

Complexity Bites

Contributor: [Jeff Davidson](#)
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Complexity in every day life dooms the unwary HR professional. Consider the following: virtually every luxury car commercial in the last 20 years has highlighted the ability of the driver to merely raise the push-button windows and screen out all the external sounds in the overly noisy environment.

You could drive off into the hills looking for solitude, but if you're not careful, you'll invite along as much noise and distraction as if you had pitched a pup tent in the middle of Grand Central Station on a Friday at 4:55 p.m. Why? Cars are now loaded with all manner of sound-producing distractions. Indeed, these days, attempting to keep things simple, in and of itself, can easily become confusing and disconcerting; complexity can be a pervasive, unwanted way of life, both professionally and personally!

On the professional front, how many types of software, testing services, evaluations, outplacement specialists, etc. can you handle. On the personal front, visit a drugstore to buy something as inconsequential as shampoo or skin lotion and you are flooded with more than 1,200 varieties of shampoo and over 2,000 skin care products – an overabundance of choices.

Choices abound in every other arena as well. More than 11,000 popular videos are available for viewing (more than 78,000 if you include aerobic fitness, management training, and how-to's). Ten times as many radio stations exist today as when TV was first introduced.

Who can possibly keep up? Thus far, not you.

Leisure Seizures

Visit an athletic-shoe store, and a clerk asks you, "What will it be, lace-ups or slides? Narrow, regular, or wide? How much tread? How much shock absorption?"

Stop in a bike shop, and the salesperson asks you, "10-speed, 15-speed, 21-speed, men's, women's, mountain bike, trail bike, or racing bike?" Likewise, you're hit with endless choices when you buy a tennis racquet, an exercise machine, a whirlpool bath, or even a birdbath (no kidding; you have to shop for a birdbath to appreciate the overabundance of choices that can suddenly confront you. Do these decisions matter to the birds?)

If you weren't so pressed for time, you could spend all day merely attempting to make up your mind about everyday things! The New York Times ran a major feature discussing how people today are experiencing stress and anxiety when shopping for leisure goods! Choices about where to vacation, where to eat, and what to order from a menu are often no less onerous

Develop and Rely on a Network

The flow of information, goods, and services, exacerbated by the Internet, contributes directly to over-complexity in choices, which has been increasing at an exponential rate for the last three decades. So, unlike generations before us, it's more important now than ever before to have network of contacts in place that you can rely upon.

Who is the first person to call? It could be your local librarian, an official of an industry or professional association, or an information service firm (such as a market researcher firm). Perhaps you can find a government expert or the editor of a leading publication. Has someone already faced a problem like yours? If so, it would behoove you to learn what he discovered.