

Free Book Excerpt

CYCLES: The simplest, proven method to innovate faster while reducing risks
A work from Bryan Cassady and 22 Innovation Experts

CHAPTER 17

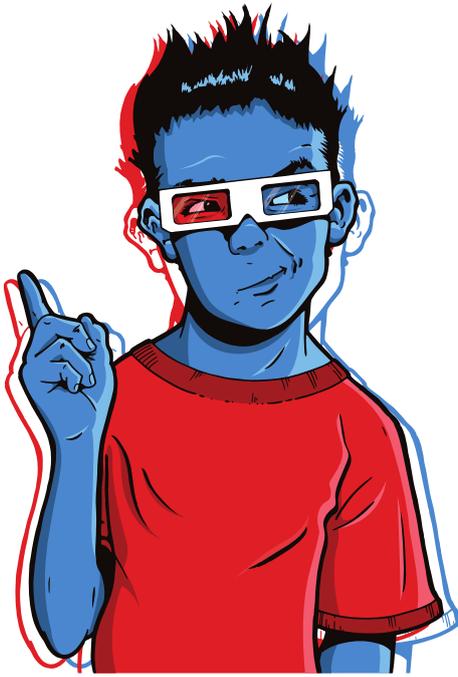
THE POWER OF CLARITY: UNDERSTANDING, HUMILITY, AND THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE.

“ Sometimes, knowledge can actually make it more difficult to communicate clearly. ”

FRANCK VINCHON

CO-AUTHOR OF THE BOOK CYCLES





WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THE CHAPTER

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

- **Clarity is at the heart of effective innovation** – this applies both to your thinking and how you communicate your idea.
- **Empathy is important** – to clearly communicate the benefit of an innovation, you must step into the shoes of a target consumer.
- **Use the 4Ps, and the concept approach to provide structure** – a systematic approach to communication brings clarity.
- **Building clarity is an iterative process** – understanding and communicating the essence of your idea will not happen immediately; it will develop as part of a continuous feedback and refinement process.
- **Can you explain the benefit of your innovation idea in eight seconds to a ten-year-old?** – if not, keep simplifying.

YOU WILL ALSO GET A LINK TO SOME USEFUL CANVASES

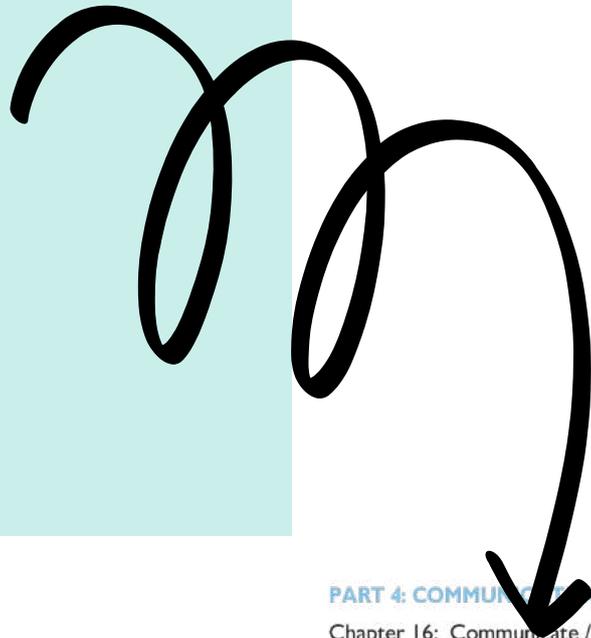
The 4 P'S Canvas To Make Your Ideas Clear		Created for:	Created by:	Date:
Name For simplicity choose a descriptive name				
Headline In one sentence, what's that big idea?				
Problem What is the problem and for whom?				
Promise Benefit promise				
Proof Reason why they should believe you and dramatic difference?				
Payoff Dramatic difference: how is their life different and better?				

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CYCLES
www.thecyclebook.com

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CHAPTER 17: THE POWER OF CLARITY: UNDERSTANDING, HUMILITY, AND THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE



Sometimes, knowledge can actually make it more difficult to communicate clearly.

The Curse of Knowledge.

The “tapper” was frustrated. After tapping out “Happy Birthday to you...” so many times, her finger was getting tired. She could hear the song in her head as she tapped, so how could the listener not identify it? It was possibly the most recognizable tune in the world, in any language. Surely, it was obvious.....!!!!

This chapter was co-written with Franck Vinchon.

The experiment, devised by a Stanford Ph.D. named Elizabeth Newton, was simple; you can try it with family and friends. One person, the “*tapper*”, thinks of a popular melody and then taps out the tune on a piece of wood while a second person listens and tries to identify it.

Before the experiment began, they asked the tappers what they thought the chances were of their listener guessing the tune. They estimated that listeners had a one in two (50%) chance of guessing the melody correctly. The actual results were very different; less than one in forty (2.5%) of listeners actually guessed correctly.

The Curse of Knowledge



Tapper



Listener

The problem was that listeners heard only a series of seemingly random taps. To the tapper, who could hear the melody in their head, it seemed incredible that they could not easily identify the tune. It has become known as “*The Curse of Knowledge*”, where having prior knowledge can be a barrier to communicating clearly.

What is the relevance of this to innovation? To build an idea into an innovation, you must be able to explain it clearly. Initially, you need to explain to others in your organization, but you will need to describe your idea to potential customers before long. Feedback is essential in refining and improving a product or service, but you can only get useful feedback if customers really understand your idea.

The *Curse of Knowledge* can make communication more difficult because you already know the subject very well. This chapter is about taking the innovative ideas in your head and communicating them simply and effectively.

Why Clarity Matters.

Dealing with “*The New*” is intrinsic to innovation. The people directly involved in the innovation process gradually overcome this as they build knowledge. One of the greatest challenges is making the benefits of *The New* readily understandable to other people who do not have that knowledge. Unless you can clearly explain the benefits, it is unlikely that an organization will take a project forward or that potential customers will be able to give useful feedback.

The problem is compounded because, in the modern world, we are constantly bombarded with information. It is estimated that people are exposed to somewhere between four and ten thousand messages every day. You must be absolutely clear about the benefit your innovation offers if you have any hope of being heard and understood. Say only what you need to say without burying the essence of your idea in too many words.

Look at the innovation descriptions below. Which works best?

- An innovative patent-pending hand hygiene solution to help hospitals improve hand hygiene compliance, **or**, Clean hands save lives?
- A new golf club integrates a patented springboard face and is designed to hit balls further, **or**, A club that hits the ball 7.9% further on average.
- A new dog food which includes patented dental crystals, **or**, Keep your dog’s breath fresh for up to twelve hours.

These are all fairly obvious, but think about why. In each case, the first version is longer and focuses on features while the second is shorter, simpler, and clearly communicates the benefit the innovation offers.

Just explaining your idea is not enough. People need relatable, understandable, simple stories that generate emotions; emotions drive people’s decisions. The starting point for communication clarity is to be aware that we often fail to communicate even our best ideas. With a healthy dose of humility, you need to ask the following important questions again and again until you have hard answers:

- Does your story capture the problem you want to solve?
- Have you described the benefit in a way people can readily understand?

Before you try to answer these questions, ask yourself whether you can see it from someone else’s point-of-view, and express the benefit of your innovation without making assumptions about prior knowledge? If not, go back and try again.

The reality is that it may be challenging to answer even these simple questions. But do not give up. In this chapter, we provide a 6-step process to refine and build clarity into your ideas. By the end, you will be able to communicate about your product or service clearly and simply.

As you move forward with your innovation projects, I would like you to put a small sign on your desk:

How can you get feedback on it if people don't understand what it is?

It will serve as a constant reminder of the need to communicate with clarity. It has worked for me throughout the years, and it should work for you!

Building Clarity.

Consider the following brands. All involve complex products, but the key benefit can be expressed in just a few words:

Facebook = *connect with friends*

Google = *find anything*

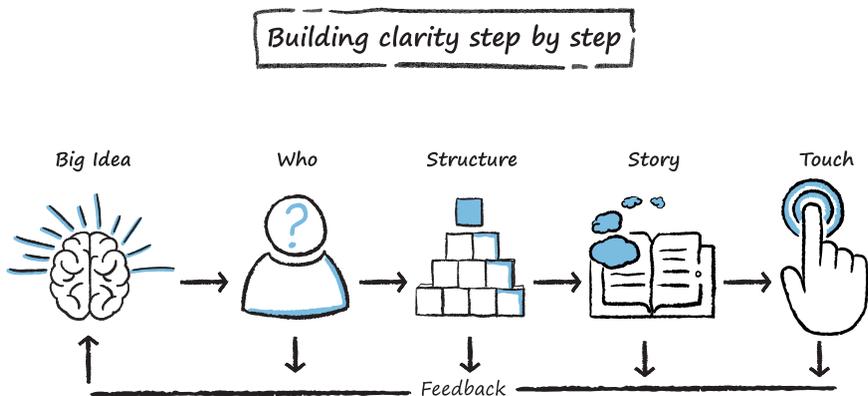
Volvo = *safety* (*)

(*) now they say it is "prosperity", but for me, it remains "safety". Sorry, Volvo!

No matter how many features they add to their services, these providers will always be recognized by these simple promises. What does this tell us? More is not a winner; less is the key to clarity.

Building clarity and making things clear and simple is hard work and takes time! I have found the best way is to use a 6-step process:

1. What is the essence?
2. Who are you talking to?
3. Structure is key.
4. Tell a story.
5. The power of touch.
6. Remove and simplify.



Following the process outlined in this section will help to build clarity systematically. It is not a once-off process; you will be coming back again and again to the essence of your idea, using feedback to refine and simplify until you reach something that expresses the core benefit of your innovation as concisely as possible.

1. What is the essence?

When we work with innovation every day, we tend to focus on features and forget about benefits. We get excited about creativity, but we can forget that other people are not as interested in our products' nuts-and-bolts as we are.

In a previous chapter, we talked about Jobs-to-be-Done. The core benefit we offer is the essence of the new product or service. We must reduce the essence to the simplest terms to express this clearly (*Volvo = safety*). But, it is crucial to recognize that what we start with is rarely the true essence. A full understanding of the essence is only reached through an iterative process involving refinement through consumer feedback.

For example, Uber started with the idea of disintermediating the taxi business. That evolved, and most people now understand that Uber is about cheap, friendly rides whenever, wherever you want. The description of the original idea was not simple enough to clearly explain the benefit to the consumer. However, the essence is. Here are some other examples of how starting ideas developed into a clearly understood essence.

Product	The starting idea	As a JTBD	The essence
Listerine	An antiseptic also used to treat dandruff and as an aftershave	Halitosis and how to avoid it becoming a social anxiety	Kills germs that cause bad breath
Snickers	A "real food" candy bar. With nuts and good ingredients	The right energy when you don't have time to eat	Snickers satisfies
Instagram	App which allows users to check-in and share plans and photographs with friends	Share photographs and short messages	Photo sharing

To get useful feedback, you need people to understand the core benefit of what you are offering, the essence. The more simply and briefly you can do this, the better their understanding will be.

2. Who are you talking to?

Almost twenty years ago, the term "*buyer persona*" was first used to denote research-based information about consumers. According to a recent survey, 80% of the people working in organizations are confused about what buyer personas are, and only 15% reported that these were effective. This result tells us that most companies still do not understand the importance of knowing who their consumers are.

You cannot achieve clarity unless you can put yourself in the shoes of the consumer. To do this, you need to know who that consumer is. The best starting point is to create a persona or personas of the people you want to talk to. Personas serve to embody and represent a human need that we can address, rather than a specific demographic. It often helps to create the portrait of a real person and to identify what is important:

- Give him or her a name?
- Why might he/she be interested in your product/service?
- What jobs are they looking to get done that your innovation could help with?
- How are they getting these jobs done now?
- What would it take to get your product chosen to do one or more of these jobs?

Creating a persona for potential consumers helps you see things from their perspective. That insight develops the empathy you need to understand who you are talking to and what they want.

Note: If you want to dig deeper into this idea, search for “*empathy map*” and “*persona mapping*”. You will find dozens of great tools.

3. Structure is key.

We have already discussed in previous chapters why a systematic approach to innovation is essential. That is as true of achieving clarity as with any other aspect of the process. Fortunately, we can adapt some tried and tested approaches.

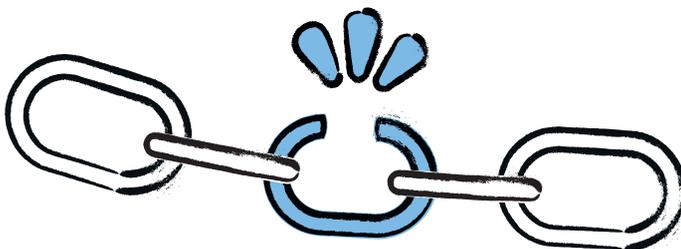
Proctor & Gamble (P&G) is a globally successful company that has achieved leadership in marketing consumer goods worldwide. Part of the reason for their success is their ability to communicate clearly.

In my opinion, P&G is a true pioneer in communication. In many ways, they invented marketing as we know it today. At P&G, communication is built around a structure using concepts first and then using them to develop creative ideas.

A *concept* is a promise a product makes to resolve an unmet consumer need, the reason it satisfies that need, and a description or portrayal of any key element that will affect the product’s perception. The P&G approach is not just about marketing; it is also a powerful tool to clarify your thinking and to help you communicate more effectively about your idea. The three core elements of the P&G concept approach are:

- Consumer Truth (showing that you understand the customer’s needs)
- Benefit Statement (what value do you provide to the customer?)
- Reason to Believe (why should the customer believe you?)

**Your communication is as strong
as your weakest link**



Consumer Truth – “You understand me.” A concise definition of the problem your innovation will address. However, it describes this from a consumer’s perspective and helps create a context within which the benefit and reason-to-believe make sense. It must be based on a deep understanding of the potential consumer’s point-of-view and acknowledge why they see a particular situation as a problem.

Consumer Truth must be backed-up with effective research that will tease out the required information; the problems you seek to address may be tangible (what does the innovation do?) or emotional (how does it make the consumer feel?). The consumer feelings and frustrations you need to understand may be unspoken and perhaps not clearly articulated by the consumers themselves.

The Consumer Truth must clearly tell the target consumer that you understand their problem. This truth can be as simple as: *Kids make tough stains.*

This insight can then be leveraged to develop new products or services such as a detergent designed to remove the tough stains kids make.

Examples of Consumer Truths:

- Dyed hair doesn’t look natural.
- Stopping for gas takes too much time and interrupts my trip.
- Soap dries my skin.

Benefit Statement – “What’s in it for me?” The benefit statement explains how your innovation solves the problem identified in the Consumer Truth by answering the question, “*What’s in it for me?*” on behalf of a target consumer. Ideally, this should be presented as a single benefit. Offering more than one benefit can be confusing and challenging to promote effectively.

The benefit must be easy to understand, valuable to the potential consumer, and provide your innovation with a clear competitive advantage.

Examples of benefits:

- Crest™ makes dental checkups easier.
- No more embarrassing static cling with Bounce™.
- Ikea™ creates great affordable home design.

Reason to Believe (RTB) – “Why should I believe you?” The RTB statement explains why consumers should believe that the benefit you promise will be delivered. The RTB can be a particular feature, ingredient, or process of the innovation or an endorsement. The strength of brand equity also contributes to the RTB.

Examples of RTBs:

- Trident Gum: “*4 out of 5 dentists surveyed recommend sugarless gum.*”
- Tylenol’s™ hospital endorsement.
- Volvo’s™ car crash demonstrations.

The 4Ps. The P&G approach is powerful, but additional tools can help improve clarity even further; checklists and formulas. These are a powerful aid to simplification and ensure that you cover everything and get the essentials right. Creating a checklist or following a formula is always more effective than merely listing points.

Here are some of my favorite approaches used to help develop clarity in innovation:

The Founder Institute, a US business incubator, entrepreneur training, and startup launch program, suggests using the following formula to produce a simple statement that will ensure you are focused on the benefit your product or service has to offer:

My company: (company name) **is developing** (a defined offering) **to help** (target audience) (solve a problem) (with secret sauce).

Doug Hall, building on the concept ideas of P&G, offers in his book “*Jump start your business brain*” an alternative formula to focus on the essence of your idea:

(Business name) **is the first to offer** (Overt Benefit) **that’s because of** (Reason to Believe).

This is important because (Dramatic Difference).

In his latest book, *Driving Eureka*, Hall has simplified this even further to just three points:

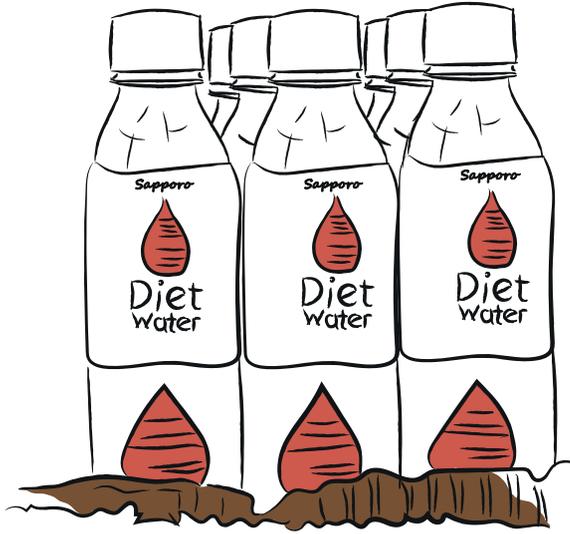
Problem, promise, proof (the 3Ps).

Although I like the simplicity of all these approaches, I would recommend going into a little more detail. The best format I have seen is a combination of the 3Ps from Doug Hall with a clearer focus on the payoff and how your innovation will improve the lives of those who use it. If you think in terms of payoff, you cannot avoid focusing on the essence. The result is the 4Ps format, and this is what we will use in this book.

The 4Ps form an iterative cycle that ensures clarity in your thinking and allows you to communicate effectively. The 4Ps are as follows:

1. **Problem** – What is the problem your innovation addresses? Who is this a problem for? (Make sure it is a real and relevant problem.)
2. **Promise** – What benefit does the innovation deliver? (Remember, features and benefits are not the same.)
3. **Proof** – What evidence can you provide to ensure that consumers believe you?
4. **Payoff** – How will your innovation improve the life quality of people who use it?

Taking the time to apply the 4Ps to your innovation will force you to think explicitly about the real benefit it offers. However, sometimes the benefit is not obvious or even logical. For example, on a trip to Japan, I came across this product; Sapporo Diet Water:



On the face of it, the idea of low-calorie water is just silly – *all* water is zero calories. If you apply the 4Ps logically, this product should not work. There is no Problem and, therefore, no Promise, no Proof, and no real Payoff. I was surprised that this product even existed, but Diet Water not only proved popular, it even spawned several competitive products. How can that be?

The answer is that the problem does not have to be grounded in logic or even reality as long as it engages with customer perception. Obesity is a Problem, and it seems that people are willing to believe a Promise that drinking a particular brand of water will help them lose weight. The science behind this is, at best, debatable, but in terms of marketing, that may not be important. If customers believe the Promise you give as a solution to their Problem, they *will* buy your product. Using the 4Ps makes sure that you stay focused on these key areas.

4. Tell a story.

The structured approach of using the 4Ps will help to generate clarity, but for truly effective communication, you should go one step further and develop your ideas into a story. The human mind is essentially a high-powered story machine. According to research, a message delivered in story form is twenty-two times more memorable than a simple fact. Stories act as mnemonic devices by organizing facts into a narrative framework.

A great trick used by people who appear to have phenomenal memories is creating stories from facts. These people do not have a better memory than you or me; they are just better at framing facts within stories. It is often done by visualizing important facts and placing them at particular locations on a mental journey, such as walking through your house. This approach, the “*method of loci*” (also known as the *memory journey* or *memory palace*), was first used by Roman and Greek orators and remains effective today.

This technique works because our brains love stories. Research by the University of California confirms that people read through, recall, and enjoy narrative texts better than encyclopedic ones. Stories are also powerful drivers of emotional value. When communicating about the benefit of your innovation, it is more effective if framed within the context of a story.

By stories, we do not mean writing fiction. Build the facts you already have into a narrative:

- What drives your organization?
- How did the idea come to you?
- What was your initial reaction to the thought?
- Is there a way to make people relate emotively to the problem your idea seeks to solve?

Once you have the outline of your story, you need to frame it in a way that is intriguing or inspiring or relatable or, ideally, all three. Include the three main elements; Context, Action, and Result (CAR), to build the narrative.

Here is an example of a story which uses CAR:

Context – Where did it all begin? What is your background?

Example: In a social experiment called the Significant Objects Project, several people bought two hundred random objects in thrift shops and garage sales for a total of 129 USD.

Action – What can you do? What do you want to do? What is the problem?

Example: Each object was sold on eBay with the addition of a fictional piece of writing relating to the object. It was not an attempt to fool buyers; the stories clearly were not true.

Result – What is your proposed solution?

Example: The random objects sold for over 8,000 USD on eBay, thus confirming the narrative’s persuasive power.

“Stories are such a powerful driver of emotional value that their effect on any given object’s subjective value can actually be measured objectively.”

JOSHUA GLENN AND ROB WALKER, THE SIGNIFICANT OBJECTS PROJECT

Pretotyping can be a valuable approach because it enables you to quickly receive customer feedback without the time and expense required to create a working prototype.

6. Remove and simplify.

“Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPERY

In terms of communication, simpler is always better. In the modern world, we are overwhelmed with information; it has been estimated that the average human receives the equivalent of over 32 GB of visual and aural information every single day. If your message is going to be memorable, it must be simple.

Research suggests that the average person’s attention span is now under eight seconds; that is even less than a goldfish! That is how long you have to tell people about your innovation and why it is critical to deliver the right information simply and concisely. It is confirmed by a research study done by the University of Chicago that found that *“irrelevant information weakens consumers’ beliefs in the product’s ability to deliver the benefit”*.

When done right, simplicity looks really simple, but achieving it is not easy. It means going over the same process repeatedly (essentially, cycles) until you can express something in its most basic form. In terms of clarity, less is always more. Your job is to use feedback to make your ideas simpler, stronger, and clearer.

Can you explain your innovation idea clearly to a ten-year-old in eight seconds? If not, you need to simplify until you arrive at ideas as concise as these:

- Overnight? *Send via FedEx*
- Safety important? *Buy a Volvo*
- Think different? *Buy Apple*

Why Does All This Matter?

Working on clarity builds innovation muscle. It forces you to think about the core benefit of what you are offering, the essence, and to whom it is useful and why. Focusing on the essence keeps you on track and clarifies your thinking. It allows you to communicate more clearly, and this is essential if you are to get the real and useful feedback needed to refine and improve your idea. Feedback is crucial in building ideas into commercially viable innovations, and clarity is an essential factor in getting this feedback.

Key Take-Aways



- **Clarity is at the heart of effective innovation** – this applies both to your thinking and how you communicate your idea.
 - **Empathy is important** – to clearly communicate the benefit of an innovation, you must step into the shoes of a target consumer.
 - **Use the 4Ps, and the concept approach to provide structure** – a systematic approach to communication brings clarity.
 - **Building clarity is an iterative process** – understanding and communicating the essence of your idea will not happen immediately; it will develop as part of a continuous feedback and refinement process.
 - **Can you explain the benefit of your innovation idea in eight seconds to a ten-year-old?** – if not, keep simplifying.
-



Next Steps: If you can't explain your idea clearly and simply, chances are you don't have an idea that is going to get other people excited. Understanding is usually a prerequisite for excitement. Use these canvases to help make your ideas so simple a 10-year-old can understand them. The first canvas is an idea starter; the second canvas will help you build a 4P for your idea.

Note: As discussed in this chapter, the 4P format is not the only way to share your idea, but it is a great way to get started. The gold standard is to have your idea down to a few words and experience that people can touch. But, remember, you need to “walk before you run.”

Chapter 17A

The Power of Clarity: Understanding, Humility, and the Curse of Knowledge.



60
Minutes

Objectives

To make your idea stronger by better understanding your customer(s)

Deliverables

A better 4Ps based on insights about your customer(s)
Feedback about clarity

How to

Step 1: Clarify whom you are making your solution for
Step 2: Using the 4P format, clarify your offer
Step 3: Check for clarity on 10pt scale, if <7 redo

The Full Communicate/Check Canvas

This Chapter

The 4 PIS Canvas
Don't fill the Canvas. Focus on the big questions.

Name: _____
Headline: _____
Problem: _____
Promise: _____
Proof: _____
Payoff: _____

Easy Market Research
Don't fill the Canvas. Focus on the big questions.

Target: _____
Market: _____
Problem: _____
Solution: _____
Competitors: _____
Barriers: _____
Channels: _____
Partners: _____
Costs: _____
Revenue: _____
Profit: _____

Communicate And Check Canvas

1. Who are you targeting? (Bio)

2. Clarify your offer (Problem, Promise, Proof, Payoff)

3. Check for clarity (Scale 0-10)

Communicate And Check Canvas



1. Who are your targeting

Who Are You Targeting?	A short description:

2. Clarify your offer

Problem	Promise

3. Check for clarity

Using a 10pt scale

0 = not clear
10 = perfect
if <7 redo

Do they know they have a problem?	
If no, why not?	If yes, how are they solving it now?

Proof	Payoff

Workplace

It is clear?

No (Redo cycle from start if not clear)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at all Perfect

Yes (Proceed on next step)

How do you know if you have done this canvas right ?



CHECK LIST

- Do you have a picture in your mind of your customer? If not, make it specific by looking for a photo, write a Bio.
- Have identified a clear problem to be solved (A JTBD). Why are you better than the current solutions?
- Check if your problem/promise leads to a clear payoff.



tiny.cc/M-cc-template

Chapter 17B

The Power of Clarity: Understanding, Humility, and the Curse of Knowledge.



60
Minutes

Objectives

To write a clear, simple summary of your innovation idea that includes a clear benefit, promise, and payoff. Success is something a 10-year old can understand in less than 60 seconds

Deliverables

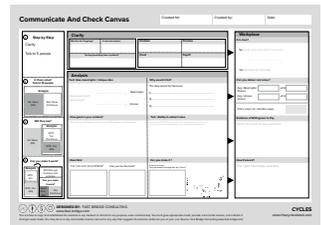
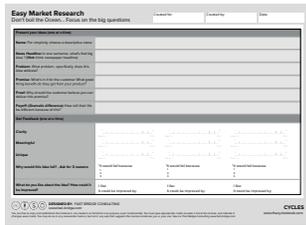
5 4Ps to more clearly explain your idea.

How to

Making ideas clear is simple if you focus on the essentials.
Take your best idea and write a 4Ps five times.
Done right, you will see your ideas getting stronger and clearer each time.

The Full Communicate/Check Canvas

This Chapter



The 4 P'S Canvas: To Make Your Ideas Clear

<p>Name For simplicity choose a descriptive name</p>	
<p>Headline In one sentence, what's that big idea ?</p>	
<p>Problem What is problem for who ?</p>	
<p>Promise Benefit promise</p>	
<p>Proof Reason why should they believe you and dramatic difference ?</p>	
<p>Payoff Dramatic difference how is there life different and better ?</p>	

How do you know if you have done this canvas right ?



CHECK LIST

- Have you clearly defined a problem someone cares about ?
- Are you offering a solution (a promise) to this problem.
- Have you clearly identified a payoff in the way your customer(s) might talk.
Make sure the language is authentic.



tiny.cc/m-cc-template



Next Up: Feedback is an essential part of the innovation process. It confirms that you have found a job that customers are willing to pay to get done, and their feedback helps to refine and improve your idea into a commercially viable product. Clarity helps you to describe your new idea, but how do you get the feedback you need?

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Franck has been handling positions in strategy and management in major advertising networks around the world for 20 years. He accompanied over 200 brands in their communication and innovation; he was largely awarded – Cannes Lions, D&AD, Clios, Epicas, Effies and about 80 local/regional accolades. Franck created his own consultancy Neon42, a unique model that develops strong narratives for brands and their ecosystem, giving them valuable edge to their business. The objective is to bring them back into people’s conversations, into distinctive cultural context and turn their consumers into hardcore fans. The Neon42 methodologies are deeply inspired by the demanding industries of entertainment and sports – each collaboration being a mix of motivation, experience, team spirit and breakthrough strategic solutions. Neon42 actively accompanies big corporations, startups and NGOs in all regions. Franck is also a writer, a screenwriter and a musician.



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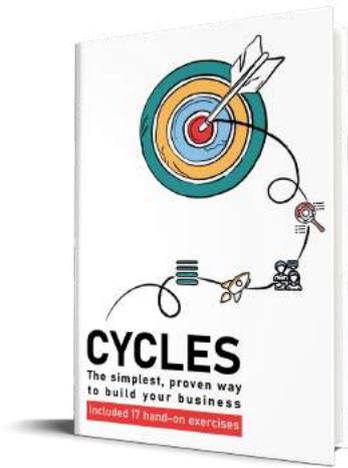
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Bryan is a passionate believer in anyone’s ability to innovate and build new businesses. He has personally built 11 companies in 6 countries, with eight of these making money.

For the last eight years, Bryan has been coaching startups and scale-ups and trying to help larger companies regain the spirit of startups. He has taught at the KU Leuven, The Solvay business school, EDHEC, ESCLA, and been a guest lecturer at the University of Chicago, INSEAD, Cornell, Berkeley, and many other schools.

He has also led programs like Founder Institute Brussels and the European Innovation Academy. This book results from four years of research with over 400 companies on what really drives innovation success.



BOOK CYCLES

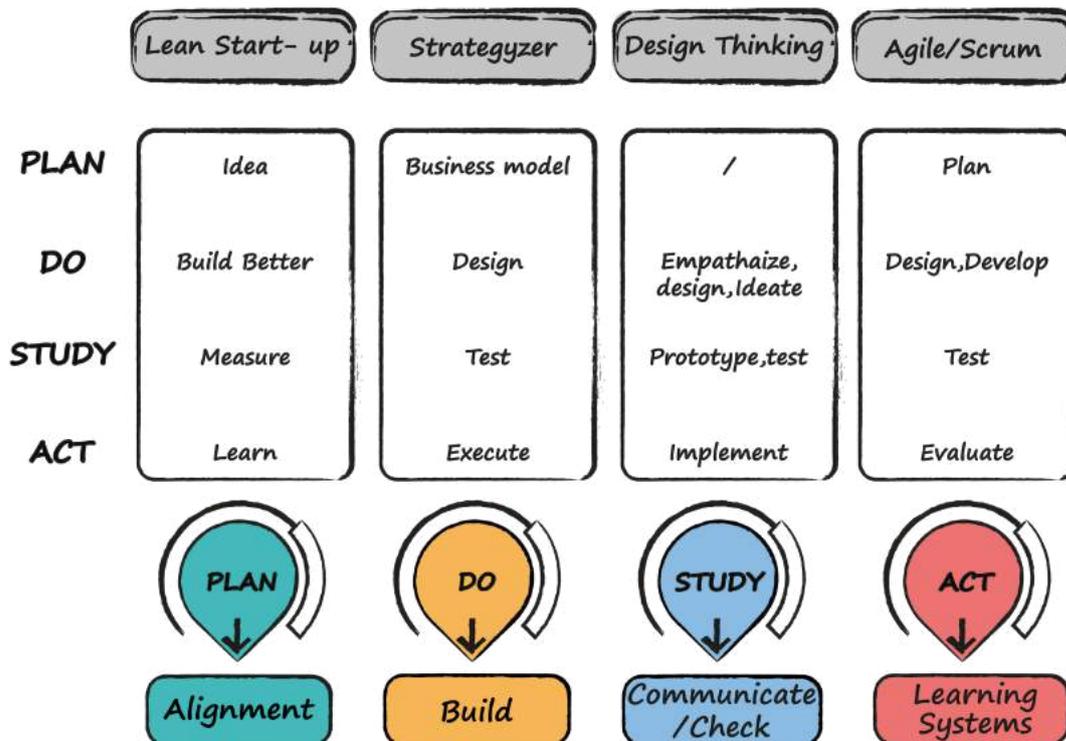
Standing on the shoulders of giants...

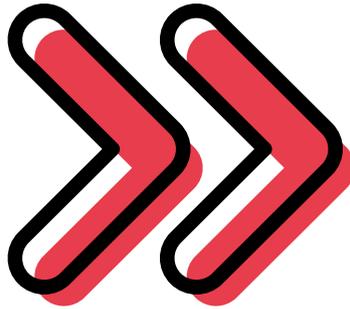
Many of the leading methods- lean start up, scrum, agile are built around the ideas of PDSA (Plan, do , study, act)

This book builds on these ideas, but thanks to the expertise of 22 co-authors, goes one step further.

CYCLES doesn't just tell you what to do, but shows you how to do things step by step.

All the leading methods are Plan, Do, Study, Act and Cycles brings it all together





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TRAININGS, GUIDED SPRINTS, PLEASE CONTACT**

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