

Simple and Usable

web, mobile, and interaction design

Second Edition



Giles Colborne

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**New
Riders** VOICES THAT MATTER™



Part 3

Strategies for simplicity

The change curve

Simplifying something means change, and change always involves pain. Most people put off pain at all costs. We all like to hope that things will get better tomorrow, rather than making painful changes today. So a vision of simplicity always meets with resistance. Often, skeptical stakeholders will try to block change.

It's tempting to deal with this by talking about the gain and avoiding talking about...the pain. But the pain is real, looms larger in people's imaginations, and comes before any gain. You must let people talk about it so they can come to terms with it. Do so, and they'll often talk themselves out of their fears.

Nevertheless, that conversation is complex. If you're talking to many stakeholders, the conversation often goes around in circles, so it helps to sketch out the three stages of change.

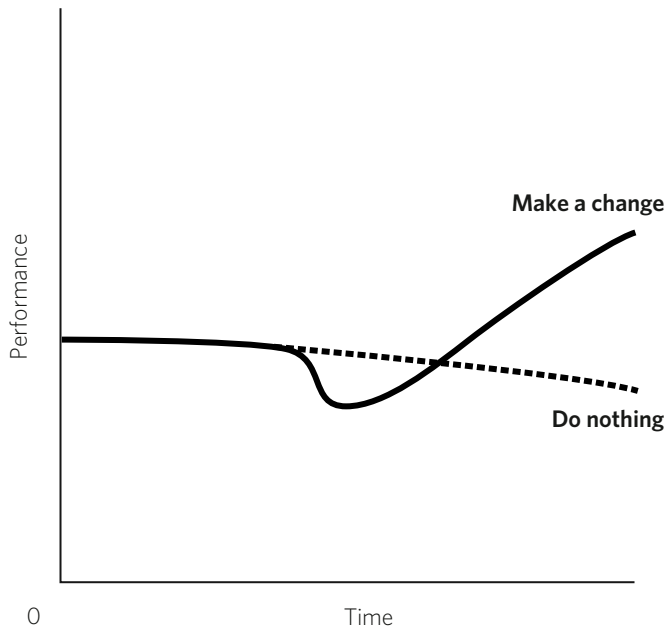
The first stage is the current, all-too-comfortable, situation. The question to ask is, Do you think the solution we have today will still be in use in a hundred years' time? Of course not. Change is inevitable. We simply need to know when it's advantageous to change. It helps to gather evidence to support the need for change (maybe you know your competitor is about to release an update).

The second stage is the pain. When you change something, some of your existing customers will complain, your colleagues will have to adjust, and performance will dip. The question is, How deep and how long will that dip be? That's hard to estimate, even with experience or user research on prototypes. The point is, you know the pain must come, so you can discuss how much you're prepared to bear.

If the change is long and complex, then you may want to run two products in parallel (many websites test changes with a subset of users before gradually releasing them to everyone).

The final stage is the gain. If your new designs are good, you'll see an uplift, which will eventually make up for the pain. Your user research can give you an indication of how big that uplift might be. Sometimes, it's enough to demonstrate that there will be an uplift. Other times, people will want more data, and you'll need large-scale research.

People usually convince themselves of the need for change. Make it their problem: Ask "What will you do about the inevitable change?" Let them talk through their fears, and encourage them to move through the timeline.



**Strategic changes
pay off over time.**

Vision and strategy

As I talk to designers, at every level, in every country I visit, in every type of organization, the same question comes up: How can I get my stakeholders to listen to me? The answer is that you must understand what's in it for them.

Your vision should tell you about your customers, their needs, and how you intend to solve those needs. But to complete the picture, you also need to link that vision back to the organization for which you're working. You need to understand your organization's strategy.

Strategy is a word I hear thrown around a lot by people who want to sound impressive but who don't always have a clear idea of what a strategy is.

The best definition I've come across is disarmingly straightforward. A *strategy* is a diagnosis of the current situation, leading to an insight into a superior solution and a long-term plan for winning.


According to Michael Porter, the author of *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, there are three generic strategies for how a company might pursue competitive advantage in its chosen market. Companies can choose to be different from their competitors (and therefore command a higher price), to operate at a lower cost (and therefore derive greater margins, or more likely charge less), or to specialize by focusing on a particular market or need.

Simplicity looks different depending on which of those strategies your organization is pursuing. If you're differentiating, then you're simplifying to make something uniquely easy (like Stripe's online checkout process). If you're cutting costs, then you're simplifying to drive down costs (like Southwest Airlines). If you're focusing, then you're simplifying to optimize for a specific audience (like GoPro cameras for sports enthusiasts).

Porter felt that organizations should focus on one strategy, but increasingly companies are pursuing hybrid strategies (for instance, by differentiating themselves among other budget airlines). There's always a primary strategy ("be a budget airline") and a secondary one ("be the most enjoyable airline"). In other words, there's always a priority to the design choices you can make.


Whatever the strategy, the goal is to build a secure audience of customers to ensure survival (by generating revenue or ensuring relevance).

Understanding your organization's strategy helps you link your vision to the company's goals and tells you what kinds of simplicity to pursue.



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