we talk about rules, we also include laws, procedures and unwritten rules. But what are rules actually?

Rules are agreements that were once made between two or more parties. Sometimes rules have been imposed unilaterally. They have always come into existence within a particular context: in a certain place at a certain time, between certain parties and for a specific reason.

Rules and simplifying
Rules exist for a reason, but sometimes their original function is not clear or no longer applicable. The context has changed, but the rule has stayed the same.

> **Simplifying: from rule to reality**

If the context has changed, you may wonder whether a rule is still relevant. Why was the rule made in the first place? Who made the rule? Who is allowed to make an exception to the rule? Who has an interest in the rule? Is it bad to overstep the rule?

Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't. It's not practical if everyone in continental Europe starts driving on the left tomorrow; our public space is not designed for that. But if you're desperate, you can go to the toilet first in a department store and pay afterwards, although from the point of view of the toilet attendant, it should actually be the other way round.

Practical tips
- Study the rules
- Study reality
- Find out who is in charge of enforcing the rules
- Think about how you can work the rules to your advantage
- Decide what is sensible: abiding by the rules or not?

In the toolbox
- Choose your battle (see Chapter 16)
- Deregulate (Chapter 19)
- The director and the doorman (see Chapter 21)
- The right questions (Chapter 22)

At a small crossing, there are two restaurants and a café. They would like to have a permit for a terrace, but the pavement is very narrow. Only 90 cm of walking space would remain for pedestrians passing by. According to municipal legislation, there must be a passageway 180 cm wide. There are of course groups of people with an interest in the 1 metre 80: wheel-chair users, for instance, and parents of twins or triplets. So the permits cannot be granted.

A terrace is very important for the three catering businesses, and besides it would be good for the image and liveliness of the neighbour-hood. The owners persist and invite the relevant officials, who can make or break the rules, for a chat over a good cup of coffee. The officials accept and start assessing the pavement situation; they even bring a tape measure with them. And then they compare the rule with the reality. A passageway of 90 cm seems entirely reasonable; the street is not too busy with pedestrian traffic and the interests of good catering for the area are also taken into consideration. Eventually the permit is granted and the neighbourhood gains three terraces.
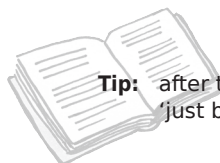
CHAPTER 14   Make it small

It may sound strange, but thinking small can bring you to great heights. By thinking small you temporarily remove all the frills from your project, leaving only the most important elements visible. Your project becomes transparent and easier to achieve. You can stop making it so complicated and get off to a quick start.

With *Make it small* you look at your project through a magnifying glass. You look at the essence and that makes it simpler.

- The *Zoom In* tool makes you focus on the essence, so that all the side issues disappear from view.
- The *Strip to the bone* tool makes you scrap all the side issues so that only the essence remains.
- *The mini Action Plan* tool makes your plan small, quick-to-action and always achievable.

Making your project smaller is a different way of looking at your project, but it doesn't mean you have to set less ambitious goals. Once it's clear what's most important in your project and you've found out how to simplify it and are back on track, you can start to let it grow again. It's a temporary way of thinking to get from vision to action without any hassle. It's quite funny when you realize that you can achieve the same effect with *Make it big* (chapter 15).

Tip: after this chapter you can read chapter 23: *Do it!* It's about 'just beginning' and supports *Make it small*.

Zoom in

Plans and projects have a tendency to get bigger, more complicated and less well-organized along the way. This creates hassle and before you know it, you're spending your time on details and forgetting about the big picture. Eventually, too much hassle and complexity can lead to inaction, either when you're working on a project or in the planning and preparation phase.

When that happens, it helps to make your project smaller. And with the simplifying method we're taking this to extremes! We will be looking for the tiniest form in which your project is still recognizable and zooming in on the essence. When you've discovered (or rediscovered) that, you can quickly start realizing your plan. Later on you can return the plan to its original size.

For example, what is the smallest design for a museum? Eight artifacts in your attic, where you occasionally give tours for small groups of visitors? Or an online museum? Both sound pretty easy to realize. The case of masters and apprentices in chapter 1 is another example of *Zoom In*, but more on an organizational level.

How to apply this tool

1. Think about the project you want to realize. What is the tiniest option you can think of, without any frills? What is the least that needs to be done to make the project a success? It will help you to write down your goals, as precisely as possible, with all the factors that play a role in it. Next, make everything smaller: fewer people, less money, less impact, closer at hand, simpler, maybe even more boring, and so on. Keep on checking if the essence of your project is still intact.

2. Is it starting to sound simple and achievable? If not, go back to step 1. Do you still think it's hard to realize? If so, go back to step 1.

3. Once your project sounds easy and feasible, you can start implementing it. Alternatively you can write a project plan or a *mini Action Plan* first. If your projects gets into a flow, you can return to your original plans and start enlarging your project again.

Kevin wants to start a business with a friend. Their dream is to deliver sustainable meals to people's homes. But they have no idea how to approach it

- How do we write a business plan? Will people be interested in our service?
- Should we start with market research?
- Should we prepare the meals ourselves or hire a cook?
- What are we going to put on the menu and what is a smart and cheap way to buy in our ingredients?
- Should we purchase a mini-bus for the deliveries? That would mean a big investment right from the start.
- There are many options and many choices to make and they all seem to be related. So where do we begin?

The fact that Kevin lives in a small village provides a simple solution: to start small and in his own neighbourhood. They create a small menu with three dishes and take it to fifty households. They ask if the families would be interested in ordering something and if so, for which day. Now Kevin and his friend know exactly how much they have to buy in. Probably only a few people will be interested at first, so for the time being a small car will be sufficient for the deliveries. When they deliver the meals they immediately try to make an appointment for the next day to ask for feedback. They can stop by again or make a brief phone call. The essence of their plan is still intact: they are delivering sustainable meals, just on a small scale for now. They learn a great deal from the whole experience and it gives them plenty of food for thought for the next steps of their plan. Is it a promising idea? Will we keep it small or should we expand our business? Slowly or quickly...
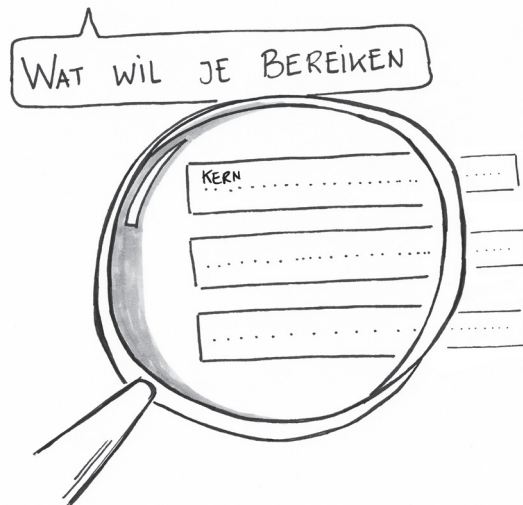
Strip to the bone

Bells and whistles, cake and decorations, they're all part of a birthday celebration. But without a birthday boy or girl and some guests, it would be a strange party. However, the opposite is perfectly possible: you can have a great party with good company, but without any decorations.

When a project has turned into a mishmash of individual elements, how do you recognize what's really important? More people and more ideas have crept in, and there are all kinds of lists, tasks, agreements and appointments, all apparently vaguely related. It can get quite complicated to distinguish main and side issues. What we do know and feel though, is when something costs us a lot of energy, but generates very few benefits. This is the insight we use with the *Strip to the bone* tool. As soon as you get stuck in your project, it's a clever move to 'strip' it: to remove all the bells and whistles.

   The difference with the previous tool is that you would use *Zoom in* mainly in the preliminary phase of designing and preparing a project, if you don't know where to begin. It lets you get straight to the core of the project and put secondary issues on one side temporarily. *Strip to the bone* is more likely to be useful in the implementation phase of a project, if you are losing sight of the overall picture. In several rounds, you scrap all the side issues. What remains is what is essential and important.

Within software development they use the acronym MoSCoW. The capital letters represent 'Must have, Should have, Could have, Would like'. It indicates in descending order of priority the demands or requirements of a project. The MoSCoW method focuses mainly on objective requirements, whereas with *Strip to the bone* you also explore your personal energy drains, the things you experience as a hassle. The two methods complement each another well. (see case).

How to apply this tool

1. Summarize: take a large sheet of paper and put the name of your project in the centre. Draw a mindmap of everything that has to do with the project: people, resources, ideas, plans, results up to now, and so on. Each category can be split up further in more detail. *Everything* should be placed on that one sheet!

2. Analyze: determine main and side issues and make it visual by marking them with different colours. Be strict! We tend to make everything important, but that won't make it any simpler.

3. Minimize: you can immediately scrap the side issues that cause energy drains. Time to say goodbye! The side issues that don't give a lot of hassle are doubtful cases. Do you really need them? Do you need them now? Be strict again. Ensure that only what is important remains; that will take your project from complex to simple. Main issues that give hassle aren't easy to scrap, of course. Try to find alternatives that provide what you need and give you energy instead of causing an energy drain.

The intranet of a big insurance company is seriously fragmented. Through mergers and working in different regions, many systems and modules have been bundled together, with all the disadvantages that brings. Over the years the system has become uncontrollable. Every time an adjustment has to be made or the system is down, the costs are high. Employees working with the system complain about the slowness and they demand a new, well-integrated system.

More and more people and wishes creep into this IT project. HRM asks for a fully automatic application for leave requests and for employees to be able to view their own pension scheme. Sales demands a full specification of the new customer management system, which should be easy to access. ICT wants new technologies to be integrated. The list of demands continues to grow and a new intranet seems a long way off.

The project manager gives the organization a choice: "Either we'll put building the new system on hold until there is consensus on the set of requirements, which will mean that it's anyone's guess when the system will be up and running. Or we choose not to build in new functions for the time being. To just integrate all the existing systems to create a single unified intranet, which we will test in our biggest region. If the test is a success, we will introduce it into the rest of the company. And only then will we start looking at expansions to the system. Of course, we'll take account of these in the design." Naturally the organization chooses the latter option.

The *Strip to the bone* tool was written in collaboration with Patty Golsteijn. Patty minimizes everything she comes across, for herself and for others. (www.minimalswitch.nl)

The mini Action Plan

Memos, notes, documents for meetings, attachments, permits, objections, more attachments, tenders… We all produce mountains of paperwork and besides writing it, we have to read it all as well. Within projects, it's often the same story. One of my clients once sent me a 130-page document to prepare for a meeting. After inquiring, he indicated that only 10 of the pages were relevant for the discussion. It saved me a lot of unnecessary reading!

Sometimes it's clever to work out a project thoroughly before you start implementing it. Especially if the project is long-term and high-risk, it's wise to write an Action Plan. These come in all shapes and sizes: from a single A4 sheet to dozens of pages. The disadvantage of a comprehensive Action Plan is that it takes a lot of time to write, and that keeps you from actually carrying out your ideas.

If you want to make a quick start with the realization, but would still like to make an Action Plan, you can opt for *The mini Action Plan*. I myself started writing my plans on small memo sheets, before switching to even tinier post-its.

A mini Action Plan consists of only a few steps and has to fit on a single post-it. Every step has to be simple, actionable and achievable.

The mini Action Plan is one of the most powerful simplifying tools and it's always effective. The rule that all the steps have to fit on a single post-it forces you to make choices. It makes you focus on the main issues and word things sharply. A good moment to apply *The mini Action Plan* is after you've used the other tools from the *Make it small* chapter; all of these make your plan manageable. An important effect of *The mini Action Plan* is that after initially being reluctant about your project, you'll start thinking: "Well I'll be darned, it can be done!" After all, you've made every step feasible.

How to apply this tool?

1. First apply the *Zoom in* or *Strip to the bone* tools. That makes your plan smaller and more comprehensible. Alternatively you could start by looking at only the first phase of your plan.
2. Make a list of requirements. Assess critically what you *really* need and what you need first.
3. Write a *mini Action Plan* that fits on a single post-it. Usually it will contain three to seven steps.

Members of the project department of a child welfare organization think the department isn't visible enough in their organization. During a strategy meeting, they discover that they aren't truly aware of how other departments perceive them. A survey should help. The temptation is to form a work group, which will become a project team that will write an action plan for this survey and will frequently consult with colleagues. Plenty of discussions, but very little action. Fortunately, they are receptive to trying a different method: writing a mini Action Plan. The question they ask themselves is: "How can we organize a survey quickly and simply?" They come up with seven steps:

1. Make a list of what we specifically want to investigate with the survey.
2. Come up with a maximum of 10 questions.
3. Come up with a maximum of 30 preferred respondents.
4. Ask the respondents how and when they want to receive the survey.
5. Mail the survey or bring it along in person.
6. Pick up the survey.
7. Compare the answers with the list in point 1 and draw a conclusion.

The survey was conducted within three weeks, after which the department team could start working on their visibility within the organization.
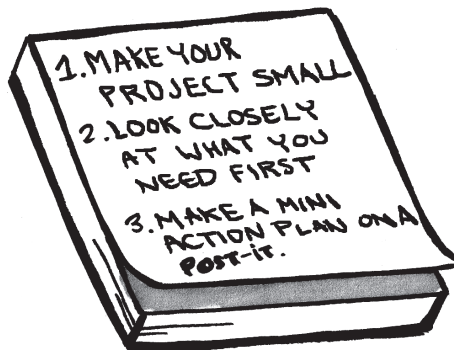
CHAPTER 24   The helicopter school

Simplifying hero:	Rob Evenhuis
Natural environment:	in the air and at airports
Energy drain:	rules

In 2005, after having worked as a flight instructor at several companies for ten years, Rob Evenhuis wanted to start his own helicopter school. It was a tough challenge: you need considerable start-up capital and you have to comply with many regulations. Officials invent new rules on the spot and, in addition, Rob's biggest competitor was opposing him whenever possible. Fortunately, Rob is not only a diehard but also a master in circumventing hassle. As we speak, he is the founder and owner of the Rotor & Wings flying school. In this interview, Rob explains how he looks for the loopholes in the law and tries to use rules creatively to his own advantage.

Black hole

Many pilots fall into a black hole after their flight training. They've passed the theory exams and made about 200 flight hours, but unfortunately you need at least 500 hours of experience to get a job with an airline. Besides, the pilots have no practical experience in transporting people or goods yet. That is why I, along with some colleagues, wanted to start a school for helicopter pilots, where students could gain flight experience as well as experience in transportation.

> **How can we get the regulations to work for us?**

Colourful

Acquiring helicopters wasn't the biggest challenge. In 2005 some students told me: "You're great instructors, but the helicopters you use are not too good. What if we were to buy a good new helicopter and you set up a school?" While they were busy purchasing a new helicopter, we prepared the documents for the flying school.

We also looked for helicopters that for some reason had been on sale for a long time. Apparently nobody wanted them. One of them was quite colourful, or according to some, hideous. But this one had a cockpit

with many instruments, ideal for our school. So we bought it. The colours didn't bother us; in fact, they made our helicopter school incredibly visible.

Location
We wanted Rotor & Wings to settle at Lelystad airport and announced our plans to rent a hangar there. Our competitor, however, was not at all keen on the idea. They had a monopoly on the civilian market for helicopter flights – such as camera flights and transport – and wanted to keep it that way. Besides, they had a lot of influence at the airport. And so we were told that the maximum number of flight movements – take-offs and landings – in Lelystad was already being used by the competitor. We were not allowed to settle there. We then flew for a while from a heliport and a small airport nearby.

We were quite successful. After a while we were operating six helicopters from five different locations but that was not allowed by the authorities:
Them:	You have to have an office."
Us:	"We do have."
Them:	"Yes, but not at an airport".
Us:	"But we haven't been granted a business permit."
And our competitor said: "They don't have an office, so they have to close".

Despite this opposition, we wanted to expand and become a Flight Training Organization. This requires a permit from the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management and you need to have your own school building. Furthermore, this building has to have several classrooms, at the very least a staff room, a classroom, a crew room and an operations room. And toilets for men and women.

Emergency exit
Renting a space was a problem, so we started searching for the possibilities within the regulations. Can you run an office from a Portacabin? Browse, browse, browse through the pages of the Code. It doesn't say it's not allowed, so it should be possible. Can the Portacabin have wheels? Scroll, scroll, scroll through the Code. Yes, it can. We were then able to obtain a library trailer from the library in Assen. A classic Scania truck.

Using partitions we made sure we had three rooms in the Scania, so actually one too few. But during the day we were flying, so we called one of the rooms the operations room. And in the evening when we couldn't fly and were teaching, the same space was used as a classroom. According to the regulations, this is allowed.

We even built a toilet in the truck, but officially a school must have both a ladies' and a gents'. So we bought a small sign that could be switched to ladies or gents. Was that allowed? The officials agreed that the rules were a bit over the top, so they approved the toilet anyway. This time without having to browse through the pages of the Code. For the emergency exits we also had to use a trick. Did they have to be doors? Well, the regulations specified nothing on that. So it may be a roof hatch? Er … probably. So now we have three emergency exits!
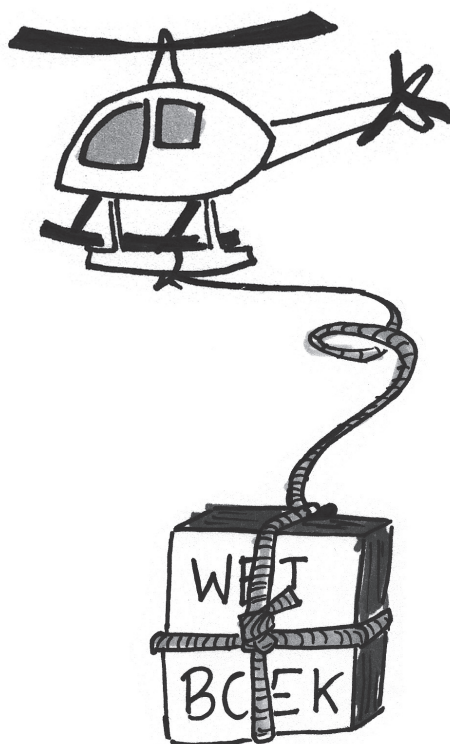
Parking

We had a good relationship with the officials involved. After all, we always complied with the rules and inquired what was and wasn't allowed and under what conditions. So in the end they said: go ahead. And that is how we got our business permit. We put the truck at the airport, temporary parking was allowed! We were tolerated and finally had our official office. And since it was mobile, we had an office at all the airports and locations we operated from.

Nevertheless, at each audit it was checked whether the truck, the office, really was there. We took photos to prove it: look, we are now at place X or at airport Y. It was also good advertising, as we drove our conspicuous Scania over the motorway and visited air shows. It even resulted in some new students.

By now we have become a big customer at Lelystad airport instead of a bunch of adventurers. We have occupied an abandoned building that had been a thorn in the flesh to the airport for a long time and have refurbished the building beautifully.

Every field an airfield

Lelystad Airport closes at six o'clock in the evening, seven at weekends. After that there's nowhere else to land a chopper. However, there is a rule that says you can use "temporary and individual use of non-designated aerodromes". For a helicopter though, any little field can be an airfield. In fact, an airfield is no challenge at all for helicopters; it's a much more interesting experience to take off and land outside airports. As a matter of fact you only need 25 square metres. So we regularly ask farmers if we can use their fields. It helps us and the farmers are happy as well, because they find it splendid that we come along with our helicopter. And of course, occasionally, we do arrange a flight for them and their children.

There's one limitation: a temporary permit like this is granted for twelve movements: twelve take-offs and landings. Fortunately, you can apply for a permit again for one kilometre away. So if a neighbour asks the farmer, "How did you arrange those sightseeing flights? I want that too!", the next permit is settled quickly. "How far from here do you live? Just over one kilometre? Perfect!"

Squatters

It's fascinating how good authorities are at inventing new rules. For example, you may not land within 250 metres of the front door of a house. We had a strange situation in the province of Utrecht. To our surprise, we didn't get a permit even though we didn't intend landing near a house. It turned out that there was an energy company's measuring and control station nearby. Normally no problem, but ... it was being squatted by someone and suddenly it was considered a residence! Fortunately, the solution was simple: we just landed across the ditch, which was well outside the range of 250 metres.

Taxi

During the Visserijdagen (Fishermen Days) in Harlingen we wanted to arrange sightseeing tours for the public. The landing area in the town centre was too small and therefore too dangerous. We found a field two kilometres outside the centre. The question was: How can we drive people to and fro in an affordable way? The local taxi company wanted 700 euro a day! Our first creative solution, the local bus museum, asked for 650 euro. Still far too much, so we decided to drive a minibus ourselves. The taxi company didn't agree with this idea: "You don't have a taxi permit".

So once again we immersed ourselves in the regulations. There turned out to be a ministerial ruling for a different topic: if you pick up children with a van to take them to the nursery, it counts as childcare and the main objective is not earning money from the transportation. So you don't need a taxi permit. The same rule applies to related activities, according to the ruling. We thought our sightseeing flights were also covered by related activities and therefore didn't have to apply for a permit for taking people back and forth. Since then we have kept a copy of the regulations in our car, in case we are asked for a permit, with the words related activity underlined in green.

Cross on the map

We try to use a creative approach to the rules, but that also means we have to take responsibility. An example showing that we do so is that we have never had a complaint about noise disturbance. Our phone number is written large on our van. We always say: if there's a risk of nuisance, talk directly to us and not to the authorities. They won't be back until Monday, and we can do something about it right now. There was a very ill woman, who was lying in bed all day

next to an open window. The sound of a helicopter is not really welcome in that kind of situation. So we put a cross on the flight map and our pilots gave it a wide berth. Simple.

By now, Rotor & Wings has grown into a full-size flying school that offers every possible training for helicopters and aircraft: from private pilot to commercial pilot with Multi Engine Instrument Ratings. This makes them the first and only one in the Netherlands and surrounding countries. Their transport permit ensures that professional pilots can make the required experience hours so they can move on to a job in the large aviation sector. The concept works!

www.rotorandwings.nl

The link with Simplifying
Probably Rob hasn't given much thought to ways of simplifying to accomplish his goals. It's just his mindset for 100%. He has an enormous amount of creativity and perseverance and he makes things happen with great ease. Still, we see some principles of simplifying coming to the fore in his example.

Million-Dollar Question
Rotor & Wings' first challenge – how do we get hold of helicopters – illustrates how you can combine thinking about money and thinking about resources. It's a matter of focusing on the core question: What do you really need? Do you need money for helicopters? Or do you need helicopters? In this example, both methods seem to succeed.

A journey of 1000 miles...
When Rob and his colleagues come up against a complex task, they first chop it up into bite-sized chunks. Then they select the quick wins. Those successes give you the energy and motivation to take on the next challenges. For example, if they want to apply for a permit, they first go to the authorities to tell them which procedure they want to follow. They ask exactly what is needed and who they need to talk to. Small steps, but the sooner you get to the right person, the sooner you achieve your goals.

Working around the system

Regulations play an important role in the aviation industry. Rob attaches great value to operating fully in accordance with the original intent of the rules. Safety and quality are a high priority to him. He just often happens to have a different view on the interpretation of the rules. The Rotor & Wings team does its homework well and thereby challenges many authorities. They always wonder how they can make the regulations work for them. Rob continuously questions the purpose of the rules and challenges the right people to investigate these rules further. By navigating through the system of regulations, he always succeeds in getting one step closer to achieving his goal: to have his helicopter school grow and thrive.

Can it be done more simply? It certainly can! We tend to make projects and organizations unnecessarily complicated. And if we don't do it ourselves, others do it for us. Before you know it, a beautiful plan or project turns into hassle and the momentum is gone.

Simplifying is a method to bring focus to projects, to move from complex to simple and from hassle to flow. Unravel a project, get rid of all the side issues and frills and you'll see what it's really about again. The next steps in realizing the project become crystal clear and you can start acting. For organizations, simplifying is a way to discover or rediscover the core of their existence: Why we do what we do?

Simplifying is playful and deadly serious at the same time. It starts with the mindset that simpler is often better and ends with an easier realization of projects and more dynamic organizations.

In Simplifying Jan-Peter Bogers describes how to recognize avoidable hassle and plumb the depths of complexity. Five key questions, six energy drains and a toolbox with 27 techniques will help you to simplify. Numerous examples and case studies show how simplifying works in practice.

'Simplifying is a different vision on organizing. It makes projects comprehensible and manageable, which clears the way for taking action' – Marcel Jongmans (@enthousiasmeur)

'Actually, this book should be mandatory reading for everybody who is involved in projects and other complex organizational stuff' – Martijn Aslander (international speaker and author of Easycratie)

'A book for people who want to attack complexity with a filleting knife. Simplifying demands meticulous craftsmanship' – Jaap Peeters (author and specialist on organizing 'Rijnlands')

SIMPLIFYING WAS NOMINATED FOR BEST MANAGEMENT BOOK OF THE YEAR 2014 IN THE NETHERLANDS

From the jury report: Jan-Peter Bogers makes it crystal clear that we too often lose track of the essence of what we do and get bogged down in the swamp of complexity. While it all began with a simple idea. The book invites us to apply the techniques on a small and large scale and contributes to what managers aim for: getting things done!

Jan-Peter Bogers is organization and project consultant, speaker and trainer. He focuses on team collaboration, vision processes and translating vision into action. He knows to entice people to simplify and take action and gets new and stalled projects on track.

Bas Bakker is "comprehensive illustrator". He literally illustrates the essence of ideas, processes and stories. In doing so, he creates overview and sets professionals, teams and organizations in motion.

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