

# **The SIMPLE. White Paper**

**Unleashing the potential of people to be connected, inspired and committed to united growth.**

**Presented by**

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## **The Final Edition**

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*This Final Edition of the SIMPLE. White Paper concludes the Research and Development (R&D) period of the SIMPLE. Method. Building on earlier versions, it incorporates the final design changes to the SIMPLE. Method, ensuring its optimum effectiveness in application as a leadership development framework, to achieve leadership transformation and organisational performance priorities in both internal environments as well as broader eco systems (e.g cross ministerial/sectoral, communities of interest, supply chain, value chain etc).*

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# INTRODUCTION

Transformational change is a type of change that occurs when there is a fundamental change in how a group of stakeholders operate to achieve a certain outcome. Transformational change typically requires a new vision, new goals and culture change that reflects the new ways of doing things. The benefits of transformational change include significant improvements in engagement, performance, creativity and innovation. Yet when it comes to achieving transformational change, there is a significant gap between the intent for change and the actual achievement of the desired outcomes; In fact, global research figures highlight that 70% of transformational change efforts fail to achieve their desired outcomes. The most widely cited reason for these failures is a lack of stakeholder buy in, into the change priorities and/or process.<sup>1</sup>

First-hand experience of this *implementation gap* is what led to the understanding that there was a need to develop a solution. Five years ago, I quit my job as a regional mental health leader. At the time, I was part of a regional Mental Health & Addictions Services cluster leadership and change transformation team under a DHB (now Te Whatu Ora). I had taken on this position as I was having an evolved interest in transparent leadership and culture development following a life changing experience I had under another national non-government health organisation within a primary health setting; where I for the first time experienced debilitating mental health decline triggered by a high level bullying culture that was underpinned by lacking leadership capability, spanning our organisational system across multiple levels of leadership. Having started my career as a frontline mental health clinician and having had this experience, I was excited to have the opportunity to now join this regional leadership team and contribute to enabling our people at the frontline. When I arrived, I found that the challenge was even bigger than I expected. Our own workforce, the frontline clinicians themselves, were under extreme pressure and stress; many of them suffering from mental health challenges themselves because of it. As I came onboard, we already had an external consultant working across our services building insight. We developed the mental health transformation team and began our work to transform our service delivery culture. As we approached a year into this transformation, I was becoming more and more aware that we were on a journey of bandaging at best and doing more harm at worst.

Around the same time, I also became part of a National Directors Group for the mental health sector, which included building a foundational national workplan for our workforce. In my very first meeting part of this group, we met with the National Director - the top role for Mental Health in our country at the time - who presented on the direction of his own workplan, following which we had a brief conversation and then he left. It was upon that door closing, that the room erupted into chatter. All of a sudden, my colleagues were sharing all of their key insights regarding why what had been presented on was not going to be achievable. It was at that moment that a couple of insights came to me that I will remember forever. I wondered 'how many times have I left a room after presenting and discussion with my people, and the real conversation, with the critical insights I needed to be successful in my leadership, was had afterwards?' and 'What is it that is creating the *conditions* for mindsets that are focused on problems and tearing others down, rather than mindsets that are focused on solutions to achieve outcomes.' I didn't know the answers at the time. I did however realize that if we (the leaders tasked with laying the foundations for the future) cannot have these real conversations nor possess a mindset of unity on overcoming these challenges, how can we possibly create transformational change? Back to my regional work in the transformation team, there was more learning. I was amongst an amazing bunch of genuine people who I held in high regard. However, a lack of connecting what we were doing as 'a whole system' and a lack of aligning what was important to our people with what was important to our organisation, ensured a focus on symptoms rather than cause.

# THE PROBLEM

The SIMPLE. Method to unleashing the potential of people to be connected, inspired and committed to united growth was designed, honed and refined by a group of SMEs over the following 5 years. Through this R&D period we did extensive market research to understand more about 'why' existing approaches to transformational change have such a high rate of failure. Our research included a comprehensive project involving a compare and contrast analysis of existing approaches. What we uncovered was that presently the transformation change field globally identifies *what* to focus on. Existing methods on *how* to go about change however, are drawing from the field of change management, organisational development is also often undertaken alongside. The reason this is ineffective is because whilst a robustly designed transformation change strategy can technically have considered the key human aspects of transformational change, none are focussed on how they interrelate and therefore are unable to intentionally create *the conditions* necessary to unite people. We uncovered that the humanistic aspects of the change, actually are what is needed to drive any change priority involving people. We uncovered that transformational change endeavours must recognise that there is a 'people system' that needs to be engineered to *develop the conditions* required, to drive improved productivity, innovation and growth in the 'production system.' Without this, change endeavours are unable to recognise or respond to the 'relational' and 'perspective' influences across both systems.



We also took note none of the existing change management approaches had a bottom up systemic development focus. Through our R&D we uncovered that lack of success in achieving transformational change isn't because we don't have great leaders, tools or existing change methods. It is because those that we do have 1) lack looking at the 'people system' as a whole with an understanding how the relational and perspective aspects of this interact, and 2) do not recognize that there is a universal knowledge set that identifies the conditions necessary to connect, inspire and unite people to produce outcomes as a whole system.

How then are we able to successfully lead out change? Without the considered engineering of these two systems, or how they overlap? Without the universal knowledge set required to understand how to create the *unity conditions* to have one system drive the other?

# THE SOLUTION: DESIGN PHASE

The SIMPLE. Method design began in late 2018. Grounded in humanistic principles, it encompasses a way of thinking systematically whilst holding the human aspect at the fore, to enable the unity required to achieve any transformative change priority.

Underpinned by systems thinking, the SIMPLE. Method draws specifically on the 3 following systems thinking rules:

- Systems Rule: Any idea or thing can be split into parts or lumped into a whole;
- Relationships Rule: Any idea or thing can relate to other things or ideas; and
- Perspectives Rule: Anything or idea can be the point or the view of a perspective.

These rules are 3 of the 4 systems thinking rules identified by researchers Cabrera & Cabrera.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the fourth rule has minor relevance, a key part of the method is about its simple application ability across both academic and non academic settings, therefore we have not included the fourth rule here. An important feature of systems thinking is the acknowledgement that the existence of a thing automatically implies the existence of another, and vice versa. This highlights the absolute necessity to ensure that the co-implications of change and development in one area of an organisation to another, are recognized and considered. The SIMPLE. Method locates this 'systemic understanding' as foundational to transformation success. Sitting next to this systems rule is the relational aspects of people complexity, which the SIMPLE. Method's development expanded through incorporating cultural consideration underlying such complexities.<sup>3</sup> The SIMPLE. Method was founded in Aotearoa NZ, myself and the co-founders having a deep appreciation of the humanistic, holistic context of te ao Māori (through lived practice and personal experience). The SIMPLE. Method is intrinsically underpinned by the intangible yet essential application of whanaungatanga (relationships), and whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building). Whilst unique to the context of Aotearoa NZ, we strongly advocate the validity of universal benefits to hold these holistic relational principles as the heart of the method regardless of demographic/cultural application. We also recognize that there is increasing awareness globally on the benefits of looking towards more traditional and indigenous cultures to explore whole of population solutions.

A further key theoretical foundation to the SIMPLE. Method is the concept of top down and bottom-up policy development<sup>4</sup> and how this relates to alignment and engagement with strong linkages to individual performance.<sup>5</sup> The development research of the SIMPLE. Method progresses this thinking to application, drawing on the key alignment methodology of Objectives and Key Results.<sup>6</sup> Further to this, the SIMPLE. Method integrates the learnings from key research and insights in group performance and culture, both internationally<sup>7</sup> and within the context of Aotearoa NZ. This integration highlights, amongst many things, links to systems thinking through identifying that collective performance is about the parts coming together as a whole. These insights also highlight that both *unity on the outcome* that is seeking to be achieved, as well as *the shared identity of the collective*, matters.<sup>8</sup> The SIMPLE. Method links these insights into synergetic research existing in the field of modern leadership space<sup>9,10,11</sup> including the highly popular work of both Sinek on purpose<sup>9</sup> and Brown's leading works on vulnerability<sup>10</sup>. Drawing on leading research in building safe organisations,<sup>12</sup> the SIMPLE. Method learning also encapsulates basic neurological responses and how these lead to behaviour presentation, motivation, innovation and creativity.

Finally, the SIMPLE. Method locates this learning framework in the founding mindset research theory of Dweck<sup>13</sup> built on the theory of neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to continue to form new connections into adulthood, after it has been damaged or when it is stimulated by new experiences. This supports the idea that you can adopt a growth mindset at any time of life, locating the potential of incorporating mindset development within culture development. For example, these insights guide practical steps to change mindset, moving leaders and teams through key deep rooted organisational culture issues, such as change inertia and siloed mentalities.

The first version of SIMPLE. to be taken for testing identified the method factors as SAFETY, INSIGHT, MEASURE, PERSPECTIVE, LEARNING, EVALUATION.

## ORGANISATIONS: TESTING & HONING PHASE

The design phase for the SIMPLE. Method began in 2018, involving the development and delivery of two experiential learning frameworks, one focused on the craft of people focused leadership and one on systemic leadership that enabled transformation through a focus on people. The first testing phase involved leadership, organisational development and human resource practitioners from 40+ organisations across Aotearoa NZ.

Key to progressing the design of both these experiential learning frameworks was immersing the learners in an environment where they were able to experience the building of unity first hand. The systemic leadership framework expanded the experiential learning further, through simulating a structured working group model, embodying intentional culture design principles based on the 7 sociological culture pillars. This enabled the participants to retrospectively reflect on how they became immersed in the group culture (unknowing to them) which was intentionally designed by our training team. Alongside this, targeted engagement and insight work was conducted which enabled insight into the method's applicability in real time as well as exploration of the necessary support required to enable successful application.

### Key Finding #1 The Unity Conditions

The SIMPLE. Method testing phase enabled the opportunity to explore its theoretical underpinnings in action and consolidate new learning. These included the key finding that uncovered the '3 unity conditions' as necessary for achieving unity at a large scale.

### Key Finding #2 Effectiveness of Intentional Culture Design

Subsequently to Key Finding #1, the SIMPLE Method's 'universal knowledge set' expands thinking on these conditions through exploration of the sociological context of societal groups, framing this key learning as the 'sociological culture pillars'. Testing revealed that participants gained phenomenal insights and

progressed through the sociological context and experiential learning delivery. This setting the critical foundation consistently in 'how' to effectively build unity through belonging.

*"I learnt the tools on how to move people, identify pain points and create a plan." – Public Health Service Central Region Operations Manager – Oversight of 400 people.*

### Key Finding #3 Moving from Insight to Involvement

The testing enabled recognizing the importance of insight works to not just be underpinned by the condition of safety, but also the commitment to inform and act, underpinned by enabling those involved to be connected to advancing development efforts. It highlighted some of the key causes leading to change inertia and the counter effect of further issues with trust in leadership and the organisation when such commitment was not present.

A key case study involved organisational development leadership of an organisation of 8,000 engaging in the experiential learning framework for systemic leadership development. This was followed with an intensive engagement & insights piece of work across the entirety of the organisational support teams. The intention was to ensure safety and build insight through 1:1 confidential sessions. Change inertia was a concern for the engagement team with 3 previous (and recent) insight endeavours already having taken place in the organisation. Yet through establishing the unity conditions, this endeavour was met with the highest engagement rates of the 4 insight endeavours in total. Whilst this was a pleasing result, the focus solely on insight limited the ability to ensure effective and sustainable solutions to be developed and progressed. This case study really honed in for us the importance of the SIMPLE. Method guiding the embracing of vulnerability across the improvement cycle; being committed to seeing the project through from a bottom up development lens and ensuring the people who have the expert lens (perspective rule) are connected to action.

### Key Finding #4 Moving from Evaluation to Evolve

Related to the insights presented in Key Finding #3, the testing phase of the SIMPLE. Method enabled the identification of a need to hone the Method to ensure a cyclic nature in application. Shifting a focus to evolution enables the Method to guide a forward and continuous improvement focus and also allows the Method to sit well within existing organisational development frameworks. Through honing the Method across the 2 year testing period, a key consideration was ensuring that application of the Method involved an applied learning approach.

## ECO SYSTEM SETTING: TESTING & HONING PHASE

In March of 2021, opportunity arose to pilot the SIMPLE. Method in a 'cross sector' community setting. This came about through a common conversation being had amongst leadership across various local regional service providers for a particular community of interest: youth. The primary issues of concern was the guarded and siloed culture across regional providers as well as the lack of a lifespan lens on achieving outcomes together as a community. The SIMPLE. Method was identified as an option to navigate



establishment and development of a working group which would seek to create transformational change at the community level.

### Key Finding #1 Effectiveness of bringing together diverse community stakeholders

The SIMPLE. Method testing phase in the community enabled the opportunity to further explore the application and impact of an intentional approach to unity underpinned by the 3 unity conditions. The initial pilot development involved the working group attending a 2 day Unity Foundation Course + 5 group workshops. Due to both a birth and death, 2 members were unable to attend the foundation training. This provided the opportunity for us to observe contrasting levels of safety (the ability to say how it really) which is the first SIMPLE. law to building the unity conditions, and subsequent investment in the project work and commitment to united growth. Whilst the 'non-full attending' members maintained good attendance at the workshops, their ability to engage in a focussed, high performance group process was noted to be less than those of their peers who had been in full attendance. Also noted was that a lesser commitment to project 'ownership' and its outcomes (linked to Key Finding #2).

### Key Finding #2 Shifting the focus from buy in to ownership

The SIMPLE. Method testing phase in the community enabled the opportunity to explore the evolved Method's focus on 'Involvement'. Building on Key Finding #1, through the testing of the method in a cross sectoral setting, we learnt that a standard of ownership rather than 'buy in' is essential to maximise potential. There was a direct relationship between the levels of ownership and those in full attendance for the entire process, furthermore consistently these members demonstrated unity as a group and were stepping up to provide context for other members who had not had the opportunity to build as strong of a sense of belonging to the and task at hand due to not fully partaking in the process. This testing enabled us to not only recognize the importance of ownership for the group but also ensuring that as the method is applied in a cyclic nature, approaching each new cycle, the new stakeholders perspectives needed are considered and then recruited, trained and engaged in the new cycle.

### Key Finding #3 Whanaungatanga above all else

The community testing reinforced recognizing the importance of the foundation of building deep connection and safe relationships and respect for each other. It also highlighted how this foundational work impacted the respect and investment for the group process and working through conflictual areas overtly, including those that are highly politically or culturally charged. For those that had built a strong bond through full attendance at the unity foundation course, not only was there higher commitment but also there was an innate ability to maintain focus on the goal, speak openly and honestly, move swiftly through the work, explore possibilities and develop innovative solutions.

## Key Finding #4 Momentum, Momentum, Momentum

The unity foundation course and workshops for this project were planned to take place over 1 year. With the Omicron wave there were a few disruptions to the ability to come together as planned, however it was duly noted that even beyond this, momentum consistently declined with the intended intervals planned between the workshops. This highlighted that in order to build energy and capitalize on momentum to its fullest potential, a full cycle of intentional design of a SIMPLE. cycle would ideally involve a design period of no more than 3 months.

# PRESENTING THE SIMPLE. METHOD

The SIMPLE. Method provides a developed, effective and accessible pathway to lead out successful transformative change.

1. It identifies the human aspect of transformational change as the people system that drives the production system
2. It provides the knowledge of the universal conditions that unite people
3. It lays out the 6 SIMPLE. Laws that create these conditions

Find current certification options in the [SIMPLE. Prospectus](#) on our website [www.growthdevelopment.co.nz](http://www.growthdevelopment.co.nz)

**The SIMPLE. Laws**

TO UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF PEOPLE TO BE CONNECTED, INSPIRED & COMMITTED TO UNITED GROWTH

- SAFETY - Being able to say how it really is
- INVOLVEMENT - Connected people informing action
- MEASUREMENT - The results required to progress
- PERSPECTIVES - The lenses people look from
- LEARNING - The universal knowledge set required to unite
- EVOLUTION - The continual path to unleashing potential

Or email us directly to receive a tailored presentation on how you can utilize the SIMPLE. Method to be successful in your current or upcoming leadership and/or organizational transformation priorities.

[enquiries@growthdevelopment.co.nz](mailto:enquiries@growthdevelopment.co.nz)

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