

Communication Catalyst

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This is my summary and abstraction of the book “Communication Catalyst” by Connolly and Rianoshek (ISBN 0-7931-4904-5). The book is about effectively communicating for improved results. It is mostly focused on the business world, but obviously has application beyond. The book has some very good concepts, and does a pretty good job on working through them. A style aspect is that there is for each chapter/area a related ‘story’ that reinforces the point. I did hear that these did work for some people. It is a good tactic, but for me, the story segments were not particularly useful. The authors do a good job with chapter summaries at the end of each chapter.

One of the key points made is that communication is very important during dynamic times and situations. Any communication is an opportunity to:

- Align
- Act
- Adjust

The authors’ view is that the point of business is to add value (stuff that customers are willing to pay for). And the current environment is pushing us to get to ‘high velocity value’ (stuff that customers get faster). Waste is anything that does not create value (of which there is a lot). Things to watch for that indicate waste are:

- Chronic complaints
- Poor record on executing agreements
- Lack of shared purpose
- Withholding information
- Conflict and deteriorating relationships

The authors’ use a graphic showing 3 vectors that intersect – employee view, investor view, and customer view. When these views all converge, it is the situation where more value is being produced with less time, money, resources, stress (i.e. ‘high velocity value’).

The assumptions around effective communication are that:

- Everybody has agendas.
- If you are seen as being unaware or disrespectful of theirs, you will be seen as a threat and will be resisted.
- If you are seen as being aware and respectful of theirs, you will be seen positively and will be helped/assisted.

So, a positive cycle is to have a building set of different conversations:

- Align conversation (look for shared purposes, come up with how to achieve, invest resources to make it happen)
- Act conversations (get people assigned, set expectations, define responsibilities)
- Adjust conversations (review what’s happening, renew and adjust)

If you hear disagreement, defending, or destructive conversations, you can’t get to the real value until you change the conversation style and behavior.

A big barrier to effective communication is our normal (ordinary) perception. Our view of things is heavily filtered through our biological and mental processes. For a variety of reasons we may respond to a situation (including communication) with fear or as a threat because our low level processes don’t differentiate between physical and social threats. This causes a perception of threat, rash actions, and defensive behavior. The key is to recognize when we are having a reaction and step back and examine why (and whether the reaction is justified) – essentially trying to turn off our built in filters. The model the authors use for listening (and reacting) are:

- Bioreaction – biological reaction to the speaker
- Content – listening to the content of the speaker
- Compassion – listening to the emotion of the speaker

- Essential – listening for the key point of the speaker
- Intersection – listening for mutual value (intersection)

The authors go on to use another ‘intersection’ model with:

- My view
- Your view
- Relevant facts

The point is to focus on the intersections and not on the differences.

The overall model is:

- Align
 - Intersect
 - Invent
 - Invest
- Act
 - Engage
 - Clarify
 - Close
- Adjust
 - Review
 - Renew

Align

First, you have to get aligned. The align pieces are:

- Intersect
- Invent
- Invest

For the **align/intersect** portion, the authors introduce a ‘conversation meter’ that is intended to indicate where you are at in your communication:

Level	Title	What’s going on	Focus	Track	Value
0-25	Pretense	a conflict between what you think and what you say	avoid difficulty	waste	none
25-50	Sincerity	an honest report of what you believe (not necessarily true)	honest and defending view	waste	low
50-75	Accuracy	separating facts from explanations, understanding explanations	reveal facts look for value	value	good
75-100	Authenticity	Exploring intersections	clarified purpose	value	high velocity

The accuracy is further sliced up into 3 levels:

- Low-range: separating facts from explanations
- Mid-range: communicating facts first and explanations second
- High-range: facts, explanations, then compare explanations for value, don’t worry about who said what

The authenticity is further sliced up into 3 levels:

- Low-range: appreciating the other person’s purpose, but not their methods or results
- Mid-range: discovering opportunities within the different views – reactive/awareness
- High-range: discovering unimagined possibilities and putting them together – proactive/synthesis

Some tips to get to authenticity:

- Don't confuse purpose with method or result
- Don't worry if you can't identify an essential purpose
- Use other alignments (like methods) to help get to intersections of purpose
- Prepare for challenging interactions (think it through ahead of time)
- Acknowledge sincerity

The **align/invent** section is viewed as being made up of

- Correlate: build relationships, identify resources, explore
- Concentrate: on fulfilling a shared vision/purpose/future
- Explode: brainstorm ideas
- Sort: based on real value meeting the shared vision/purpose/future

The **align/invest** conversations will be around value, planning, efficiency, and feasibility. The authors recommend approaching this with:

- Simulate: propose scenarios
- Compare: filter and rank the proposes through common criteria
- Improve: make the scenario better
- Commit: choose and then dedicate resources – time, money, talent

The authors talk about 4 decision protocols:

- Authoritative
- Voting
- Consensus
- Contributive

The key roles (which can overlap) are: Decider, Executor, Advisor, Recipient, and Uninvolved.

The Alignment part of the book is about 60% of the text...

Act

Once things are aligned, you need to get everyone to act – together. This still involves communication and conversation – ones that cause action. Again the Act pieces are:

- Engage
- Clarify
- Close

The authors modify the previous 'conversation meter' into a 'promise meter' that is intended to help with moving people to valuable actions:

Level	Title	What's going on
0-25	Pretense	A dishonest promise to deliver a result
25-50	Sincere	An honest promise to perform – well intended, but unlikely to be met
50-75	Accurate	A confident promise based on informed thinking and relationships
75-100	Authentic	A confident promise as above, but more of a personal commitment

The **act/engage** portion is where you get people to accept responsibility to act. The best interests that will connect (i.e. motivate) the individual with the vision/purpose/future are:

Agency: it's our job and we CHOOSE to do this

Understanding: being heard and understood

Contribution: making a real contribution to the goal
 Relationship: belonging and being connected
 Time/money/safety: meeting basic needs
 Learning: opportunity to grow
 Appreciation: recognizing the action and value added

The **act/clarify** portion is part of the feedback cycle on action. Check for/assess success. The key point here is to precisely communicate expectations. And watch for problems or misunderstandings.

The **act/close** portion is just as it says – does the person agree to act – i.e. promise. There are 3 sorts of response:

- I promise x
- I refuse x
- I won't do that, but how about x? (get a precise understanding, it turns into a promise, if not it's a refusal)

The Act portion of the book is less than 10% of the text.

Adjust

Once things are aligned and being acted on, you need to do course corrections (i.e. review) and learn from the process (renew). Again, this still involves communication and conversation.

The standard adjust process the book talks about is:

- Review
 - State the original purpose and results promised
 - State the accurate outcome to date
 - What worked well?
 - What worked poorly?
 - Who is there to appreciate and recognize?
- Renew
 - What lessons will produce value going forward?
 - What area of improvement is our highest priority?

This adjust portion is part of the normal retrospective checkpoints that we have used for quite some time at Agilent and HP.

The Adjust portion of the book is less than 10% of the text.

Summary table

In the book appendix there is a 'meter' table for the main and minor conversation cycles through the book:

Cycle	purpose	Pretense 0-25	Sincerity 26-50	Accuracy 51-75	Authenticity 76-100
Align					
Intersect	Identify key participants and senior purpose	Dishonesty or lack of disclosure	Openly expressing and defending own views	Carefully researching views and facts	Understanding and commingling views and facts to discover senior purpose
Invent	Inventing a surplus of ideas to fulfill senior purpose	Disinterest – withholding full participation	Promoting own ideas, questioning or attacking others	Carefully listening to ideas to reach understanding	Building on ideas to cause a cascade
Invest	Confronting feasibility and committing resources to	Avoiding commitment of resources	Refusing to committing resources	Identifying and troubleshooting the resources and feasibility	Expanding the reach of the value while addressing feasibility and resources

	senior purpose				
Act					
Engage	Connecting the senior purpose with best interests of people involved	Forgetting or ignoring the interests	Mass communicating the new direction	Cascading accurate information through the organization, Q&A	Hosting conversations to appreciation of value and senior purpose
Clarify	Clarifying precise expectations to fulfill senior purpose	Assuming that expectations must be clear and obvious	One way download of expectations (lecture/monologue)	Thorough review of specific tasks and duties and expectations	Have relevant people clarify the network of promises important to the senior purpose
Close	Committing to action to fulfill senior purpose	Assuming understanding equals commitment	Demanding commitment by wielding power	Requesting specific people to deliver specific value by a specific time	Each individual ensuring his/her commitment to being in action to fulfill senior purpose
Adjust					
Review	Reviewing performance to date relative to senior purpose	Being afraid to slow down or lose time by reviewing	Conclusions from a hasty review published so everyone can see where they went wrong	Thorough and inclusive review of actual events, explanations and effectiveness	Honestly reviewing effectiveness to reveal valuable adjustments for senior purpose
Renew	Learning lessons and designing a new focus for senior purpose	Quietly hoping things will go better next time	Attributing success or failure to luck or circumstance, precluding learning	Actively seeking explanations of performance revealing areas for improvement	Discovery of a learning focus that people connect, enables increased competency and value