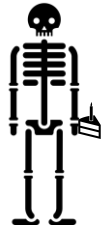
As Simple As Possible…How to Create Smaller Stories and Tasks to Deliver Value Quickly

David Frink



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Why Simpler Stories?

- Every story is a guess
- Short feedback loops test our guesses
- Deliver value sooner
- Value = value to customer
- Value = learning for team

Working First, Awesome Later

Basic Philosophy for Finding Simplicity

- **Working** first, awesome later
- **Possible** first, easy later
- **Build** first, polish later
- **Learn** first, ship later

80% of the value comes from 20% of the effort…do that 20% first

Agenda

- Form Teams
- Series of exercises using a common experience (restaurant) to demonstrate splitting/simplification techniques

Key things to note:

- At the end I'll share a link to notes and resources
- We've got a lot to cover, so let's get started

Forming Teams

Set-up

- Teams of 3-4 people
- You'll need space to put sticky notes
- Raised hand means exercise is over

Instructions

- Form your team (3-4)
- Introduce yourselves
- You're creating a restaurant
- Write the name of your restaurant on a sticky note

Exercise 1 – Big Project – Opening a Restaurant

Set-up

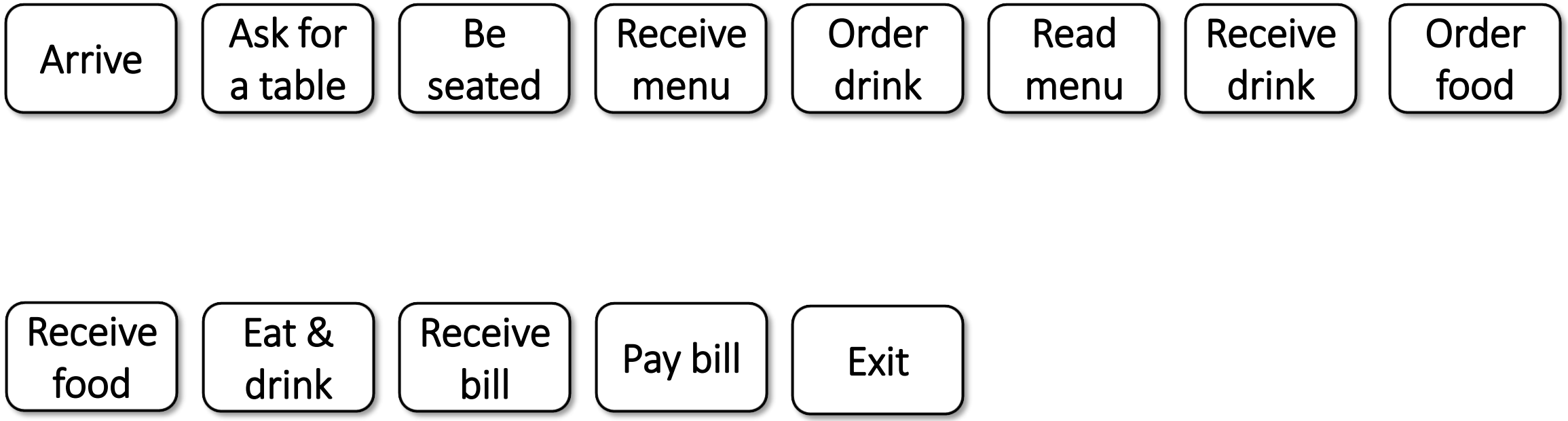
- Opening first restaurant (sit-down)
- Don’t worry about the building, hiring staff or what happens in the kitchen. Only focus on what the customer sees.
- Want to understand customer experience

Instructions

- Create the customer’s experience, one sticky per event
- Arrange from left to right/start to finish
- Start with verbs: “Ask for a table”

Exercise 1 Debrief

Exercise 1- Customer's Experience



Exercise 2 – Restaurant MVP (minimum viable product)

Set-up

- Before you open you need an MVP
- For each key step, identify the key things you need to support before you can do your “grand opening”
- Suggestions – party size, drink options, menu choices, payment methods

Instructions

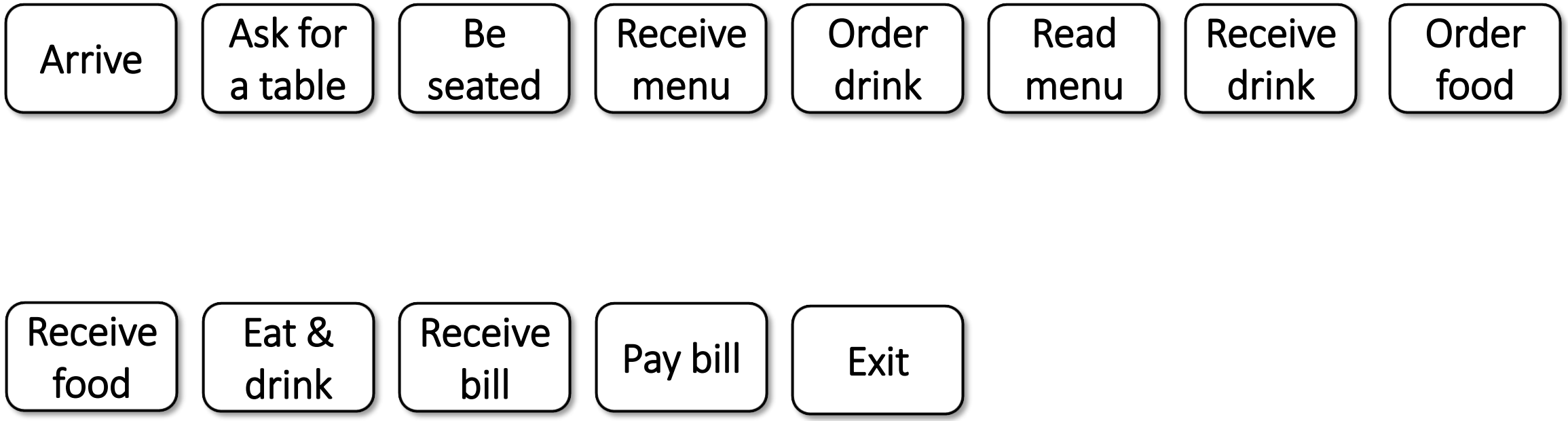
- Add one sticky note per MVP feature below each key step
- Won’t have much time, so make sure to get 2-3 options in each step (ignoring ones like “Eat Food”)

Exercise 2 – Ideas if you're stuck

- Host/hostess
  - Small Parties
  - Large Parties
  - Reservations
- Drinks
  - Water, Soft Drinks, Tea, Beer, Wine, Kombucha
- Food
  - Appetizers…
  - Entrees…
  - Desserts…
- Payment Methods
  - Cash
  - Visa
  - MasterCard
  - Amex
  - Diner's Club

Exercise 2 Debrief

Restaurant Workflow



Exercise 3 – Happy Path

Set-up

- You have your flow and MVP, but it will take too long to do all of it
- You've never run a restaurant and want to test your flow works first
- Need to test each component (host/hostess, waitstaff, kitchen, payment)
- Need to test connectivity/handoffs
- Want to be sure your restaurant works before you make it more complicated

Simple steps to a “Happy Path”

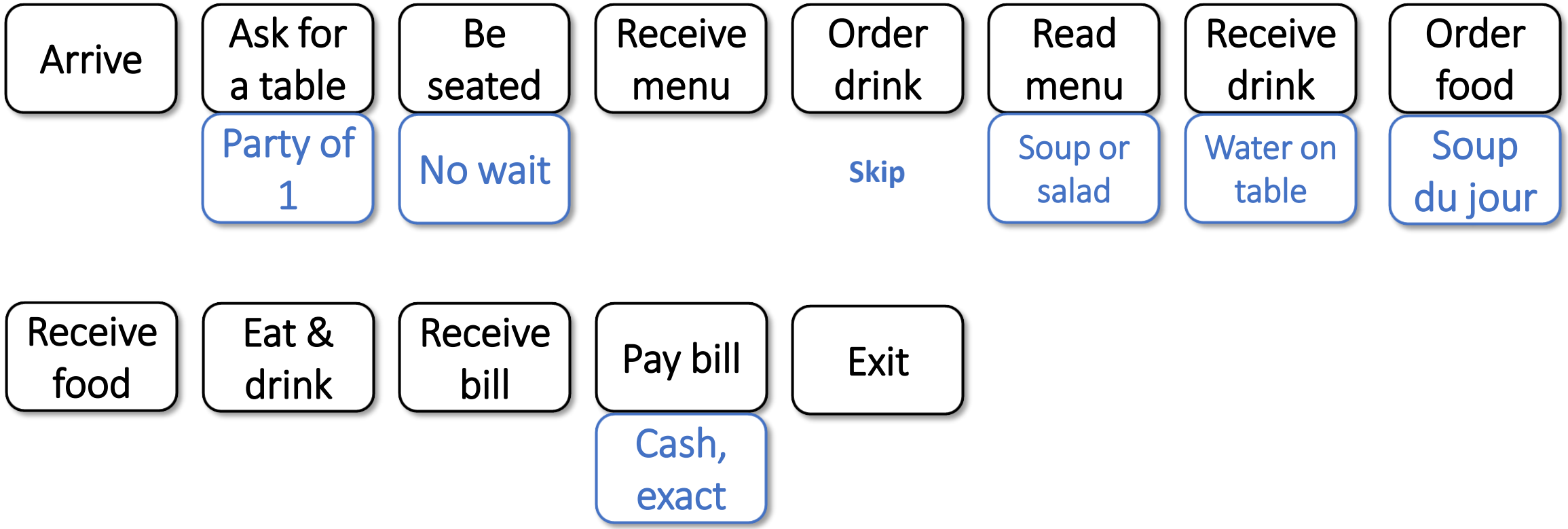
- INVEST, specifically:
  - Independent
  - Valuable
  - Small
- Variations in complexity – Easy/Hard
- Variations in frequency – Always/Seldom
- Make assumptions
- Reduce decisions

Instructions

- Find the “Happy Path” - Identify the simplest way to get through each step
- Pick one small feature to support per step
- Write this on a new sticky note below each step
- “Party of 1”

Exercise 3 Debrief

Exercise 3- Happy Path



Patterns for early learning (80/20)

- MVP is rarely “minimum” – focus on learning
- Test the system first, then worry about customer value
- Happy Path first – Pretend it is easy
  - Make assumptions (all users are the same and they don’t make mistakes)
  - Skip configuration
  - Skip interfaces
- Split on variations in data
- Split on variations in complexity
- Build the thing with the fewest options first (reduce choice)
- Use INVEST to test your stories for splittability
- And…

It’s Alive! (and has cake)

- **Walking Skeleton**
  - Backbone with just enough meat to make it move
  - Confirms all components exist and can communicate
  - You can choose where to invest next

- **Thin Slice**
  - Each slice of cake hits all the layers
  - If you can create a thin slice, you can come back and make the slices bigger later

But wait, there's more…it slices, dices and even works on technical stories and tasks

- Thin Slice is the opposite of a "technical story"
- Not:
  - (0% value) Story 1 – Database with 30 fields
  - (0% value) Story 2 – Business layer with 30 fields
  - (0% value) Story 3 – API with 30 fields
  - (100% value) Story 4 – UI with 30 fields

But wait, there's more…it slices, dices and even works on technical stories and tasks

- Instead:
  - (10% value) Story 1 – 3 fields functional in: UI, API, Business Layer, Database
  - (33% value) Story 2 – 7 fields functional in: UI, API, Business Layer, Database
  - (100% value) Story 3 – 14 fields functional in: UI, API, Business Layer, Database*
- And for tasks, each layer can be a task…because it is something you can get feedback on (code review, early look, etc.)

* Only 24 fields because by iterating, you figured out you didn't need 6….That's 100% of the value at a 20% savings to you!!!

Exercise 4 – Find the core value

Set-up

- Step back from your flow and think about which steps provide the most value
- There are 2-3 steps that are most risky…without them you don’t have a restaurant

Instructions

- Identify the 2-3 steps that are most valuable/risky
- Once you’ve identified them, think of ways to test if they work without your whole workflow

Exercise 4 Debrief

What is your RAT (Riskiest Assumption Test)?

Arrive

Ask for a table

Be seated

Receive menu

Order drink

Read menu

Receive drink

Order food

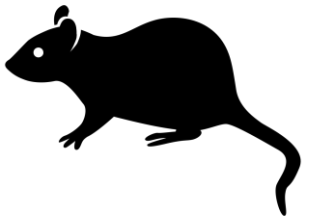
Receive food

Eat & drink

Receive bill

Pay bill

Exit

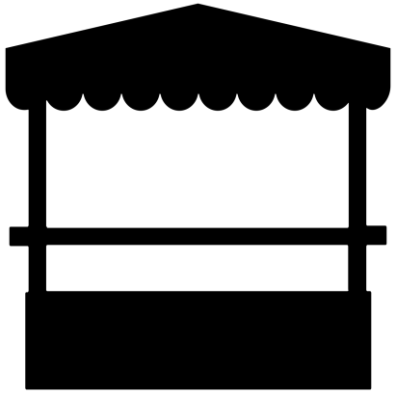


What is the riskiest assumption?

Cook good food

Get paid

How to test this assumption with less effort?



The Only 3 Problems You Have

- Can I get it working?
- Does it add value?
- Everything else

Until you solve the first 2, here's what doesn't matter:

- Usability
- Performance
- Scalability
- Edge cases
- Availability

(The stuff on the right does matter and you need to account for it…but unless you know you're solving the right problem, it can be wasted effort.)

Disclaimer: If your team doesn't respect DoD or your organization doesn't have the discipline to learn first then finish the feature the right way, these techniques may cause trouble

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- Build the thing with the fewest options first (reduce choice)
- Use INVEST to test your stories for splittability
- Walking Skeleton/Thin Slice 
- Find the RAT 
- What’s your food truck? 

Key Questions to find simplicity

- “Is this a problem we have right now?”
- “What is our biggest risk?”
- “How long can we get away without solving this problem?”
- “What if that wasn’t configurable at first?”
- “What will users want 90% of the time?”

Working First, Awesome Later

(assuming this approach won't lead to you shipping half-done stuff and moving on)

Further Reading

www.dfrink.com/simple

Thanks/Questions

www.dfrink.com/simple