

Complexity

The innate cleverness of a large, complex brain, in conjunction with an opposable thumb and a linguistic tongue, has given the human species a compulsion for complexity that often gets us into a lot of trouble. Looking back, we find a generally inverse relationship between complexity and efficiency, reliability, and durability.

The complexity of machine design has exponentially increased since the beginning of the industrial revolution, but the designs that endure are generally the simplest ones. In general, the more parts a machine has, the more chances it has to fail, the lower the quality of its individual components, the less chance it has of being fixed, the more energy and resources are consumed in its manufacture, and the more pollution it creates.

The cultures that endure are not the big civilizations dependent on complexity. Until they were squeezed out by the all-encompassing congestion of the new global civilization, the cultures that endured alongside the rise and fall of many civilizations were those with the simple hand to mouth tribes and extended families that lived just a few weeks from starvation.

The complexity of government tends to steadily increase until governments become so mired in excess verbiage that they become nonfunctional. The current mood of 'throw the bums out' is focused on individual politicians when the problem is that our current system of electing them will just get us more of the same at best. Our electoral system is seldom providing us with wise leadership, and when it occasionally elects someone with some intelligence and practical knowledge, they get swept away in the vast flood of mindless verbiage that surrounds them.

Many human systems become non-functional beyond a certain size or complexity. The goal is not to abandon complexity, but to respect it. We are the most complex creatures to evolve on this earth. It's what defines our place in the hierarchy of life. Used wisely, with caution and constraint, complexity can bring us great wealth and wisdom. Used with reckless abandon, it will bring disaster.