

Review of: "If knowledge were simpler, we would all be wiser"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Review

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The paper:

If knowledge were simpler, we would all be wiser.

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1. The topic is very interesting and there is always a temptation to simplify any problem and to look for the easiest solution. For instance, linearization is a thinking process of simplifying nonlinearity. Society created many linear systems to simplify the complexity of the real problems. Measuring the physical characteristics of material objects is done by using linear systems (e.g. measuring mass, area, volume, temperature etc.). Also, measuring time is done linearly, although the biological time is nonlinear. However, when the initial problem has a high degree of nonlinearity, dividing it into several smaller linear problems and looking for their solutions lead to a final solution that introduces unacceptable errors. An example of recent efforts of researchers to apply accounting linear frameworks to measure the intellectual capital (i.e. knowledge capital) of an organization – that is nonlinear – produced many errors and misinterpretations. Therefore, people should be careful what can be simplified and how much the simplification can be accepted without changing the nature of the problem.
2. All three examples used by the author in this paper to demonstrate the utility of simplification are limited to mathematics without any possibility of generalization to many other complex problems or academic knowledge. If we analyze more closely the given examples, it is difficult to assert if they represent knowledge simplifications or only some codification issues. From my point of view, they are codification issues for the explicit knowledge. How can we

extend these examples to simplify experience or tacit knowledge? How can one simplify the emotional or spiritual knowledge?

I agree that the purpose of this paper is focused on academic knowledge, or textbook knowledge. But if the textbook is about the human brain how can one simplify the text in order to increase the usefulness of the theory?

3. I agree with the author that to publish in the top journals it is requested by many reviewers a high academic level of presentation and many times to introduce unnecessary complexity. But that is not an argument for the whole theory of simplification. Moreover, simplification can be done only by those people who understand very well the problem at hand and can explain in simpler way its essence. But that is a competence not many people can have. It is worth to look for it but only when people are knowledgeable.

4. De Bono is one of those authors capable to simplify down to the essence, but not everyone can do that. Yes, it is a good argument to search for ways of simplifying the theories we teach students, but all those simplifications depend on the topic and the absorptive capacity of students.

5. Finally, the paper can be improved if the author can present some basic principles for simplifying the academic knowledge, keeping in mind the limitations of such a process. These principles should refer to the knowledge structures and their dynamics and not to some mathematical formulae which are not simplifications but codification issues.