

The SIMMER SYSTEM Blueprint

**The Framework for Bringing
Change to Your Organization
Without Ruining It or Your Career**



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Hello, and welcome to the Simmer SystemSM Blueprint!

I'm Douglas Brown, the creator of the Simmer SystemSM, an approach to organizational change that is service-marked with the US Patent and Trade Office. I'm the author of several books based on this system, including:

- Let It Simmer: How to Make Program, Portfolio and Project Management Practices Stick In a Skeptical Organization, and
- Simmer Down! How to Deliver Successful Projects Despite Impossible Deadlines and Unrealistic Budgets.
- Hot Spots: Turn Your Enterprise Risk Management Practice into a Key Driver of Business Performance

You can find out more about these and other books through on our website, <https://decisionintegration.com> at the Resources page. (By the way: there is a way you can get all my books, now and future, for free. Go check it out.)



You'll notice that I don't put out cheapie churn books. For a few bucks you get a couple of hundred pages of solid material filled with examples, practice exercises, case studies and so on. This little book is different: it's short and priced accordingly for those who've heard something about the Simmer System and want to know what it is. For some people, time is money. You've got all the parts here and if you understand your organization and this process well enough, you could follow the blueprint and implement successfully. And if you realize you're going to need a bit of support, whether with how to do it or with getting it done, you know who to come to!

What's the Point of the Blueprint?

I've been a manager and business consultant in a variety of commercial and public-sector settings for over 25 years, and I've got professional certifications in several related disciplines. I can, where it's appropriate, help organizations set up highly-complex management processes. What's different about working with me and using the Simmer System is that I'm willing to tell you that even for large and generally-successful organizations, the traditional "best practices" approach to setting up management approaches, and even the "leading" methods of smoothing the associated organizational changes ... just don't work.

The Simmer System resulted from seeing what works, and what really doesn't work, while instituting changes in dozens of organizations. It helps you get past the internal resistance that is always going to come with any effort to change the way people are doing things, and it helps you focus your efforts on those things that matter most to the organization.

In other words, it will help you get your changes put in place and have them stick when you're not there to make things happen, while avoiding the conflicts and disruption that can make your life as a change agent miserable (and ineffective).

This Blueprint is a complete document. I've shown you all of the elements of the Simmer System - nothing has been left out to make you buy something. You could actually go out and implement the Simmer System by yourself.

But I must caution you that it's only a blueprint. It can't explain in detail how to do each of the steps, the pitfalls, the nuances. It doesn't have the templates and examples. You can get the stories, templates and more from the 275+ pages of "Let It Simmer", plus the other books in the Simmer series. Let It Simmer has had a great reception and it has sold a lot of copies, considering that I'm not a big TV name or professional marketer, but any book has one drawback: it is what it is, once it's published. It can't be customized to your particular situation.

As with most management topics, the hard part of managing change isn't the steps, it's the people. They react differently in every situation. We all know that even the most resistant people don't always object to change: they change things every day. What they do always object to is being changed. You must keep your process dreams largely under wraps, finding ways to slide it into the normal working rhythms of your organization.

In other words, you'll need to work somewhat undercover if you want to be an effective change agent.

Some people are natural politicians. They're probably not even reading this blueprint, because they don't need it: they're very good at getting people to do things for them (although those people may regret it later). I had the drawback of being a very straightforward person; I'm not into pretending, lying, manipulating, or palming off a bait-and switch approach. But it's not dishonest to learn how to encourage people when they want to proceed in a direction that will ultimately work for you, and not to discourage by insisting on driving towards an end goal that they think is impractical or even threatening.

That's what I mean by "undercover": keep your ambitions to yourself if you want to achieve them. Focus on helping people fix their own problems until eventually they find out they have fixed yours too.

Those how-to's are hard to come by in an organization that isn't used to collaboration, or process management, or accountability for results. Rocking the boat too early can be hazardous to your continued tenure, and there will be few people you can ask for help outright. That's why you have to keep it under cover! But it would probably be somewhat reassuring to have a place to turn to for how-to's and ongoing support, and your current colleagues may not be the safest way to do that just yet.

To help you with that, there are Simmer System workshops that provide an intensive hands-on program that will walk you through how you can implement

the Simmer System steps in your organization and provide you with help in tailoring it and adapting it to conditions. Perhaps most importantly, you gain access to an unlimited consulting arrangement that will serve as the "accountability partner" that prods you to finish the current step and move on the next step when the daily turbulence of life and work seem ready to drive your change mission not only under cover but completely underground. Once enrolled in the workshop, you'll also have access to the Catalysts for Change private Facebook group so you can get ideas and encouragement not just from me but also a much wider group of people going through similar experiences – without exposing your concerns to others in your own organization.

If you're already thinking that the workshops could be for you, then come check it out at:

<https://decisionintegration.com/training/>



In this Blueprint, I'll take you step-by-step through the principles and key activities of the Simmer System. My goal is to give you the framework to introduce the changes that you know your organization needs, while overcoming the very normal patterns of resistance and backsliding.

After having worked with dozens of organizations over the years, I have absolute clarity that one person can make a difference, that you're going to bring in a solution to problems that many of your colleagues have also experienced, and they are literally waiting for someone (why not you?) to take this burden off their back.

I also know that they're also a bit nervous that getting freed from that problem might bring on its own problems, and so they'll put up some resistance against the very thing that they actually want.

That's why I created this Blueprint – to help you reach them in a way that encourages them to do the things that move your own objectives forward while all they see is that you are helping to solve their problems.

Where has the Simmer System Worked Before?

The Simmer system evolved over time, so it's got a lot of parents. Many of whom would probably prefer not to be identified! That's why the case studies you'll find in Let It Simmer are anonymized. But here are just a few of the examples:

- An organization that had greatly disparate project management processes across its global divisions couldn't get agreement on which of the three major approaches to adopt enterprise-wide. By focusing down on what they needed to share to get the job done, the divisions were able to adopt a "middleware" approach in which they provided critical information in a common form while retaining their own processes.
- An enterprise that had viciously fought any form of project reporting or oversight accepted help in bringing contract costs under control and, in doing so, ended up implementing both project reporting and oversight.
- A small engineering company focused on its need to pivot to become a regulated manufacturer. Focused on the goal of achieving government certification, its managers chose to inflict on themselves some very robust planning, configuration management and reporting processes, while leaving other processes very informal.
- An organization that had lost complete control over its programs and its staff began requiring monthly mini-plans, as a result of which outsourced work was brought back on schedule, an automated system was brought back on track, and regulatory requirements started being fulfilled.

- In an organization with extremely weak leadership, middle managers banded together to set work priorities and make delivery commitments to one another. Eventually, they formed a robust governance process, leaving the top manager with the responsibility of periodically granting waivers when something needed to be signed.

The common theme in all these cases is that the organizations began with serious internal rifts that were making it impossible to apply "structured" management approaches. Despite what the literature suggests, there was no top cover support for fixing these situations, and it didn't work to appeal to the common survival ethic: the participants seemed quite willing for the entire organization to wallow in ineffectiveness rather than conform to any consistent (read: constraining) process.

The Simmer System evolved after I realized that in all of these cases, what had eventually worked was doing things that appealed to their self-interest of what annoyance they wanted to get off their backs, instead of appealing to what they were "supposed to do". Then it became a matter of finding ways to work together to solve their short-term problems. That resulted in strong, collaborative approaches that ended up quite high on the formal maturity curves despite the initial refusal to have anything to do with it.

Of course, and by law I have to say this, these results may not happen for everyone. I cannot in full integrity say that if you follow the principles of the Simmer System and use the methods I teach, that the same thing will happen for you. Some organizations just aren't ready to change. In fact, some authors talk about the concept of "anti-maturity" and when it might be better just to start looking for another organization, although I think for most people that's a bit impractical (at least until a better offer comes along).

What I can tell you is:

- If you try to follow the usual recommended approach but find that the necessary conditions are not in place, and decide to wait until they are, you will be stuck with the current problem forever. Those issues will never change on their own.
- If you realize that the “usual” (although in fact very rare) conditions are not in place but you follow the “usual” track without using the Simmer System ... well, has your organization gone through the motions of adopting substantial changes before? And here we are, trying to do it again. And where, by the way, is the person who tries running that effort last time?
- The examples cited in the Simmer books do reflect exactly what did happen (although names have been changed for obvious reasons), and similar results are certainly possible
- Many of the people who have read my Simmer books tell me that they thought I must have been talking about their organization. Believe me, you're not alone in having these challenges to work with!

There is a great sense of gratification in bringing a tough initiative through to completion, and having it deliver the all results you had hoped for and more. Not only are you doing something good for your organization and making your peer group's lives easier; it makes you feel a lot better about yourself and your employer to know that you're not crazy and they're not psychotic. Your professional values are not out of touch with reality, and you're not the process-obsessed impractical maniac everyone was accusing you of being. You did a great job keeping it to yourself, but the stress from being treated that way was there all along, ruining your enjoyment of work and your downtime at home. Your family will thank you!

There's a lot to cover in the Simmer System Blueprint, so let's get started. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this report and, more importantly, to

hearing how you've managed to break through the inertia and generated brilliant results.

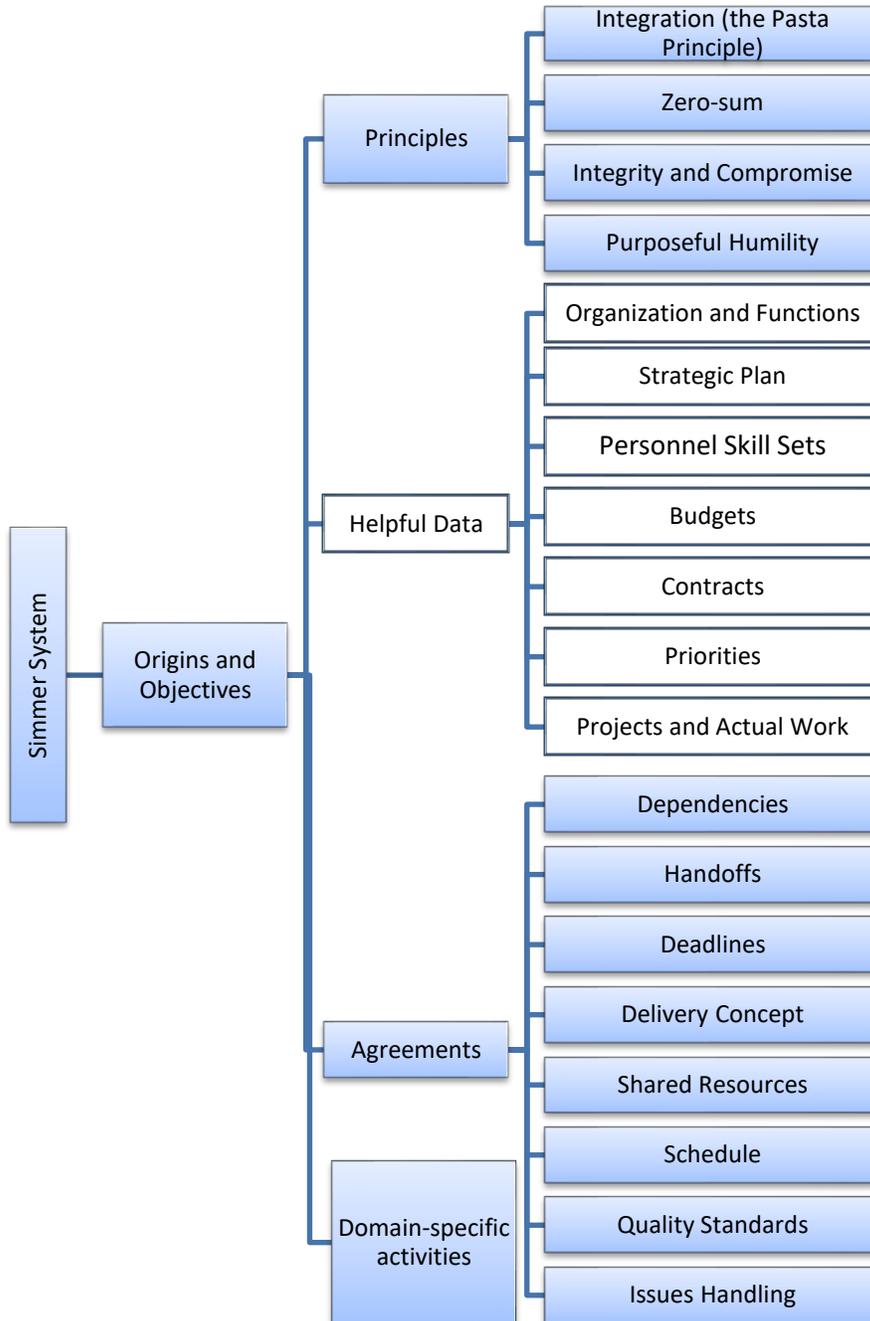
If this is making sense to you, even though it's a bit unconventional, I look forward to welcoming you at a Simmer System workshop. The link was provided above. If that's too much of a commitment, try out one of the Simmer System books, which will give you access to the people and resources in the Simmer Community (www.simmer-system.com).

Scan to get more resources:

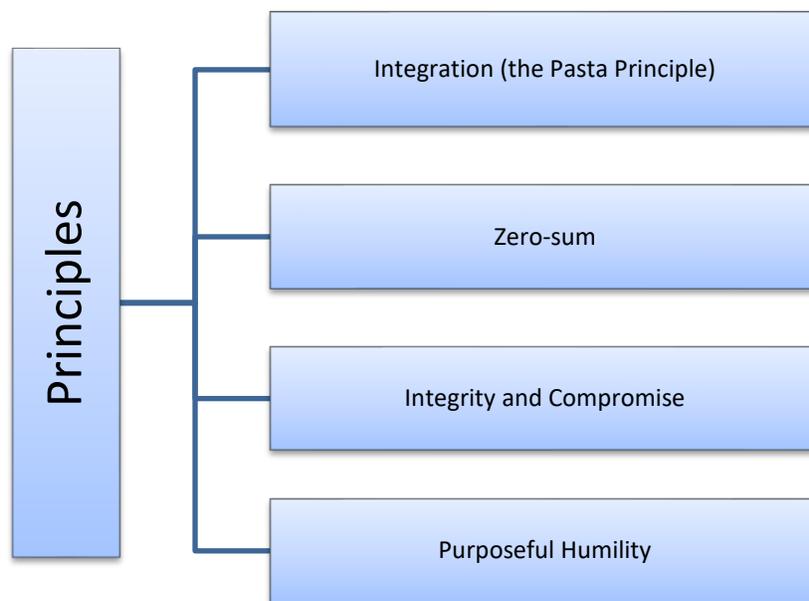


Douglas Brown

Blueprint Overview



Principles of the Simmer System



The most important components of the Simmer SystemSM are the Principles. They represent the big picture: the things you must not lose track of or negotiate away while working out a very fluid set of circumstances in the other Simmer component areas.

INTEGRATION: The Pasta Principle

As a change agent, you have two big advantages you might not have thought of:

- Management of a complex organization involves many components that are interconnected, and that makes them even more complicated. It's impossible to implement any one discipline in its entirety in a short period, and you certainly won't solve all problems at once. So you don't have to try
- People don't like having two or three different answers to the same question. It's called "cognitive dissonance", and it's a very powerful driver to take some action to alleviate it. People will adjust their own behavior to make the information match up, without you having to tell them to do so.

Because all these management aspects are connected, you'll end up making progress in several areas at the same time even when you're not trying to.

CONSTRAINTS: The Zero-Sum Principle

Management problems and solutions are based on the idea of constraints. If you have unlimited time and money, and nobody cares what you do anyway, then any issues you might be experiencing are not due to management problems; they are caused by leadership and teamwork issues.

Where an organization operates on the day-to-day whims of powerful managers, your management processes aren't going to be taken seriously, because they are irrelevant. To succeed, find a way to create scarcity, of money, of time, of personnel resources. Every organization has a practical upper limit to the amount of money coming in, or a limit to the number of people it can hire. Somehow, those limits have to float down to your program or division. Once that happens, managers can't do everything; they have to make actual choices, and then some sort of management process has to emerge.

BEDROCK: Integrity and Compromise

The third principle doesn't require any particular task steps. Integrity should go without saying in all business situations (although you know it doesn't); the

reason it's elevated to a principle here is that the Simmer System asks you to make choices as to what processes need to be addressed immediately and which can be deferred until later. When executives are making decisions, no information is better than misleading information. Don't help anyone mislead.

If you can't avoid publishing sketchy information, find ways to convey that it is unevaluated, portrayed only as received. It might seem easier to go along than to fight yet another battle and lose another ally; but the hard reality is that the errors will eventually be detected, at which point those people will turn around and blame you before they admits to faking the numbers. They aren't your friends; if you lose them over this issue, good riddance. Don't do it.

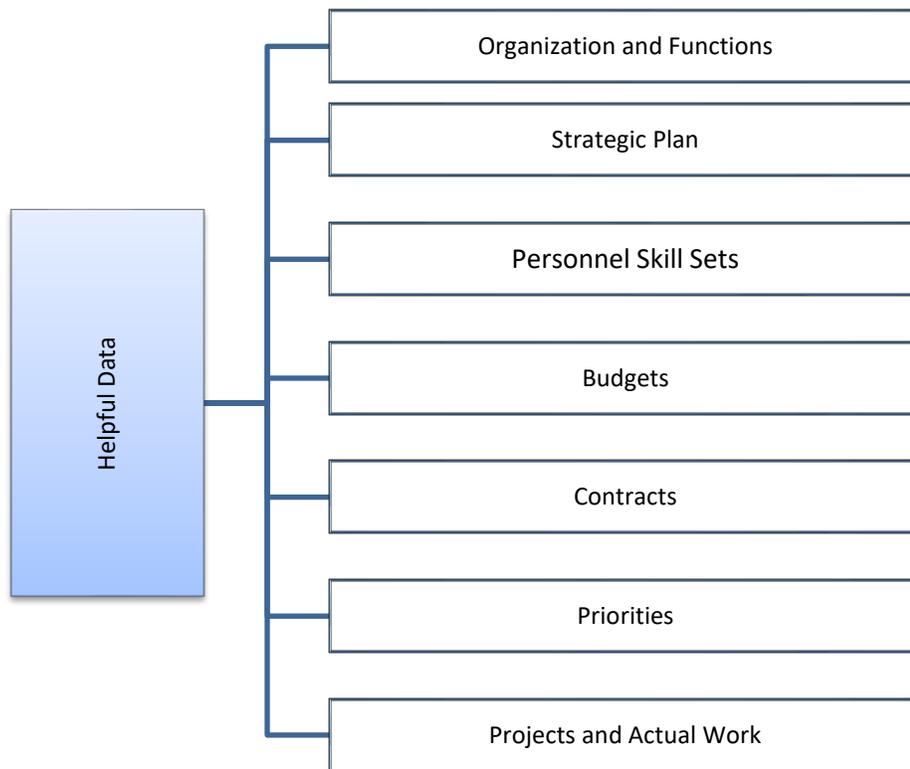
CO-OPT: Purposeful Humility

Many managers would argue against this principle, on the basis that when you're already struggling to be relevant, you should avoid taking on work you don't have to do. That's sound advice under normal circumstances, but you're trying to do something a little extraordinary: to get cooperation from people who would rather not. If you can find a way of lightening their load while also moving your own agenda forward, everybody wins.

So those are the four key principles of the Simmer System. In a chaotic situation they are the guideposts that keep you headed in generally the right direction. Now let's go see what some of those directions are.

HELPFUL DATA

Most of the management disciplines draw on the same sets of data. Remember the point about cognitive dissonance? If you can cause people to see that information about them is wrong, they'll demand to interact with that other office to find out what is going on, and usually they end up at a mutually agreeable solution. Of course, this solution moves your agenda forward too! The Pasta Principle proves itself once again, and the problem is solved, Simmer-style.



Putting the Data to Work

The most valuable data sets in this regard are the ones used by the largest number of the largest groups. That gives you the most avenues for leverage. Yes, your organization is unique – but not that much. They all need this information.

You're not gathering these data sets just to know what's in them, although that's useful to have. As a change agent, the key for you is that, in a process-averse organization, this data is highly inconsistent. You can leverage the gaps to gain acceptance for the initial steps in your management improvement initiative.

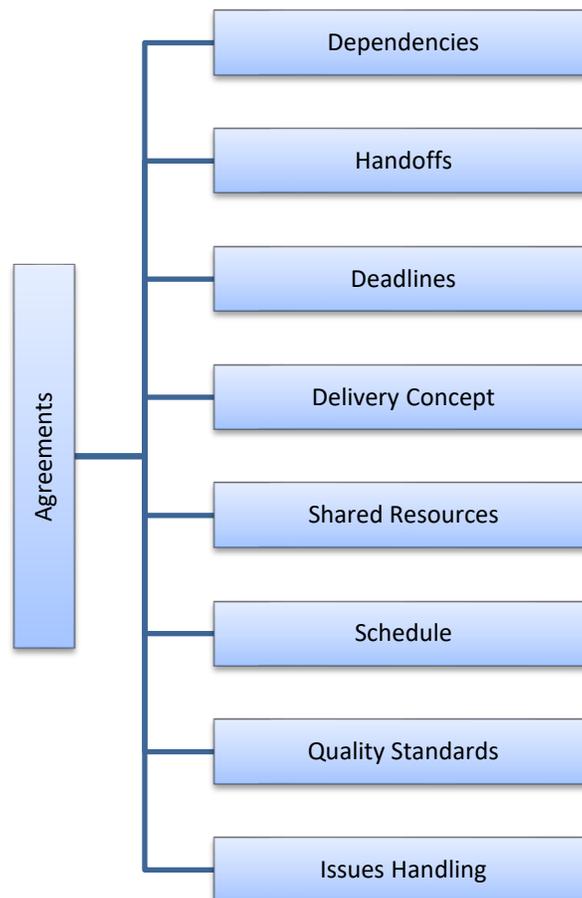
1. The first data to gather is the **Organization and Functions** of your enterprise. You'd think this would be easy to get, and it should be posted on walls and on line, but often it is more like a tightly-guarded secret. If that's the case, if you can map it all out, you'll become the go-to person when people are trying to find out who they have to see to get things done.
2. Next, get the **Strategic Plan** and know it backwards. Nobody can fault you for setting out actions to forward those goals, or asking others to help you with them. They may have to start looking to see whether they can say the same. Or maybe nobody cares; that's good to know too.
3. Find out how various **Personnel Skill Sets** are distributed. This will tell you where work is really getting done, regardless of the organization chart, and where different groups will have to cooperate to get any work done.
4. The first point at which you'll start to encounter serious resistance to data gathering is with regard to **Budgets**. In all organizations, money is the real measure of influence, especially discretionary money. Where management maturity is low, funding data is either jealously guarded or a complete rat's nest of conflicting information. "Help me understand this" can be the start of many interesting conversations for you.

5. Organizations tend to get very secretive when we move into the area of **Contracts** data. Maybe compliance rules are being skirted; maybe work is being done that's not in the corporate priorities and maybe not even in the contract. Or maybe they just think it is none of your darned business. Which, in fact, it is not (unless you're in one of those specialties where financial due diligence is expected). But the contracts, especially service contracts, will tell you even more about the true staffing levels and skills that are available and what they are being used for.
6. The matter of **Priorities** shouldn't be much of a secret; after all, it's how leaders let their people know what to do. Actually getting the information can be a different story; it's surprising how few organizations do ensure that priorities do filter down from one level to the next. Comparing your understanding of the priorities with your peers will give you good insights as to the degree to which the organization takes its own strategy and priorities seriously. As a minimum, you need this information to guide your own activities.
7. Finally, it's important to establish what is really happening in terms of **Projects** and **Actual Work**. It doesn't really matter what the priorities are if everybody is working on something else anyway. Project reports and staff weekly activity reports tell you what the local supervisors' priorities are, and whether it is the executives or Murphy (of Murphy's Law) that really run this organization.

Once you have all this, or even a good part of it, you'll be among the best informed people around! You'll also discover any number of inconsistencies in these data sets, and each one is an opportunity to explore the ramifications and build support for an effort to improve that art of the overall process. When you're Simmering, each little low-level bubble moves the process forward to the savory outcome.

Collaborate

Depending on your situation, you can identify the areas in which improvements are needed based on an assessment process. Alternately, you can find the most glaring sources of inconsistencies in the collected data, and start resolving those issues.



The processes demanded by your professional training and affiliations are of interest to only one person in your organization: you. Everyone else is going to ask you the same question in different ways. They all mean "what's in it for me?"

The Simmer System's emphasis on collaboration asks you to seek out tasks that are of benefit to your fellow managers rather than pushing your own agenda. Helping them to solve a problem they have long wanted to get off their back, in a way that invokes a process you wanted to start anyway, makes it their solution instead of yours, and it will stay in place without constant policing by you.

Not all of the following interactions will apply to every organization; if some are already in place, the absence of the rest will be felt even more strongly.

Instigating and facilitating a group problem-solving effort places you, the change agent, right where you want to be: trusted by all as a useful, generally helpful resource. Eventually, they'll agree to reciprocate when the WIIFM is more about you.

1. **Dependencies.** It's quite rare that two business units in your organization have absolutely no interactions. The first thing you need to sort out is what gets handed off between business units and why. If those interfaces aren't working, the parties will actually want a resolution, but it may be years since they've broken off relations. Just by asking about how this interface works, you may find yourself appointed as the honest broker to facilitate communications and gain a long-awaited resolution of the process.
2. **Handoffs.** Once two units have agreed on the nature of a handoff between them, it won't be long before one of them starts complaining about things being "thrown over the transom". That usually means shoddy work turned in right on the last minute of a deadline, with likely rework for both sides, or a late delivery, in which case key resources are left idle. One way to defuse this issue is to set up a method for the sending party to inform the receiving party in plenty of time as to when the next handoff will be ready. It doesn't require a detailed project schedule, but it does ask people to

communicate about the one thing they are most sure of: what they are doing right now. That way, each group can re-plan their work to take into account the new availability windows for those key resources.

3. **Deadlines.** It's hard to get agreement on the details. Before expanding your "baby step" victories into a robust production or project schedule, which can be seen as an excessive escalation of complexity and accountability, consider getting the various units to rally around common drivers, particularly external deadlines. We know that in the end the organization is going to scramble resources to meet those deadlines if needed, so why not agree to work towards them now? That will set in place a number of end-point dates that the teams have no choice but to work backwards from and drive their own deliveries. Another highly-valued output from this effort is a consolidated schedule of deliveries - just the delivery dates, not a detailed task-by-task schedule. Publishing that rollout calendar where it is widely visible works wonders in getting the producer business units to communicate what they are doing.
4. **Delivery Concept.** Although every management framework insists that actions and processes should be driven by requirements, the predominance of cases in which there is inadequacy or even absence of useful requirements for almost any organizational activity is a well-documented phenomenon. As explained in the 2nd book in the Simmer series ("Simmer Down"), this gives you a lot more room for negotiating than you might have believed. Your business units may be surprised to learn that they have been working at cross-purposes or they may have been frustrated all along over a lack of definition as to what the end product of their work is supposed to be. If that is the case, then the change agent can take on a useful role as honest broker in these discussions.
5. **Shared Resources.** The first four interactions have been just discussions about what to write on a piece of paper (although in an organization having

difficulty with even these minor interactions, the fact that you are able to get managers to sit down and have those discussions is a major accomplishment). Eventually, someone has to do the real work. Most organizations value their labor hours at zero, on the theory that the person has already been hired, so they don't make much of an effort to track what work people have been assigned to do as long as they don't quit over being given too much of it. In fact, many will be signed up for multiples of their true capacity. The more reliable they are, or the more they have a unique skill, the more overbooked they will be. And yet as often as not, at any given moment, none of the work they were to do has yet arrived at their desk. Instead, they're working on other tasks that were also delayed ... or pet projects that weren't on the list at all. After a while, we just come to accept that anything they do is going to be delayed in starting and take far too long once it does. Knowing who the high-demand resources are and coordinating their availability is a collaboration effort that most managers really appreciate once they complete the first two or three iterations. Why not act as facilitator for those resolution meetings?

6. **Schedule:** The discussion so far has been to facilitate 1:1 communications between managers in different business units. Now that it's obvious that most of the substantial work is cross-compartmental, and now that the sharing of the resources is on the table, you're in a position to construct a top-level model of the typical value stream or life-cycle of the most common work-streams. From there you just combine the life-cycle model, known handoff dates and dependencies and match them up to the finish dates. Voilà, an integrated master schedule at a manageable level of detail. You can offer to maintain the master list of enterprise milestones, partly to ensure that someone is doing that and partly as a demonstration to the her participants that this can be done relatively quickly and inexpensively using whatever tools they are working with now.

7. **Quality Standards.** Going back to the "over-the-transom" argument, one of the main issues with last-minute or late delivery is the amount of rework that is also required. The change agent can be very valuable in bringing resolution to what really is required when one group hands work off to another. Although it is very important to get this working as soon as possible, it is in 7th place in the sequence because it's important to define all those other more fundamental questions. Once we get to this point, we're really starting to address the small niggles that created the rifts between these business units in the first place, but now that we have their relationship in proper context, we should be able to make some progress.
8. **Issues Handling.** This last action is one of the most important of all in building a culture of accountability. Although it is one of the basic elements of most management frameworks, I recommend you wait until now because it can cause the most trouble. In an immature organization, if managers do ask for assistance clearing roadblocks ... nothing happens. Except, perhaps, that their peers now view them as a tattletale or their higher-ups view them as unable to get the job done. In that world, it's easier to suppress a problem until it blows up into a real disaster that implicates enough people that nobody shoulders the blame. But I can tell you this: almost every culture change I've participated in has changed dramatically for the better once the first issues placed on the table get executive attention and the appropriate executive decisions or redeployment of resources. Your next problem will be to cull the sudden flood of issues raised in the hope that they too will get noticed at last! When that day comes, your culture change will have implanted itself. There will still be many days of delay and constant renegotiation to come, but from that day forward the work will proceed under the general assumptions of accountability, prioritization and teamwork. What more can you ask?

As you walk through these different types of collaborative activities, you may see them as mundane and hardly worthy of comment. That's pretty much the point of the Simmer System: taking steps that people will not only not object to but actually welcome, instead of leaping immediately to the end-point, and tailoring your view of the end-point to emphasize those things that the organization finds valuable. It may not sound like much, but in fact if you complete these steps, you'll be in the top 25% of organizations. That's pretty impressive for taking a few inoffensive steps!

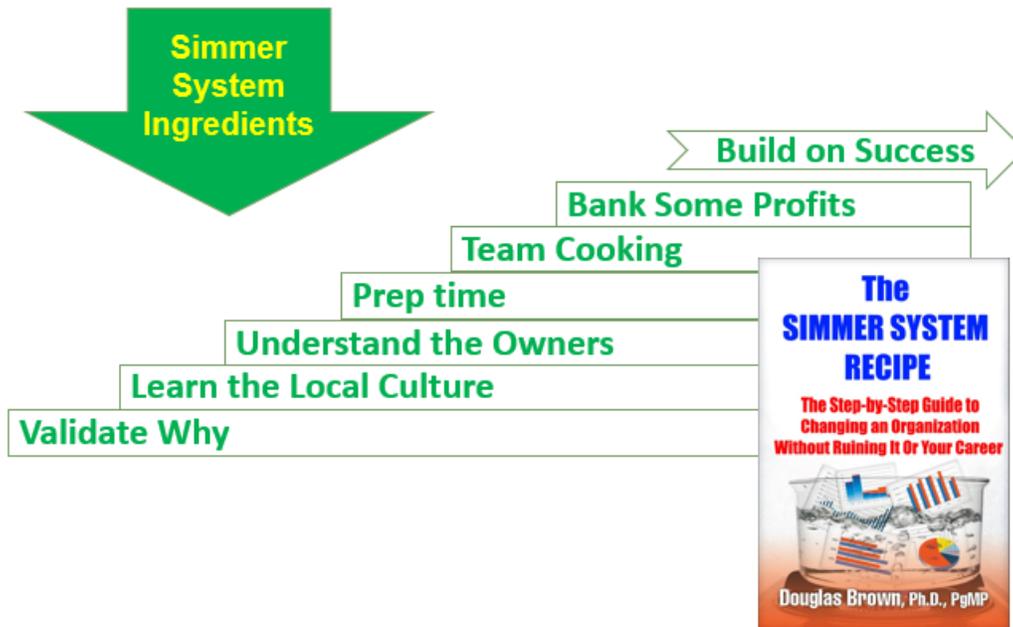
Simmering Recipe

A blueprint isn't a working scale model. It tells you what the elements are that go into the finished product, and what the product looks like when it's put together. It doesn't teach the builder how to build or the cook how to cook. When you look up a recipe on line for some yummy simmered dish (Oso Buco's one of my favorites, [try this recipe](#)), it doesn't tell you how to braise meat or mince garlic. That happens in a cookbook or a cooking school, and I'll let you know about just such tools shortly.



But first, I said I wasn't going to hold anything back. So in addition to the blueprint of materials you will need and how they fit together, I'm going to share the recipe: the steps of the path along which you can bring your improved management practices into being.

Here are the seven steps of the Simmer System:



How do you translate the cooking metaphor into your daily business environment? Here's how the steps work in your context:

- **Validate your why:** Whether it's a restaurant or a management change, make sure you believe in the benefit your ideas will bring, so you can stick it out through the difficult spots. Make sure you know how to execute; half-baked implementation is probably a key reason why the organization isn't doing these practices already. If it's the case, find out why the organization says it is interested in making this change at this time; it won't be the whole truth, but it may lead to you a version of the truth. But, because it won't be the whole truth, you need to be ready to serve the needs that might emerge: understand the business value that your professional discipline (see the next section for what that might include) can bring to various business problems.

- Learn the local culture: No matter how great your offerings may be, the local culture will be a key driver is whether anybody comes around to benefit from them. If you've decided on a Latin American theme, then starting your dinner hours at 9 or 10 p.m. may be authentic, but you won't have many customers if you're in a town where people start their commutes at 5:30 a.m. Whether it is the best thing to do or not, your ideas won't be implemented if they go head-to-head against the way your organization thinks and acts. Find out how your colleagues think and operate, and find out what problems are bothering them the most. When you start relieving scratch that pain, you'll be welcomed into the club.
- Understand the owners: In the end most management practices support some sort of organizational decision-making processes. Different sets of executives make those decisions in different ways. You're not going to change that soon, but you may be able to coach them as to how they can leverage your processes for their own purposes, and how they can in turn act to make those processes work for them more effectively.
- Prep time: Long before the chefs arrive to create their magic, the kitchen has been at work for hours laying the groundwork, chopping and rolling, packaging and marinating. You're going to do as much research as you can into the organization, its real facts and figures, and its real challenges. You'll find out where they keep the information that how to get it. Then you'll be in a position to suggest some ways in which you might be able to help.
- Team cooking: Now it's time to engage with your colleagues and start producing some results. You can't produce great results in an organization as a soloist. This step is where we introduce the collaborative agreements that form one of the key components of the Simmer System. It's the fun part, too, the one where you and your colleagues actually work on making things a bit better.

- Bank some profits: The early wins of the Team Cooking phase start building your credibility. The more things get done together, the more your colleagues will be inclined to give you a little slack for your desired activities too. Still with an eye to the value-adding use cases, bring on the management processes that make sense and drive your organization to even greater efficiencies and/or effectiveness.
- Build on success: You'll have earned it! Once people see that these management practices aren't hurting and seem to be helping, be ready to support the adoption of your current efforts on a wider basis, and a willingness to adopt even more advanced processes. Keep driving the action to the enterprise level, and you'll start showing some real return on investment (ROI), which is very hard to establish at the local project level.

Specific management disciplines

Let It Simmer was written specifically about how to introduce project, portfolio and program management, so it includes additional material on governance. Other Simmer implementations (yours, for instance) might focus on different management practices. There is no shortage of candidates, commonly including:

- Project, portfolio and program management, which I cover in Let It Simmer
- Risk management, covered in the forthcoming "Hot Spots"
- Quality management
- Business process management
- Contract management
- Financial planning and execution

- Health and safety management
- Human resources management, and even
- Sales and business development.

Even hot-button issues such as regulatory compliance or IT security are viable candidates for Simmering. You can't get to universal perfect execution overnight; choices must be made as to what comes first. Choose the activities that make a real operational difference to gain your fellow managers' cooperation.

As time permits, and with the help of your inputs, we'll build out Simmer System supplements for these areas. Keep an eye out in the private Facebook group (which comes with the Workshop) or in the Simmer Community of book purchasers to find out about supplemental Simmer resources as they come out.

Success Despite the Maturity Models

So, there you have it – **the full Simmer System Blueprint**.

The steps don't seem like that big of a deal. They aren't. That's the whole point.

But the outcome – now that is a big deal. Here's why.

Most management frameworks prescribe a five-step maturity model. They may use different words, but the general levels are:

1. Awareness: processes are not managed effectively, but the organization is now aware that something needs to be done about it, but has not actually done anything about it.
2. Managed: this is a bit misleading in that it does not apply to the enterprise. It means that in some parts of the organization, efforts have been made to manage processes. The fact that you are making this assessment counts.

3. Defined: the organization has identified some key processes and established how they are to be executed all across the organization.
4. Measured: the organization is now measuring those processes and taking action to maintain delivery or service standards. This is what normal people would call “managed”.
5. Optimized: the organization continually evaluates its processes and improves them. More importantly (although many frameworks skip this aspect), all processes are considered together, to remove sub-optimization that over-emphasizes the processes that are more aggressively managed.

What is astonishing is that several advisory firms report that among their customers, which include the premier commercial companies and many government agencies, few ever get past level 2. But all level 2 means is that **some** managers are making **some** effort to run their part of the organization effectively.

In other words, despite years of “transformation initiatives”, often costing millions of dollars, most organizations have implemented very little in the way of best practices. So don’t dismiss the Simmer System as too timid or incremental. With these "simple" little steps, you can get your organization, or at least your part of it, performing on a level with the top quartile in your industry within months at minimal expense.

I know there’s a lot here, and yet it's just the framework. Remember, you don’t need to do ALL of this, especially on the first go-around ... I simply want to open your eyes to how you can leverage your colleagues' interests to get them to do what you need to have done anyway. Think of it as a Tom Sawyer approach - remember how he got those kids to paint the fence for him?

Unfortunately, making changes in the way an organization behaves – even if only in that part of it you are able to influence – requires interactions with numerous human beings, and they’re a lot trickier to handle than sheets of plywood or cuts

of meat. Trying to follow a precise recipe with people is a recipe for only one thing: disaster!

The Blueprint tells you what you need to know and do to generate cooperation from your peer managers and get your desired change accepted in your organization. You don't have to do all of it; in fact, it's so very situational and personality dependent that some of it can't be done and some you might be better off not doing.

Let me reassure you once again that you're not alone in being concerned about taking on this challenge. The most frequent comments I get in response to my books and speeches are:

- "I thought it was just me. Have you been looking over my shoulder?" and
- "I was starting to become convinced that all my training and experience was all wrong. Or else that I was going crazy, being the only one in the room who seemed to be able to see what was obvious"

It might be unconventional to say that no, actually, I **don't** love this stuff. I wish people **would** just do what is best instead of whatever unproductive or self-serving agenda they bring to the table. But that's not how the world works, and over the years I've devised some ways of dealing with it. What I **do** love is helping other people get past those same hurdles and perhaps avoid the frustrations and self-doubt that plague anyone trying to bring positive change to an established environment.

Walking the Walk – With You

Leading a change effort can be ... no, always *is* ... a trying experience and it's often impossible to get support and advice from within the organization. I'd be very honored if you want me to help you deal with those same situations, and I've created several ways of doing that.

You can get more details, case studies and templates in the 275 pages of “Let It Simmer”. If you want to dip your toes into the Simmering way, that's a good place to start. And when you purchase it, you also get access to the Simmer System community.

But if you're like me, you've got dozens of books or video trainings on a variety of things that you could do, yet we don't. At least not consistently. Whenever I re-read one of those great books, or watch another webinar on more or less the same topic I think, "yep, I should be doing that". The real value of a live course isn't the factual information that is handed out; you could get that by reading or on a video. A live course allows us the interactivity to work through real situations, supported by an ongoing community that can share ideas and experiences, is a way to get that regular reinforcement, and that's what I've put in place with the Simmer System's implementation workshops.

Those workshops are what you might call entry-**way** courses. Not “entry level”. If someone just coming into the workforce is being handed the responsibility for a significant change initiative, this organization has got some real problems. No, what I mean by “entry-way” is that the principles we practice in the workshops are the framework that will open up a lifetime of examining how to tailor and refine the general approaches to actions that will be most effective in your specific situation. I wouldn't try to pretend that you're going to become an expert in every possible way of interacting with your colleagues in your real-world situation. But it's not just a “quick overview”: when you're done, you will have executed one of the collaborative activities needed to move your program forward, and you'll be ready to take on more.

We do need to be a bit realistic about a Simmer System workshop:

- It's not a basic training for new employees: let us hope that your organization didn't throw you to the wolves that quickly! You wouldn't be thinking about these subjects unless you already had some career

experience. The good news is, your fellow students will also have a level of experience and they can be a very valuable resource now and in the future.

- It takes time and commitment to complete. But once you do, it shows you that there is a path though the confusion, it does work if you follow it, and as a result of the course you will in fact have implemented at least one improved business practice.
- It's still just your first crack at the Simmer System. The ideas, exercises, and personal mentoring, are just the beginning. People and situations are very complicated. Every time you go through a change event, you'll learn another refinement, and through the Change Catalysts private group you'll have a community at your back as you share a lifetime of the real learning: by doing.

If you're already thinking that a Simmer System workshop could be for you, then come check it out the availability and details on my website at decisionintegration.com



I hope you found this Blueprint useful. I'd love to hear your biggest takeaway from this report. Which of the principles or collaborative actions resonates deepest with you and/or your thoughts in general about making change happen? Drop me a note at: <https://decisionintegration.com/contact-me/>

The more people I hear from, the better I can tweak the Simmer System to be a better resource.

I hope to meet and talk with you soon!

Douglas Brown