Reduce Complexity
| **The Simplicity Cycle Tool**

The Simplicity Cycle equips users with a visual vocabulary for discussing complexity and simplicity in a design. The framework aids with assessing and expressing the value of adding or removing design elements.

WHEN

Introduce this tool in the early phase of a project and use it throughout the development effort. It is applicable to a broad range of activities, from writing code to designing business processes and creating presentations.

WHY

The Simplicity Cycle:

- Helps users chart a development path and identify which tools to use at each phase.
- Helps frame the problem and establish the "definition of done."
- Provides a visual representation the way complexity affects "goodness" in a design.
- Increases focus on the program's actual objectives.
- Provides a visual/kinetic vocabulary for discussing and exploring the impact of complexity.
- Helps the team maintain awareness of different design phases and the tools to be used in each phase.

HOW

STEP 1: Using the Simplicity Cycle framework diagram, identify your project's location on one of the four numbered points listed below. This assessment is typically based on recent actions and tools. (For example, when the team has been adding a lot of features to the system, the project is probably near the Shift or Stop point).

- *START:* The design is simple, basic, immature, and delivers little value. The best move involves adding strategies that increase complexity (e.g., Brainstorming, Prototyping).
- *SHIFT:* The design has accumulated a critical mass of complexity and now delivers significant value. The best move is to adopt reductive strategies that decrease complexity (e.g., Trimming, Stormdraining).
- *STOP:* The design has accumulated too much complexity, which overwhelms value. The best move is to pause, then use reductive tools to significantly reduce complexity.
- *SHIP:* The design is elegant: simple and effective, providing maximum value. Declare it complete and send it out into the world!

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The *yellow arrow* indicates time pushing things in the direction of decreased goodness, as yesterday's breakthroughs become tomorrow's commodities. This brings us back to the start point, where the cycle starts again.

STEP 2: Depending on the project's current location, identify the desired next location. Make a list of action steps and strategies that can help move the project in that direction.

The Simplicity Cycle Tool | Example

1. Simple, basic design that delivers *little value*. The best move from this point involves additive strategies that increase complexity. Key verb at this phase is *start*.

2. Design has accumulated a critical mass of complexity and now delivers *significant value*. The best move from this point involves reductive strategies that decrease complexity. Key verb at this phase is *shift*.

3. Design has accumulated too much complexity, which *overwhelms value*. The best move at this point is significant reduction to reduce complexity. Key verb at this phase is *stop*.

4. Design is now elegant: simple and effective, providing *max value*. Best move at this point is to declare the design complete. Key verb at this phase is *ship*.

5. Yellow arrow indicates time pressure in the direction of decreased goodness, bringing design back to point 1.
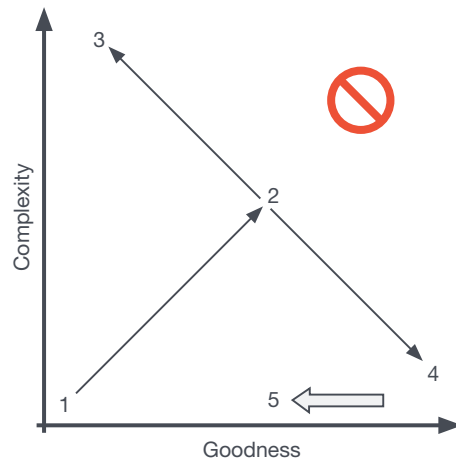
The Simplicity Cycle Tool | Worksheet

Topic:

Goodness is:

Recent Additions/ Impact:	Recent Subtractions/ Impact:

Next Step: Add, Subtract, Pause?

Where are we?
How did we get here?
Where do we go next?

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