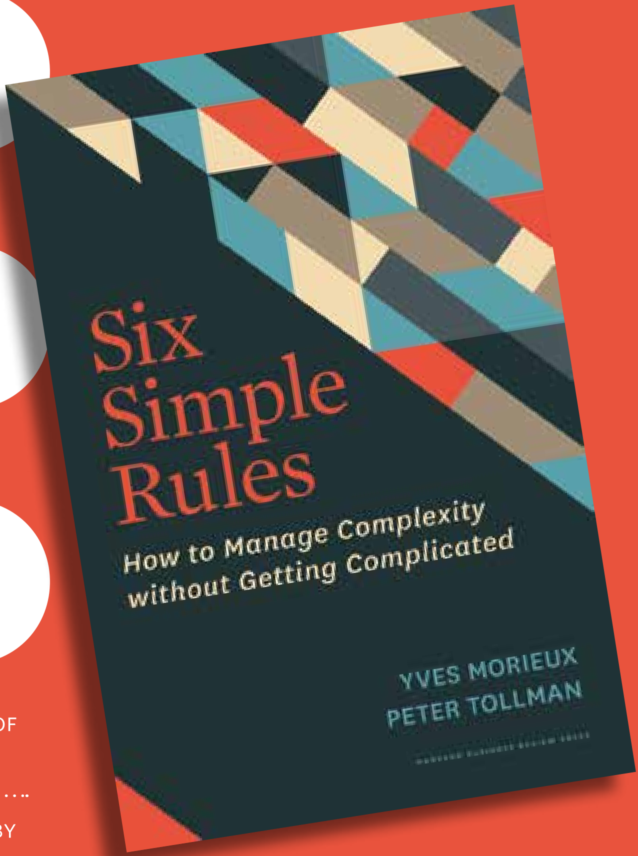
Challenge conventional wisdom and apply **six simple rules.**



INTRODUCING SIX SIMPLE RULES OF SMART SIMPLICITY®

HIGHLIGHTS FROM A NEW BOOK BY THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP

How do companies
create value and
achieve competitive advantage
in an age of
increasing complexity?

Why organizations need the six simple rules...

The world is getting more complex

- More stakeholders with more demands
- More customers with more choices
- More markets—at home and abroad
- More requirements
- More difficult to create value
- More conflicting demands and faster changes

Businesses respond by getting more complicated

- More procedures, processes, layers, structures, and scorecards
- More time spent managing work… and less time actually doing it; you work harder—at meetings and e-mails—but you're not adding value

In 1955, businesses typically committed to between **four** and **seven** performance imperatives. Today they commit to between **25** and **40**.

The BCG Complexity Index shows complexity has gone up **sixfold** since 1955.

In the top 20 percent of complicated organizations, managers spend...

- More than **40 percent** of their time writing reports
- Between **30 and 60 percent** of their total work hours in coordination meetings

The BCG Institute for Organization shows that the number of procedures goes up **6.7 percent** a year. That's a **35-fold increase** over the 55 years we studied.

When we reflect on our work with the companies we have served over the years—500 or more in all kinds of industries in more than 40 countries—what we remember most vividly is rarely the specific problem that caused a business leader to call us in. Rather, what comes to mind is the people—an airline maintenance worker, a head of R&D, a hotel receptionist, a sales director, a train driver, a CEO—all of whom were facing more or less the same situation. They confronted a challenge that seemed impossible—increased complexity in their business.

To meet the challenges of complexity, these people had tried applying the "best" management thinking and following the "best practices" of the day. And those practices had failed to bring them success in their efforts in creating value.

What's striking is how poorly served these people were by the conventional wisdom in management—the management theories, models, and practices developed over the past hundred years. Instead of helping these people manage the growing complexity of business, all the supposed solutions only seemed to make things worse. There had to be a better way, and through on-the-ground work with organizations and their talented and motivated people, we have battled-tested a new approach.

Over, now, to the Six Simple Rules of *Smart Simplicity*®...

Yves Morieux
Peter Tollman

Complexity can be a good thing...

- It affects everyone—so if you can master it, you win.
- The winners will be the companies that can transform complexity into competitive advantage.

But it's never good to be complicated...

- Rules, procedures, and structures get in the way of performance and make organizations worse, not better.
- Organizations get rigid... and can't respond, especially when it comes to making judgments about conflicting requirements.
- People work harder on activities that add less and less value... and make less of a difference.

Organizations take one of two approaches—or sometimes both. And they're both wrong.

The hard approach: structures, processes, systems, and financial incentives

- This approach assumes that systems are predictable and people are the weak link in the chain of reliability. Systems are designed to control people.

The soft approach: team building, people initiatives, off-site retreats, focus on leadership style, and emotional incentives

- This approach assumes that performance depends on interpersonal relationships and psychology rules. Therefore, if you appeal to people's psychological needs, you can control them.

Both of these approaches seek to achieve control. In so doing, they make organizations complicated—slower, more bureaucratic, bogged down in process, and, more important, unable to manage the complexity of the environments in which they operate.

What's needed is:

- Less-direct control based on the hard and soft approaches
- Fewer systems
- More flexibility
- More autonomy

Such an organization is nimble—and better able to respond to complexity because it better leverages people's judgment and energy. It achieves *Smart Simplicity®*.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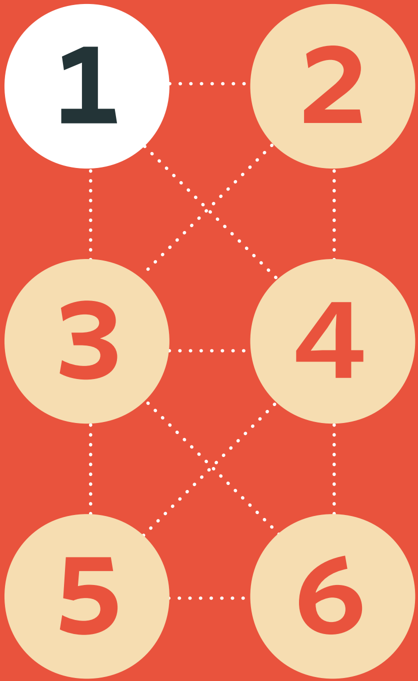


Rule One:

Understand What Your People Do

Find Out
What's Really Happening in Your Organization

Know the *contexts that shape behaviors*—what's *really* happening in your organization. Learn how your people cooperate, find resources, and solve problems—or fail to do so.

To analyze context, you must understand goals, resources, and constraints.

- ***Goals:*** What people are trying to achieve, or the problems they're trying to solve
- ***Resources:*** What people use to achieve their goals or solve their problems—for example, time, information, budget, power, skills, strengths, and the cooperation of colleagues
- ***Constraints:*** The things that hinder or restrict people from achieving their goals—so they try to avoid, minimize, or sidestep them. They might include performance targets, rules, or dependency on others. But remember—one person's constraint is another's resource.

The problem: A major hotel chain faced low profitability and falling share price—due primarily to low occupancy rates and poor per-room revenue. Customer satisfaction levels were also low.

What they tried: First, the "hard" approach. They restructured and reengineered, redefined and recast employees' roles, and rolled out a computerized yield-management system. Nothing changed. Management committed to double its share price in three years—which terrified employees but didn't improve performance.

Then they added the "soft" approach. They conducted more surveys and learned that customer satisfaction was even lower than they'd imagined. Receptionists had high turnover—they must be the source of the problem. So management sent the receptionists to "guest engagement" training and created more rules, scorecards, and processes, along with incentives to sell rooms. And things got worse.

What was really wrong: The real problem was a chain reaction. Rooms were made up late—or were held out of service due to maintenance problems. That made guests angry. Housekeeping saw maintenance issues but didn't call them in—they were incentivized to clean rooms as fast as they could, and repairs would slow them down. Receptionists had limited options—give angry customers rebates or transfer them to other rooms. So they kept rooms in reserve—that's why profits and occupancy rates were low. The receptionists were trying to solve the problem with the only resources they had.

What worked: The chain ditched their hard and soft programs. Instead, they gave receptionists power over housekeeping and maintenance so that all could cooperate to solve customer problems—without giving rooms away. In addition, they changed management career paths and required managers to work in more than one function, so they could learn what other functions did and how they all fit together.

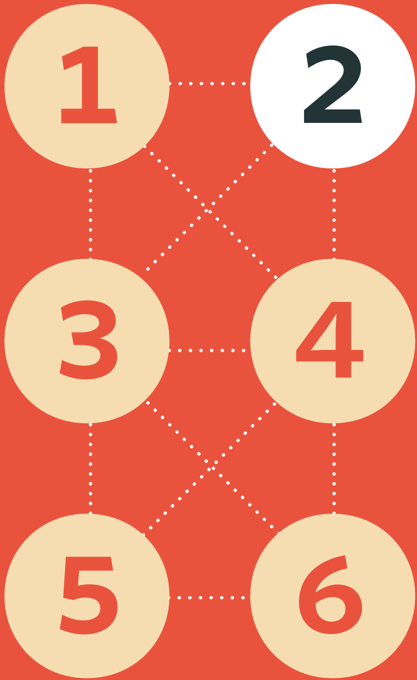
The result: The chain didn't double its share price in three years—it *tripled* it.

Key questions to ask your people in order to understand their contexts:

- What are the ***most interesting and frustrating aspects of your job.*** Why?
- What are the ***key problems*** you have to deal with?
- How do you ***solve*** them?
- How ***do you know if your solutions work***?
- Who do you have to ***interact*** with to do your job?

Keep in mind:
Behaviors are rational solutions in a particular context

- People always have reasons for the things they do
- Every behavior is a solution to a problem



Rule Two:

Reinforce Integrators

Look for Cooperation.
Hint: You'll Find It Where People Are Resented

This is part of knowing the context: Find out how *cooperation* happens—and *who makes it happen*.

Identify the "integrators"—the people and units who bring others together and drive processes. Eliminate layers and rules and give the integrators the power, authority, and incentives to make the entire task succeed.

Cooperation defined

Cooperation means improving the effectiveness of others in the creation of a joint output by taking their needs and constraints into account. It involves creating an end product that's more than the sum of its parts. The focus is on the result. In this respect, cooperation differs from collaboration and coordination, which are about process. Collaboration is about teamwork and good interpersonal relationships, which could even lead to the avoidance of real cooperation. Coordination means taking interdependencies into account. When you collaborate or coordinate, it's easy to avoid confrontations and hard choices. Not so when you cooperate—because you are working together on a single "thing." Cooperation is a demanding activity. It involves taking individual risks because individual contributions to the joint output can't be directly measured. People only cooperate when, by cooperating, they can win as individuals.

The problem: A telecom-system manufacturer was taking more than 30 months to develop each new release of its network hardware and software. The industry benchmark was 20 months. Profit margins and market share were declining while defects increased.

What they tried: Management surveyed the three engineering groups assigned to the project, as well as the project managers. They found out that only one of the engineering groups was meeting its deadlines. They also learned that all the engineers were angry with each other—and they particularly hated the high-performing group. No one had strong feelings about the project managers, one way or the other.

What was really wrong: The real heart of the problem—ironically—was the high-performing group. The other engineering groups had to struggle to incorporate customer feedback into their new designs. The high-performing group was responsible for a component that was governed by international standards—so it didn't have to change much. This meant they were able to deliver on time. As a result, the other engineers had to do even more work—they had to make additional changes to accommodate and integrate with the only component that was already finished.

What worked: The company eliminated the project managers, who had no power and were just serving as middlemen. (The fact that no one cared about them was a sign that they weren't adding value.) They made the high-performing engineering group accountable for delays, not just in their component but in *the entire system*. The high performers had to go to marathon meetings with angry customers—and come up with ways to cooperate better with the other engineers. They became the integrators.

The result: After 15 months, the company was beating industry benchmarks for speed to market by 20 percent while matching competitors on cost and quality. And no delays were passed from one release to the next.

Integrators aren't coordinators

- An effective integrator has both an ***interest*** in making others cooperate and the ***power*** to impel them to do so.

How to identify integrators

- ***They love or hate their job.*** This means they are at a nexus where constraints and requirements meet.
- ***They are loved or hated by others.*** This shows they have their hands on the levers of cooperation and are using this power to their own advantage.
- ***They are never met with indifference.*** Indifference is a sign that people have no power to "force the issue" and impel cooperation.
- ***They are at the center of tension.*** Tension in this case can be a good thing. It might mean that people are doing the hard work of cooperating. A lack of tension might mean that people are avoiding cooperation.

Turn managers into integrators

- ***Remove managerial positions*** if they don't influence people to cooperate.
- ***Minimize rules.*** Too many rules keep managers from exercising judgment.
- ***Rely on judgment over metrics.*** Cooperation cannot be measured directly—it's impossible to say who contributes what. Turn managers into integrators by relying on their judgment instead of pseudo-precise metrics.

Rule Three:

Increase the Total Quantity of Power

More Power to More People!

Power isn't a zero-sum game. Increasing the total quantity of power available in the organization allows managers to think about and act on more performance requirements. This supports strategy and leadership… and helps organizations respond to the demands of complexity. Creating power can be a small matter—like giving store managers control over staffing—and it doesn't necessarily look "strategic." But it can have a real impact on performance.

Power defined

Power is the possibility for one person to make a difference on issues—or stakes—that matter to someone else. Because *A* can make a difference on issues that matter to *B*, then *B* will do things that he or she would not have done without *A*'s intervention. As such, power is not directly a function of someone's position in a hierarchy or of authority granted by some third party.

Stakes defined

A stake is something that matters to people or that makes a difference to them. A stake can be either positive or negative, something that a particular individual or group either wants to have or wants to avoid.

Rule Three Case Study

The problem: A retailer was losing ground to competitors. Discounters were undercutting it on price, and specialty stores offered better selection. Market share, foot traffic, and sales were all declining.

What they tried: Management told local store managers to run promotions to appeal to their customers. Pick the products, change the displays, arrange discounts, revamp the look and feel. They failed—and actually avoided launching the promotions altogether.

What was really wrong: In recent years, the retailer had "modernized" and centralized. Key decisions—about product assortment and availability, pricing and staffing—were made at headquarters. Store departments focused on their own priorities, with no desire to support new things like promotions or events. Store managers had little power. Without resources, they stopped trying.

What worked: Management needed a way to give more power to the managers. To do that, they had to identify a stake that would matter to everybody concerned.

A central issue was customer satisfaction—as measured by the time customers had to wait in line. One solution to the problem would be to open up new checkout counters as soon as lines got too long. These counters would have to be staffed by employees from the store departments—who would have to interrupt other work. So checkout duty calls mattered to them.

What if the managers, instead of the department heads, got to pick the employees who went to checkout? Management tried this—they created a new stake that gave the managers a new base of power.

Seem trivial? It wasn't. Store managers got to make a difference. They were able to use checkout duty as a reward—and find out about the employees' workload. Employees had reason to listen to the store manager, so they listened about other things as well. Since store managers controlled key aspects of performance, the central functions had to listen to them as well.

The result: Customer wait times dropped and satisfaction levels shot up. And as store-specific promotions, design, and pricing programs finally got traction, market share, foot traffic, and sales improved sharply in all stores.

Three myths about power

- ***Power is an attribute of position.*** No. Reporting lines are just formal conventions without any automatic effect.
- ***Authority is equivalent to power.*** Wrong. Authority provides the legitimacy to exercise power, not power itself.
- ***Power is an attribute of individuals and their leadership style.*** Again, not true. Personal attributes and style may be ways to exercise power but they don't determine whether an individual has power in the first place.

Why you must create new power centers

- ***Power determines the capacity to impel cooperation***—and that's essential for addressing business complexity.
- Therefore ***power in the organization needs to be more than a zero-sum game***. If someone always loses power as others gain it, then, there will always be someone without the power to impel cooperation.
- ***New power helps*** the organization. You can ***channel the intelligence of more people against more fronts***. The organization becomes more flexible, adaptive, and effective.

When to add power

- Think about increasing the total quantity of power whenever you consider changing your organization's structure, processes and systems. See if creating new power bases could satisfy more requirements in dealing with complexity.

Rule Four:

Increase Reciprocity

Make Cooperation Happen

Work is becoming more interdependent. That means that people need to rely more on each other—and cooperate directly instead of relying on dedicated interfaces, coordination structures, or procedures. Those things make life complicated—while "reciprocity," which ensures that people have a mutual interest in cooperation (and that their success depends on each other), makes people cooperate more autonomously and, therefore, makes organizational life simpler.

Reciprocity defined

Reciprocity is the ***recognition by people or units in an organization that they depend on each other to achieve their goals.*** To create reciprocity, it's necessary to make people dependent on one another—for example, by removing resources.

Rule Four Case Study

The problem: An industrial company faced with declining quality set out to increase investment in research and development. So they had to cut costs in other areas.

What they tried: They ordered the purchasing department to reduce costs by 20 percent with no erosion of supply quality.

The purchasing unit involved two roles: "category strategists," who figured out how to buy goods and "buying" units, who executed the strategy.

They failed. Finger-pointing ensued. The category strategists said the buying units didn't implement the strategies properly. The buying units said the strategists cared only for their strategy and not what the buying units really needed.

Meanwhile, operating units bypassed the purchasing department altogether and did their own buying. Of course, that made it much harder for purchasing to haggle for better prices later.

What was really wrong: The three "players"—the strategists and buying units within purchasing, and the operating units doing their own buying—were isolated from each other. They didn't share objectives—therefore their work didn't overlap. What we had here was a failure to cooperate.

What worked: First, the company clarified objectives for each unit. The strategists were to develop innovative buying strategies. The purchasing units were to develop the skills of team members. Then, they created "overlap objectives"—the strategies had to be practical and the buyers had to follow them. This forced the strategists and the buyers to cooperate. They formed a **"community of practice"** that lifted everyone's skills.

The company also cut the purchasing budgets of the operating units—who were then compelled to cooperate with the purchasing department, since they no longer had the resources to do their own buying.

The combined effect of rich, overlapping objectives and reduced budgets was to force all the players to work together.

The result: The purchasing department met its targets for cost reduction. Supply quality did not decline.

How to create reciprocity

- ***Eliminate internal monopolies.*** They kill cooperation because they don't need to take into account the needs and constraints of others.
- ***Remove resources.*** If you take away the extra TVs in a household, people will have to cooperate to decide what to watch on the one remaining TV.
- ***Create "multiplexity": Networks of interaction.*** Put people in situations (such as communities of practice) where they have to address mutual performance requirements.

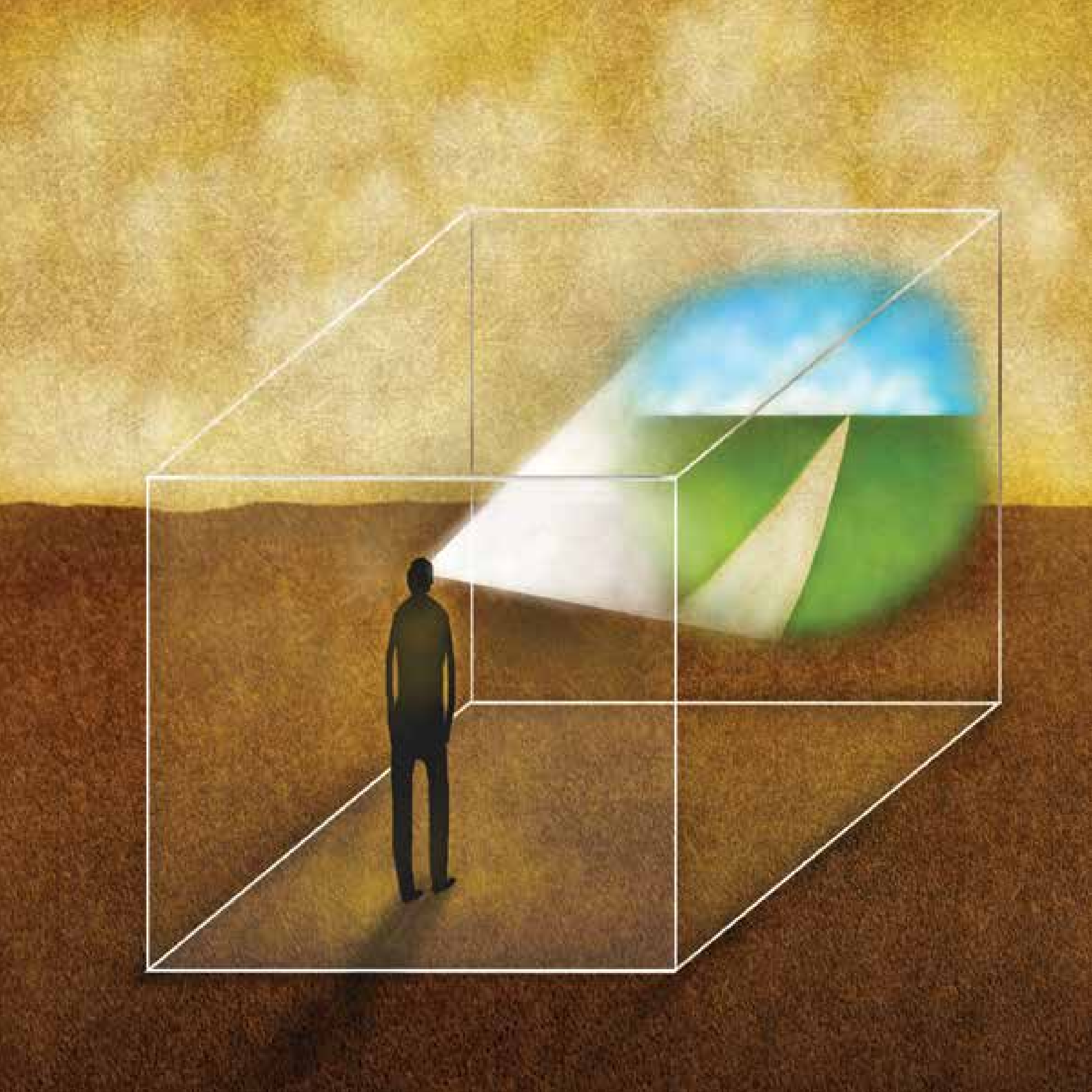
Misconceptions about roles and objectives

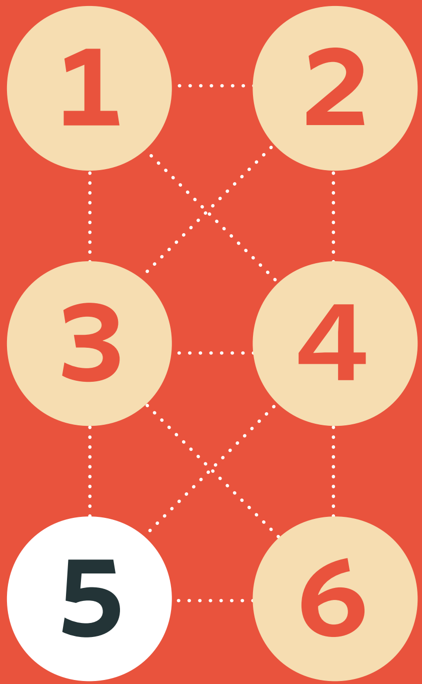
- ***The more clarity, the better.*** No. A certain degree of fuzziness can be a good thing.

  A relay race team works best when some objectives are defined (the first runner needs to get out of the blocks quickly) but others are left up to the runners (where exactly on the course to pass the baton to your teammate).
- ***Cooperation dilutes personal responsibility.*** Or, "if everybody is responsible then nobody is responsible." But interdependency makes it impossible to parse the amount of each person's responsibility.

  Two relay racers are jointly responsible in the short distance where the handoff takes place. If the baton drops, both are at fault.
- ***Interdependency destroys accountability.*** "How can I be responsible for results that depend on the performance of others?" It's wrong to think we can be accountable for our work only if we are the sole authority over it and control all the resources.

  Each runner is responsible for the performance of the entire team.





Rule Five:

Extend the Shadow of the Future

Actions Have Consequences—
and Living the Consequences Boosts Performance

Increase the importance to people of what happens tomorrow as a consequence of what they do today. By making simple changes, you can manage complex requirements while making the organization less complicated.

“The shadow of the future” defined

The term “the shadow of the future” comes from game theory. It means that people have to experience the consequences that result from what they do today.

Rule Five Case Study

The problem: An international vehicle manufacturer was struggling to meet a range of requirements—cost, safety, product size, energy efficiency, and resistance to corrosion.

What they tried: In a phrase, "strategic alignment." They went all out: different functions standardized their product platforms to achieve economies of scale, project units customized products, engineering divisions were organized according to both marketing and technical requirements. There were roles, processes, key performance indicators, and incentives.

Then a competitor added to the complexity—they offered a five-year warranty, in contrast to the manufacturer's two-year warranty. The manufacturer had to match or beat that. But there was this issue: the manufacturer's vehicles were shockingly difficult to repair. An extreme example: to fix the headlights, engineers had to remove the engine. There was no other way to get to the headlights. A headlight repair was hugely expensive—and took three days. A competitive warranty seemed to be out of the question.

The company added a new "repairability" function to the product design process. It failed.

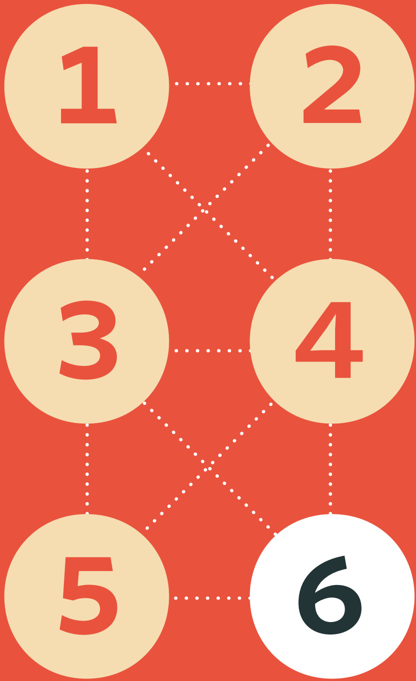
What was really wrong: Creating a new function didn't work because that wasn't where the problem was. The problem was that engineering teams were each pursuing their own goals. To make a particular vehicle compact, design engineers took space away that the electrical engineers needed for wiring. That's why the repair departments couldn't get at the wires—and had to remove the whole engine to fix the lights.

What worked: The problem wasn't lack of alignment—it was lack of cooperation. And the solution was devastatingly simple: require the engineering teams to cooperate, and make sure they would have to take repair issues into account. Specifically, some engineers were given future assignments to work in the service network—where they'd have to repair the vehicles they had designed.

The results were spectacular. Once the engineers understood they'd have to deal personally with the consequences of their choices, they began cooperating in earnest—with all the conflict and turbulence that real cooperation generates. By working with each other and with marketing, and by making tough choices, they were able to create vehicles that allowed the manufacturer to match its competitors' warranty without compromising any other goals.

How to extend the shadow of the future:

- ***Tighten the feedback loop*** so people feel consequences more frequently. Have your people interact more frequently with others whose work is affected by their actions.
- ***Bring the end point forward.*** Make sure people's involvement in the work continues to the end point of the activity—the point at which the consequences of their actions show up in collective results.
- ***Tie futures together*** so that success requires contributing to the success of others.
- ***Make people walk in the shoes they make for others,*** so they are exposed to the problems their current behaviors could create.



Rule Six:

Reward Those Who Cooperate

People Think Cooperation Is Risky—
Make It Riskier *Not* to Cooperate

Blame and risk aversion are at the heart of organizational culture. But smart organizations accept that problems happen for many reasons, and the only way to solve them is to reduce the payoff for those who don't contribute to a solution. Performance evaluation and reward systems are the key—but instead of using them to punish failure, use them instead to punish failure to help, or to ask for help.

The right way to tolerate failure

Most organizations punish failure. But that can make people risk averse. On the other hand, taking risk isn't a goal in itself. The challenge is to encourage risk taking that improves performance. And that means encouraging cooperation. People take personal risk—and risk becomes fruitful for the company—when they know they can count on others to compensate, relay, absorb, or provide a safety net in case things go wrong.

The problem: A European rail service was failing in its old strong suit—on-time performance. On-time arrivals had declined below 80 percent. Other rail services—and other modes of transportation—were encroaching on their market. The railroad had to get faster—while keeping up its standards for safety, quality, and cost.

What they tried: The railroad set out to find the heart of the problem. They created a monitoring department to identify the source of the delays.

What was really wrong: The monitoring department was the problem. Its role was not just to investigate the reason for delays but also to find out who was to blame. If a department announced a delay, that department would wind up on monitoring's radar. So departments tried not to alert others. And delays, instead of being caught early, spread through the system as the departments refused to cooperate with each other.

The key to improving performance was to increase cooperation. How to promote it? Units were dispersed across hundreds of miles—so it wasn't easy to make them feel the impact of their actions. And it wasn't practical to extend the shadow of the future by having maintenance staff work as train conductors. The answer lay elsewhere.

What worked: Management changed the evaluation criteria. They announced that once a unit told others it had a problem, *the units that failed to cooperate in solving it would be held responsible for the delay.* The message was radical: **"When another unit causes you to be late, *you* are going to be the one to take the blame."**

There was no longer an incentive to hide delays—in fact, the opposite was true. It was in the interests of those who needed help to be transparent about it and for the others to provide help.

The result: Within four months, on-time performance jumped to 95 percent. It happened without additional equipment, new scheduling systems, or additional trains or teams. There were side benefits—investigations were no longer needed, since everyone was transparent. And surveys showed that employees were happier—because customer relations and hierarchical relationships both improved.

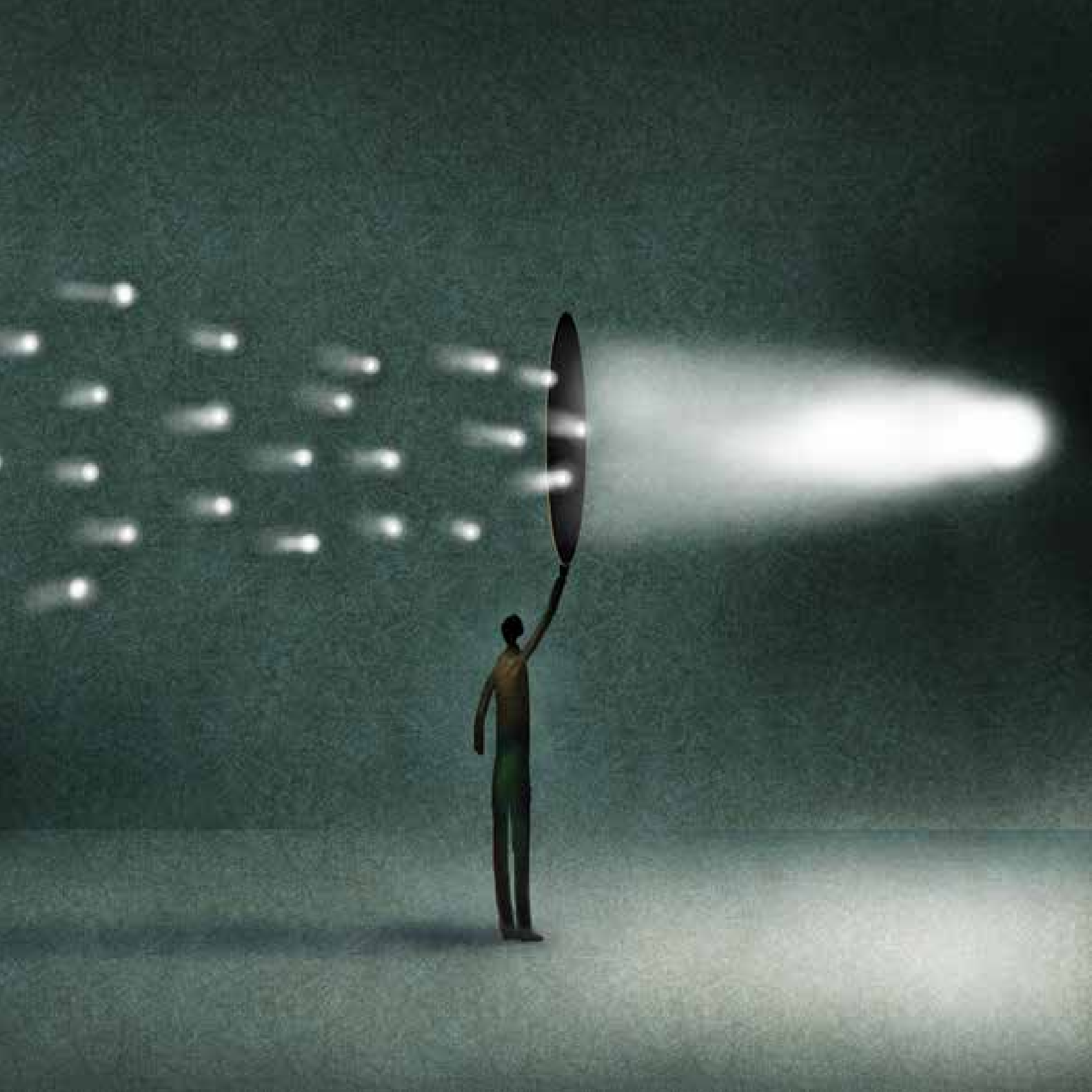
How to reward cooperation

- ***Don't punish or blame people for results***—but do encourage in-depth knowledge of how results were obtained, and who helped out.
- ***Use managers and feedback loops*** to capture how each individual contributes to the effectiveness of others. This makes it more difficult to pass the buck.
- ***Ask the right questions.*** Traditional evaluations make people defensive: "Why aren't you hitting your targets?" To get their people off the defensive, instead ask: *"What do people say when they complain about you?" "What personal risk are you taking in all this?" "How can I help you get the cooperation you need?"* Questions like these get people focused on cooperation—and encourage them to cooperate by reassuring them that they have your support.
- ***Avoid the influence of vested interests.*** Set goals for the best group result, not just the best outcome for your function.
- ***Refuse escalation.*** When decisions get pushed to a higher level, it can mean that peer groups aren't cooperating. By refusing to arbitrate, a manager can promote real cooperation—even if that involves hard work and conflict.

It's About Performance: Why You Should Adopt the Six Simple Rules

The primary goal of the simple rules is to create more value by better managing business complexity. This involves abandoning the hard and soft approaches. In so doing you also remove complicatedness and its costs. Simplification is not a goal in itself, but a valuable by-product of the simple rules.

The simple rules are battle-proven ways to leverage state-of-the-art thinking and practices from the social sciences to **break the vicious cycle of complicatedness, help companies grow, create enduring value, and achieve competitive advantage.**



Making the Six Simple Rules Work in Your Organization

The Six Simple Rules are designed to be practical and fast to implement. These pointers will help you put them to work in your organization...

Use pain points to discover where cooperation is needed:

- "Our on-time performance is too low."
- "Our occupancy rate is below target."
- "Our time to market is too long."
- "Our products aren't innovative enough."

Ask your people what they'd do differently if they were cooperating:

- Make sure they talk in specifics: it's not about "trust" or "responsiveness"; it's about having maintenance tell us when the train will be late.

Have them define the difference that cooperation would make

Find out what's getting in the way of cooperation:

- How do some behaviors lead to other behaviors?
- Learn what goals, resources, and constraints make people do what they're doing now—instead of cooperating. Too many resources? Power that lets them avoid cooperation? Or not enough power to take the risk of cooperating?

Then use the Six Simple Rules to change the context:

- **Understand what your people do** so that managers understand the context.
- **Reinforce integrators.** Take away rules and procedures, and add resources, so both managers and employees can both promote cooperation.
- **Increase the total quantity of power** so that your people are able to engage and cooperate, instead of staying in safe isolation.
- **Increase reciprocity.** Kill monopolies, remove resources, and create new networks of interaction.
- **Extend the shadow of the future.** Take consequences from "down the line" and put them into people's everyday lives so that cooperation happens.
- **Reward those who cooperate.** Make it useful to cooperate and dangerous to avoid cooperation.

Create an action plan based on the realization that:

- Problems aren't personal.
- Change isn't cause for anxiety.
- Buy-in is built in—you won't have to "sell" the solution through corporate communications campaigns because your people built it for themselves, based on real knowledge of their work.

A final note… the day-to-day battle against “best practices”

To improve performance by managing complexity while not getting complicated, you’ll find yourself up against decades of business theory.

Watch out for abstractions that creep back into the discussion, particularly about…

- Reporting lines
- Key performance indicators
- Leadership styles

In place of such abstraction, the organization needs *direct knowledge* of operations.

You can achieve direct knowledge and deal with the real context of the work by constantly and relentlessly asking simple questions:

- What role do you expect this manager to play?
- What value is the manager supposed to add?
- What is the manager supposed to do to make people do what they would not spontaneously do?
- What power basis will the manager have?

The Six Simple Rules show that your intelligence and energy—focused on the day-to-day reality of your business—will make a difference that shows in your organization’s bottom line.

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To learn more

For additional insights and materials, please visit https://www.bcgperspectives.com/sixsimplerules. Yves and Peter are available to talk with the press and organizations.

To join the conversation on Six Simple Rules, please use the Twitter hashtag #6simplerules.

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