

SIMPLIFYING

REALIZING PROJECTS WITHOUT HASSLE

(ENGLISH SUMMARY)

Jan-Peter Bogers



SHORTLIST
MANAGEMENT
BOOK OF THE
YEAR 2014.

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Alle rechten voorbehouden. Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden verveelvoudigd, opgeslagen in een geautomatiseerd gegevensbestand en/of openbaar gemaakt in enige vorm of op enige wijze, hetzij elektronisch, mechanisch, door fotokopieën, opnamen of op enige andere manier zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de uitgever/auteur.

De auteur is echter groot voorstander van het delen van kennis, dus neem gerust contact op via janpeter@versimpelen.info indien je vragen of een verzoek hebt.

Make it as simple as possible.
But not simpler.

Albert Einstein



Saturday morning, 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!

Simplifying.

A note on this English summary

The book *Simplifying - realizing projects without hassle* was originally written in Dutch (*Versimpelen - projecten organiseren zonder gedoe*) for the professional and corporate market in the Netherlands.

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?

A brief translation

My invitation to the PMI Finland Conference in Helsinki challenged me to write a summary in English. It describes all the chapters in a couple of sentences per chapter. Including an introduction of all the tools.

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
- 1 of the case studies.

Curious for more?

I really enjoy sharing my ideas on Simplifying and helping you to make the world of business less complicated. So if this summary triggers you to read more, please persuade me to translate more parts of the book. Choose a chapter and send me an email (see address below) with a request for a translation.

You may also invite me to another international event. That will surely motivate me to translate at least another 30 pages! Introducing me to an international publisher would be great as well.

Special thanks

I started translating this summary myself, both for practice with specific terms and language and for the fun of puzzling with language. I would like to thank Fleur van den Berg for translating the back cover text. Christine Gardner, translator and English native speaker, provided me with corrections and suggestions and helped me transform this translation from acceptable English to 'proper' English.

Enjoy Simplifying!

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Table of Contents

part 1	the theory	9
part 2	the energy drains	14
	Chapter 8 A different approach to Money	14
	Chapter 9 A different approach to Time	14
	Chapter 10 A different approach to Rules	14
	Chapter 11 A different approach to People	15
	Chapter 12 A different approach to Ourselves	15
	Chapter 13 A different approach to Complexity	15
part 3	the toolbox	16
	Chapter 14 Make it small	16
	Zoom in 16	
	Strip to the bone	16
	The mini Action Plan	16
	Chapter 15 Make it big	17
	Big Hairy Audacious Goal	17
	Million-Dollar Question	17
	Groundhog Day	17
	Chapter 16 Make a choice	17
	Limit your choices	18
	Take decisive action	18
	Choose your battle	18
	Chapter 17 Make it sharp	18
	Black-and-white thinking	18
	The quadrant	18
	Clear language	19
	Chapter 18 Make it visible	19
	Brown Paper	19
	Comprehensive illustrating	19

Chapter 19	Deregulate	19
	Working around the system	19
	Permission or forgiveness	20
	Guerrillas and ripple effect	20
Chapter 20	Regulate	20
	Backward planning	20
	The project triangle	20
Chapter 21	The right people	21
	The 7 roles	21
	The director and the doorman	21
	Pits and machines	21
Chapter 22	The right questions	21
	Why? Why? Why?	21
	The clever How	22
	Dare to ask	22
Chapter 23	Do it!	22
	A journey of a thousand miles	22
	The power of the experiment	22
part 4	cases of simplifying	23
Chapter 24	The helicopter school	23
Chapter 25	Jimmy's	23
Chapter 26	The maritime museum	23
Chapter 27	The flexible civil servant	23
Chapter 28	Hans is falling behind	23
Chapter 29	There's my iMac!	24
Chapter 30	This book	24
part 5	more reading	25

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 inter-related 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.

PART 3 the toolbox

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

Accuracy 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 connector.

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 hassle 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 complex 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>

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.

