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The Communication Catalyst

*The Fast (But Not Stupid) Track to Value
for Customers, Investors, and Employees*

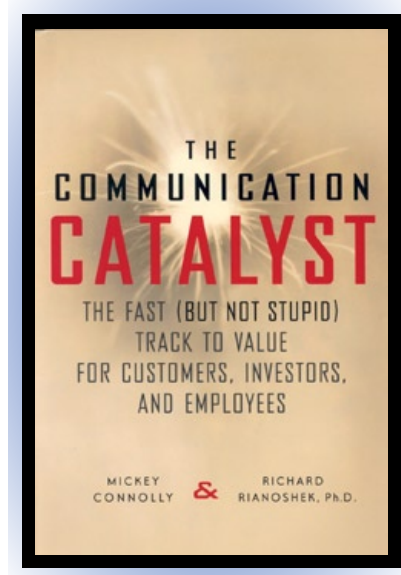
Mickey Connolly and Richard Rianoshek, Ph.D.

Foreword by Greg Merten

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Reviewed by Sharon Baldwin Sittner

Introduction

Co-authors Mickey Connolly and Richard Rianoshek do something extraordinary in the introduction of **The Communication Catalyst**. They make a promise. If readers take the time to read, understand, and apply their “conversational cycle of value,” Connolly and Rianoshek *promise* their readers will see not just results, but concrete, *measurable* results such as decreased time-to-market; increased customer loyalty; attraction and retention of employees, customers, and investors; and profitable revenue and investor return. And these are two men who take promises seriously, as becomes clear in Part 3 of the book. They pledge that, particularly in dynamic situations where speed and adaptability are paramount, taking the time to study and practice their model for high-performance conversation will increase employee

commitment and accelerate the achievement of goals - all without capital investment, new technology, or additional resources.

Regardless of position, situation, or industry, everyone in business grapples to one degree or another with these two topics – time and money. A reliable method for creating more economic value in less time would seem a panacea to the problems faced by industry leaders, managers, and employees alike. **The Communication Catalyst** proposes just such a solution. Based on their experience as co-founders of Conversant, a consulting firm that has advised more than 400 organizations in 20 different countries, Connolly and Rianoshek assert that the answer to the time/value challenge lies in increasing the quality and value of interaction and, more specifically, of conversations. The authors present the “architecture” for high-velocity conversation that leads to high-velocity, high-value results.

From their wealth and breadth of experience, Connolly and Rianoshek have discovered a deceptively simple but too often overlooked premise: high-velocity value for leaders, customers, investors, and employees begins and ends with engaging in effective, carefully considered interactions within the uniquely human method of communication, conversation. Conversation, then, is the leverage point

About the Authors

Mickey Connolly and **Richard Rianoshek, Ph.D.** are co-founders of Conversant, a communications consulting firm that has worked with 400 organizations in 20 countries. **Mickey Connolly** has advised executives in multiple industries and governmental institutions on subjects ranging from managing a global workforce to high-stakes negotiations.

Richard Rianoshek, Ph.D., is a social psychologist with expertise in group dynamics and performance management. His work has been applied in universities, police departments, and major corporations.

For more information, please visit:

www.conversant.net

for creating the high-velocity value necessary in today’s business and industry.

Following the authors’ proven principles for high-value conversation is an opportunity to enjoy the fruits of their decades of collected knowledge and expertise in the area of communications. As they state, “We have learned a lot from our mistakes. There is no need for you to make the same ones.”

“Our investments in developing conversational skills have been extremely valuable. I can easily show hundreds of millions of dollars of additional profit directly attributable to our work on high-performance conversation.”

--Greg Merten, Vice President & General Manager of Supplies Operations, Hewlett Packard

Woven into and throughout the text is a parable narrated by Walker O’Reilly, a frustrated manager from a high-tech company. O’Reilly’s interactions with Rev Baker, the mysteriously wise and business savvy owner of a popular barbecue restaurant in Austin, Texas, are designed to reinforce the principles presented in each chapter; and the “bevnap” lessons Rev passes along to O’Reilly and his cohorts clearly demonstrate the profound difference high-value, high-velocity conversations can make.

PART 1: UNCOMMON LEADERSHIP, UNCOMMON VALUE

In the face of unprecedented competition, rapidly changing technology, and instantaneous global communication, business leaders today find themselves faced with the need for speed. Whether it’s faster time-to-market, increased productivity, acquisition/merger integration, or abbreviated product development timelines, speed has become a necessary evil in business today. Decisions are made faster. . . but are they made smarter? Speed alone is not a reliable measure of success. In high-pressure settings, industry leaders, managers, and employees alike may feel it’s all they can do to keep their heads above water, a situation that can only lead to burnout, frustration, and waste.

In this milieu, taking the time to read a book on conversation, much less training staff in the art of high-value communication might sound like a trivial pursuit. In fact, it may be that business leaders who feel there is absolutely, positively no time to stop and examine

interactions among cohorts, customers, and stakeholders are the very ones who will profit most from studying and implementing the high-velocity, high-performance “Cycle of Value” mode of conversation.

Because everyone knows how to converse, and successful business people have already honed their communication skills to be able to effectively present ideas

“The power to lead may live simply in the ability to initiate a conversation that generates valuable action when you are not around.”

and influence behavior, it’s easy to fall into the trap of overlooking the value of conversation in business settings. High-velocity business environments, however, call for specific and unique communication skills that will create high-velocity value. Whether the venue is e-mail, board meetings, process reviews, performance evaluations, lunch meetings, or water cooler discussions, *all* conversation has the potential to become part of high-velocity value when the skills detailed in **The Communication Catalyst** are applied.

High-velocity conversation is a *learned skill* that improves with practice and that favorably improves *measurable* results in areas such as recruiting and retention, time-to-market, customer loyalty, and earnings per share. All conversation affects the quality and speed of its outcome; therefore, the quality of business conversation directly correlates to the success and pace of business outcomes.

Communication in static situations, such as binding contracts, calls for creating value through cost efficiencies, reliable profits, and a high volume of activity. In these situations, the modes of communications are relatively simple – following instructions and adhering to standards. Roles are assigned and information is shared only with those who need that specific information in order to make their contributions to the effort.

Few business situations, however, remain static; if they do, there will be no growth, no increase in value. Connolly and Rianoshek cite the imperatives for communicating in dynamic situations as: real-time learning and adjustment, valuable conversation, adaptive roles, the free flow of information among all constituents, accountability, and adaptability. Conversations that apply these imperatives result in dynamic leadership and high-velocity value.

Conversation in which participants continually interact, learn, and immediately apply the lessons learned is the key to leading in dynamic situations.

Several years ago, *USA Today* conducted a survey on Americans’ greatest fears, and found the fear was public speaking to be #1, followed by death at #2. That study led comic Jerry Seinfeld to quip: “So this says that, at a funeral, you’d rather be in the casket than delivering the eulogy.” Seriously speaking, the fear of speaking publicly overflows into boardrooms and conference rooms, severely limiting effective and innovative partnerships and solutions.

Conversation is the foundation for all coordinated achievement. Conversations are not neutral; they always affect the quality and pace of the outcome, either accelerating or decelerating the creation of value or the creation of waste. Specifically, the subject addressed in this book is how business conversations dictate business results, and how, by applying the “cycle of value” conversational techniques, readers can have a profound effect on the pace and creation of value.

Connolly and Rianoshek lay the groundwork for the “cycle of value” conversational mode by defining terms that are central to their theory.

- **Value:** What customers and investors are willing to pay for, that employees are willing to provide.
- **Waste:** Any use of resources that does not create value for customers, investors, and employees.
- **Communication:** Any action that links separate elements into a larger system.
- **Conversation:** The uniquely human kind of communication, in the forms of impressions (listening) and expressions (speaking)
- **Catalyst:** Anything that causes or accelerates activity between two or more persons or forces.
- **High-Performance Conversation** – Well-designed listening and speaking that creates high-velocity value.

An important point to be made here is that conversation takes place in two forms – speaking and listening. Conversation actually creates value not at the point where an idea is expressed, or spoken, but rather in the act of listening that gave birth to that idea. Value begins with the quality of impression, or listening; and listening is colored

by perception. To illustrate, the authors cite the following example of how perception influences the outcome of a situation: Two people are walking their dogs in a wooded area. Both are wearing corduroy pants. When one person returns home and enters her garage, she notices her pants are covered with prickly burrs. When she tries to remove the burrs, she finds they are nearly impossible to pull off and that they prick and scratch her fingers. Her reaction is annoyance, and she decides the pants are ruined. When the second person returns to his home, his pants are also covered with burrs, but he reacts with curiosity, wondering how the burrs have attached themselves so stubbornly even though he barely brushed against the bushes. The second person in this scenario is actually George deMestral. After examining the burrs under a microscope, he came up with the design for Velcro, a multi-million dollar product.

The point, of course, is that different perceptions in similar or even identical situations can result in very different outcomes. The value of action is actually dictated by the value of perception. Perception can be categorized into “ordinary” and “high-value” perception. Ordinary perception is based on our normally unobserved biological reaction (bioreaction). Although some people are blessed with natural high-value perceptive talent, everyone can develop the skills needed to switch from ordinary to high-value perception. Without conscious effort, it is human nature to fall into the trap of the cycle of waste.

The responses to ordinary perception are actually hardwired into humans by a tiny part of our brain called the amygdala. The amygdala is responsible for our biological survival. When the amygdala perceives a threat, whether physical or social, it automatically sets us up for the cycle of waste with a “fight, flee, freeze, or appease” response. A perceived insult in a meeting will elicit the same bioresponse as a physical assault, resulting in an automatic response that contributes to the cycle of waste. One person may choose to confront the perceived slight head-on, reacting out of anger, another may withhold further participation, while another might nod at all the right times, smiling and agreeing with the majority viewpoint, all the while seething on the inside. It takes conscious knowledge, effort, and practice to short circuit the amygdala and react in a manner conducive to producing value. When the amygdala kicks in and we react rashly, choosing to fight,

flee, freeze, or appease, high-velocity value is impossible. Unexamined, ordinary perception locks people into a destructive cycle that makes a mutually positive outcome unlikely at best, and creates real, measurable waste at worst.

To add to the problem, the speed of an opinion is most often faster than the speed of understanding. First impressions are accepted as fact, even though the truth may be quite different, given the time to develop an understanding of the person/situation. This opinion/understanding gap is another facet of perception that accounts for much miscommunication and frustration. Everyone has biases that influence his or her perceptions.

“Shift your perception habits from ordinary to high value and you will produce more benefit in less time than you ever have before. You will become a communication catalyst.”

Where we were born, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity are just a few factors that shape our perceptions.

Ordinary perception is a reliable chain of events:

1. Something interferes with getting what I want (stimulus).
2. I perceive the stimulus as a threat.
3. I look for evidence that defends my perceptions and actions.

To the amygdala, being right translates as being safe; therefore, evidence supporting my perception is more valuable than creativity, resourcefulness, and being receptive to other ideas. Few creative options are available once the amygdala takes over. The brain is too busy defending and protecting one point of view. Fortunately, armed with the insight shared in this book and a conscious effort to recognize and change the cycle of waste, ordinary perception can be turned around into high-value perception.

Changing perception from ordinary to high-value begins with listening. To illustrate the value of high-performance listening, the authors refer to the “ladder of listening,” with each successive rung getting closer to the goal of perceptive, reciprocal listening. Each rung of the ladder includes competence at the rungs below, and the listener becomes closer to high-value listening with each rung reached.

The first rung of the Ladder of Listening, bioreaction (fight, flee, freeze, or appease), occurs with a perceived experience of being dominated, diminished, or disrupted. The focus is on the listener's preferences and agenda. The second rung is compassion – listening to appreciate the speaker's personal emotional relationship to what he or she is saying. Compassionate listening allows the speaker to vent safely. Rung three is listening to appreciate the essential, or most important, purpose of the speaker. Listening for the essential purpose requires conscious effort to avoid forming an opinion without hearing the speaker's entire proposal or plan. The highest rung of the Ladder of Listening is “intersection”– of listening for mutual value. Focusing on how the speaker's values, purposes, and concerns intersect with the listener's is the key to high-value conversation.

PART 2: THE CYCLE OF VALUE: A CONVERSATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Connolly and Rianoshek present a basic pattern, or architecture, for interaction that produces value (cycle of value) and for interaction that does not (cycle of waste). The cycle of waste results in deteriorating relationships, decreased learning, and low value. Most often, conversational waste is rooted in focusing on differences or disagreements with no attempt to find intersections, or common ground. The three parts of the cycle of waste are: 1) Disagree, 2) Defend, and 3) Destroy. Picture these three phases of a conversation on a wheel. Each time the wheel turns and the phases are repeated, waste and ill will increases. Conversations that focus on differences, blame, and justifications are signs that a group is “stuck” in the cycle of waste. Other evidence that an organization is caught in the cycle of waste includes arbitrary authoritarian decisions, unproductive debate, defensive posturing, and divisiveness.

A typical cycle of waste cycle includes choosing up sides and separating from anyone not holding the same viewpoint, attempting to win others over (through evidence, argument, manipulation, or authority), and then eventually settling on a course of action. Once a decision/solution has been reached, those people on the “losing” sides start looking for indicators that their solution would have been better. As a result of disconnected disappointment, the

parties may indulge in blame and undermining the success of the enterprise.

The vicious cycle of waste continues until and unless one or more of the following happens:

- A major emergency melts differences and resets the relationship.
- Group members turn over, and a new set of relationships is in play.
- An intentional shift is made to the cycle of value.

In contrast, the cycle of value is also composed of three equally important segments: 1) Align, 2) Act, and 3) Adjust. Again, picture these three elements as parts of a wheel. In this paradigm, each turn of the wheel (or conversational cycle) increases and strengthens cooperation and participation, encourages creativity, and increases value.

“Align conversations” unite people, time, and money by: 1) finding the point at which separate purposes *intersect* to find shared purpose; 2) *inventing* new ideas for achieving those purposes, and 3) *investing* time, money, and people in those ideas.

“Act conversations” make commitments and launch action. The act phase of the cycle of value involves: 1) *engaging* those people needed to carry out the action; 2)

“There is a basic design to high-value conversation, as reliable and important as the design of a skyscraper or a suspension bridge. Waste decreases and value increases the more we adhere to the design.”

clarifying expectation; and 3) *closing*, by asking specific promises to deliver measurable value.

“Adjust conversations” translate experience into improvement; in other words, recognizing and admitting shortcomings, learning from them, and then incorporating the lessons learned into processes already in place. The two elements of the adjust phase are: 1) *review* results; and 2) *renew* efforts and relationships.

Cycle of value conversations value inclusion over exclusion, curiosity over bias, and open inquiry over dominion. To encourage high-performance conversation, Connolly and Rianoshek suggest following these three axioms (which sound suspiciously like the Golden Rule we learned in grade school):

1. All humans have purposes, concerns and circumstances.

2. If someone perceives that you are unaware or disrespectful of his/her purposes, concerns, and circumstances, he/she will consider you a threat and will actively avoid, resist, and undermine resolution, creating waste.
3. If someone perceives you are aware and respectful of his/her purposes, concerns, and circumstances, he/she will share information, work toward mutually beneficial solutions, and move into action, thereby creating value.

Accepting the three axioms listed above and identifying the intersection point quickly is a function of intention and practice; it is a skill that can be learned, developed, and mastered, becoming a launch pad for high-value interactions. The authors even suggest reading the axioms ten times a day until they become an automatic response.

High-performance conversation begins with finding what Connolly and Rianoshek call the “intersection,” (i.e., purposes, values, or stakes all parties share), and using that point of intersection as a starting point for creative and valuable solutions. Employees, investors, and customers may each have different (perhaps even *wildly* different) concerns and viewpoints. However, when all three groups are involved in or affected by an issue, high-performance conversation dictates, first, researching the viewpoint of each to discover the point(s) at which their views overlap, or

“For managers, there is a powerful temptation to accelerate action by demanding compliance. They should just do it! Forced compliance will ultimately backfire, however. In the face of domination, fighting, fleeing, freezing, and appeasing run wild.”

intersect, and using that common ground as a springboard to success.

Although this sounds simplistic, the vast majority of business conversations consist of one person or group stating and then defending his/her own position over another. In this paradigm the battle lines are drawn. Participants become entrenched in their own doctrines and, ultimately, there is a winner and a loser. Or, more accurately, there *is* no winner because of the negative feelings generated by this exclusionary process. The “losers” are disenfranchised, lack commitment, and may even set out to sabotage the chosen process. In fact, Connolly and Rianoshek assert, if the presentation of one party’s viewpoint doesn’t include the perspective of the other party

or parties involved, neither contingent will even *hear* the other. When people find themselves in situations where argument, defensive posturing, and divisiveness is the prevailing mode of interaction, making a conscious effort to step back and to find intersect points will immediately change the tenor of the transaction, and will produce new ideas and otherwise hidden possibilities.

In the cycle of value, the first step to correcting the problem when a group finds itself in the cycle of waste is recognizing and acknowledging the situation, then making an *intentional* shift to the cycle of value. Altering conversation will alter behavior, which will ultimately favorably alter outcomes. Finding intersection among all parties is the first step in the “align” phase of high-value conversation. Without this crucial element, groups will find themselves slipping back into the cycle of waste and solutions will be limited in scope.

To illustrate this point, the author tells of a time he was mediating a dispute scheduled to go court the next day. Two hours into negotiations, one of the participants said, “I want a new mediator. You are entirely too arrogant to work with.” Disregarding the normal, defensive reaction to such a statement, the author instead asked, “Could you tell me what exactly I did or didn’t do that had you realize I was arrogant?” The gentleman responded that the author had interrupted him the last three times he spoke. To him, that indicated “arrogant;” whereas, to the author, it translated to “hurried.”

A natural bioreaction would have called for the author to defend his position, explaining he was trying to resolve the situation in a very tight timeframe. That would not have served the shared purpose of finding a mutually acceptable solution before the scheduled court hearing. In this case, the author stepped back (figuratively) and said, “I apologize for interrupting you. I should not have done that. Would you please give me 45 more minutes to make sure your points are made clearly and completely to your satisfaction? If you still want a new mediator after that, I’ll do whatever it takes to find one.” He agreed, and the parties reached an agreement by the end of the day. In fact, the man who made the complaint later complimented the author on how quickly he had gotten his “arrogance” under control.

The second step in the Align conversation is “Invent.” Now that you’ve established a common focus, this phase

is a “cascade” or ideas to fulfill the shared purpose. Basically, this is the brainstorming phase of the decision-making process. Invention is a communal act that expands exponentially with the number of people involved. Ideas breed ideas, which breed more ideas. Encouraging the free expression of ideas with no criticism will net a wealth of new possibilities and new opportunities for intersection. The important phrase in that last sentence is “with no criticism.” Group members will participate fully only if they are confident their ideas will be accepted for what they are – free association, and not ridiculed, belittled, or excluded. Also, make sure all participants have time to collect and intersect with many sources of related information before asking for ideas. Prior to the brainstorming session, encourage participants to connect, inquire, and wonder about:

- What senior, or shared, purpose must we honor?
- Are there other “givens” that need to be included (i.e., promised delivery dates, etc.)
- What is at stake?
- What purposes, explanations, and facts are important?
- What purposes, explanations, and facts are important to other stakeholders?
- How will we/others assess success?
- Who has succeeded at a similar challenge? What can they contribute?
- What assumptions limit us? Are they necessary?

“Invest” is the final step in the Align conversation.

This phase is the bridge between potential and performance. The shift from the invent phase to investing is from the exhilarating optimism of generating new possibilities to fact-finding, simulation, and comparison of those ideas. Invest conversations creatively address issues of:

- Value – Will this investment produce benefit for which customers and investors will pay, and will our employees be willing and able to provide it?
- Planning – Are the right people involved in the planning? Is the plan adequate to assess time, money, and talent needed.
- Efficiency – Are processes the plan assumes in place? Do those processes make smart use of our resources?
- Feasibility – Can we practically expect success? What are the risks and are they worthwhile?

Simulating realistic situations for several possibilities will force comparison and new possibilities. Once a clear choice is identified, it is time to make commitments of time, money, and talent sufficient to successfully complete the task.

What’s left, but to Act? Here, I want to take the reader back to the “promise” Connelly and Rianoshek made to readers in the Introduction, because in the Act phase the authors speak of promises, both implicit and explicit. This

“An inventor is the opposite of a victim, transforming constraints into building blocks and barriers into launch points. When my purposes, circumstances, and explanations intersect with other purposes, circumstances, and explanations, the inventing begins.”

pair of communicators takes promises seriously. Whether it’s promised time, revenue, talent, or support, promises that create high-velocity value are those that will result in actions that move the group closer to its shared purpose. Promises, whether given or received, need to be accurate and authentic for high-performance action.

The three steps to the Act Conversation are: engage, clarify, and close. Engage stakeholders by identifying intersections. Decisions can be made autocratically, but for people to fully embrace a decision and be engaged in the success of that decision requires a clear senior, or shared purpose. The source of teamwork is a common future, and a shared purpose for that purpose is the basis for resolving differences and accelerating both action and value. The shared purpose must be identified, communicated, and take precedence over individual agendas. Finding a shared purpose does not negate the necessity of making tough choices, but it clarifies which choices must be made.

Be proactive about bringing clarity and precision to the situation by examining the: who, what, where, why, and how of the situation. Watch out for implied or unspoken expectations; this is the time to lay all your cards on the table. To ensure clear expectations, make sure these three “precision” questions have been answered:

1. What precisely is at stake for customer, investors, or employees? What senior purpose is being served, and what makes it important now?
2. Why choose this person to do this task? What is it about her skills, position, leadership (or

anything else) that explains your interest in her contribution.

3. How, precisely will you measure success? What needs to be delivered and when? What measures will you track?

“Closing” calls for informing stakeholders of the decision and getting down to work. To close an act conversation, use precise information from the previous step and ask for a promise. “Do you promise to have this new product on store shelves by January 1?” Responses will fall into one of three categories: 1) I promise to do that; 2) I promise not to that (i.e., no, I won’t, I can’t); and 3) I promise something else as an alternative (i.e., I can’t have product on shelves by January 1, but could have product on shelves by March 1).

The third and final phase of the cycle of value – Adjust - is often overlooked. The hard work of coming to a

“Alignment conversations are peppered with these kinds of words: possible, plausible, probable, might be, we could, we hope, maybe, I like it, and what if. As you get to the end of the invest conversations, the language begins to change. Allocating resources begins the shift toward the language of action, to new words like commit, yes, I promise, accountable, responsible, we’ll do it, and make it happen.”

conclusion that satisfies all shareholders is finally complete. Resources have been secured; managers have been carefully chosen, and process and design developed. It feels as if the battle is won, as if the quest for high-velocity value is complete. We can relax.

Organizations known for their high-performance value, however, realize the cycle of value is just that – a cycle. Once decisions are made and realized, it’s time to review the process for opportunities for improvement. Reviewing needs to return to the original, shared purpose and any specific promises that were made and then identifying valuable insights based on actual outcomes data. What worked well? Who, specifically, is there to appreciate? Take the time to show stakeholders you value their contributions. Where were weaknesses? Acknowledge unmet targets and mistakes of both commission and omission and begin the cycle of value process (align, act, adjust) to correct them. Taking ownership for both successes and shortcomings is empowering. Share the wealth with all constituents!

PART 3: MOMENTS OF TRUTH

In Part 3, the authors discuss raising and resolving issues, another tool for achieving high-velocity value. As a term of conversation, Connolly and Rianoshek define an issue as, “an uncommunicated opportunity to improve achievement of a purpose.” Looking at it from that perspective, it would be foolish not to address issues. In the heat of the moment, though, with your boss pressuring you on the ABC project, the finance department threatening to cut your budget, and the senior project manager threatening to walk off the job, it’s easy to sweep some “issues” under the rug. Who has the time to deal with anything but the most urgent strategic needs?

Taking the time to step back from pressure cooker situations, to ask for someone else’s perspective on what issues need to be addressed or even raised, is the key to moving forward. Issues are opportunities, not problems; and purposes are achieved by resolving the issues that stand between the status quo and reaching for the stars.

The first competency for raising issues is accountability. Connolly and Rianoshek claim the current paradigm for ensuring accountability is actually a perfectly reliable tool for blame and fear (i.e., public school teachers or police officers). Competency testing has not increased competency. It has, however, created mistrust and ill will at every level. Connolly and Rianoshek call this “disintegrated accountability.”

To create “integrated accountability,” first and foremost, assume people want to be valuable. People who are valued create value; people who feel belittled or ignored have little stake in outcomes. Find the point of intersection, invite input, and develop a clear, valuable senior purpose (i.e. a system benefit that all stakeholders can support). When stakeholders feel valued and valuable rather than threatened, accountability becomes a matter of high priority because the community is at stake.

Typically, opportunities for raising issues in any organization tend to be a function of organizational structure. If a business is organized by product lines, chances are that opportunities to raise issues outside a specific product line are rare; if an organization is structured by region or district, or by function (i.e.,

marketing, engineering) the same is true. To generate authentic opportunities for growth, it is often necessary to create occasions for conversation. Examine any purposes, or issues, that is not support by your current organizational structure and create occasions, both ad hoc and impromptu, to address these issues. Any authentic conversation is an opportunity for reinforcing shared values and refocusing talent and resources on high-velocity performance.

The final chapter of **The Communication Catalyst** focuses, ironically, on failure. However, the book ends on a positive note. How else do we learn if not by mistake, by failure? Failure is not an end in itself, but is an important piece of information. The title of the chapter, “The Back Road to Brilliance” refers to failure. Connolly and Rianoshek cite six lessons on the “back road to brilliance:”

1. “It’s the conversation, stupid!” I relate, therefore I am.
2. It’s achievable from here. In any set of circumstances, there is something that can help.
3. The faster we admit error the sooner we create value.
4. Forgive your own and others’ mistakes - success is the redemption of failures.
5. Make appreciation a purpose, not a reaction. Do it on purpose, and demand it yourself.
6. Being valuable is more satisfying than being popular.

* * *

A chapter-by-chapter summary and a bibliography are provided.

Remarks

The Communication Catalyst is based on a deceptively simple premise – the conversations we have and the manner in which we have them are the leading indicators of success or failure in any organization.

How can co-authors Mickey Connolly and Richard Rianoshek make such a bold claim? What about research and development, systems design and analysis, marketing, strategic planning? They’re all crucial to the success or failure of a business or product, too. Connolly and Rianoshek would not disagree; however, the degree of

success each of those functions achieves is fundamentally correlated to the quality of the conversation within the parameters of that function.

The purpose of any organization is coordinated effort. The quality and efficiency of all coordinated effort, whether between two individuals or among thousands of people (or more), is directly dependent on and correlated to the effectiveness of the interactions of the parties involved in and affected by that effort. The goal of achieving high-value, high-velocity, and, thus, high-performance outcomes begins with the process of interaction. If these statements are true, it naturally follows that the effectiveness of conversation is the single most important indicator of success in any organization.

The techniques presented in **The Communication Catalyst** for achieving high-velocity, high-value conversation are also deceptively simple. Many of the practices are just plain common sense. But in the mad rush to get a product to market, they are overlooked. We need to be reminded, in the heat of the moment, to step back and put ourselves in another stakeholder’s shoes. The authors back up their claims by citing numerous examples of multi-billion dollar companies that have turned sluggish or erratic performance into high-velocity performance by implementing programs focused on high-value conversation.

In **The Communication Catalyst**, interaction is synonymous with conversation. Conversation, both formal or informal, takes place in many forms and venues – in face-to-face meetings, via e-mail or telephone, in annual reports or state-of-the-company addresses at shareholders’ meetings, in casual discussions over lunch or coffee, on sticky notes posted on office doors, in progress reports, and in endless other ways. For the sake of simplicity, enhancing the value of each and every interaction in the workplace necessarily increases efficiency and, therefore, productivity. The larger and more complex an organization is, the more critical the need for high-performance conversation. Achieving high-value may dictate creating new modes or opportunities for conversation to take place.

The Communication Catalyst is a blueprint to effective communication in any situation. Its track record speaks for itself. Greg Mertin, Vice President and General Manager of Supplies Operations of Hewlett-Packard, said of the cycle of value method of conversation: “Our

investments in developing conversation skills have been extremely valuable. I can easily show hundreds of millions of dollars of additional profit directly attributable to our work on high-performance conversation.” Similarly, Daniel Bowling, Director of the Duke Law School Conflict Resolutions Center and Rayona Sharpnack, President, Institute for Women’s Leadership, Inc., and countless other industry leaders have enthusiastically espoused Connolly and Rianoshek’s methods for high-performance conversation and high-value performance.

Reading Suggestions

Reading Time: 19-20 Hours, 249 Pages in Book

Each chapter in **The Communication Catalyst** is divided into three sections. First, the concepts, methodology, and techniques are presented and explained, followed by a Chapter Summary, and concluded with an installment of the parable of Rev Baker and Walker O’Reilly, which illustrates the chapter’s principles in action.

Over the last few years, the parable has become a popular genre for teaching business principles. Beginning with the unprecedented success of *Who Moved My Cheese*, there have been a number of small, quick-read works of fiction designed to illustrate business principles (i.e., *Whale Done!* and *High Five!* by Kenneth Blanchard; *Fish!* by Lundin, Paul, and Christensen). **The Communication Catalyst** improves on this form by providing detailed, proven concepts, models, and techniques in each chapter, followed by an installment of the fictional account of Walker O’Reilly and his quest for a solution for a seemingly hopeless business situation. The fictional account provides a general understanding of and reinforces the elements introduced in the preceding chapter. Once you’ve completed the book, it can be helpful to re-read the parable by itself, beginning to end, in order to strengthen your understanding of the basic principles of the conversational cycle of value.

Scattered throughout the book are quotes on communication by a widely diverse group of well-known, ranging from Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Einstein, and Benjamin Disraeli to Mick Jagger, the Temptations, and Frank Sinatra. These quotes are not only fascinating,

but also enlightening in combination with their placement in the text.

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Chapter 1: The Communication Case for High-Velocity Value

Chapter 2: Valuable Perception

Chapter 3: Align: Intersect

Chapter 4: Align: Invent

Chapter 5: Align: Invest

Chapter 6: Act: Engage, Clarify, and Close

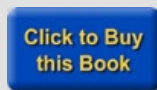
Chapter 7: Adjust: Review and Renew

Chapter 8: Raising and Resolving Valuable Issues

Chapter 9: The Back Road to Brilliance

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