Part I

DIALOGUE GAP
Chapter 1

How Dialogue Gap Arose

We need to continue dialogue with our customers and consider making changes depending on their needs.

—Atsushi Saito, President, Tokyo Stock Exchange

Malaise of the New Millennium—A Call to Arms

In the 1960s I spent summers as a boy living in an old converted ice house built to store ice for refrigeration through the hot summer months in the Laurentian mountains north of Montreal. By the 1960s electricity had done away with the need for an icehouse and it had been converted into a living space, still with walls a foot thick and a door so low adults regularly hit their heads on the way in.
Typical of most boys in their preteens my imagination was in overdrive at night living in the forest at the side of Lac des Iles. I often found myself staring at the ceiling wondering what those strange noises were beyond the safety of my bed. Mosquitoes make recognizable sounds as do moths hitting the screen, but when squirrels scratch at the wood or bats wriggle around inside the roof the sounds fill your imagination with more sinister creatures and you find your senses moving into overdrive. You begin seeing and hearing more than you normally would. It isn’t that your senses improve but rather your presence and your attention forces out everything else until all you are noticing is that which you are focused on or in my case, scared about.

With senses fully activated and now wide awake the scratching sound had stopped so I focused my attention on the ceiling and how, despite contours caused by squirrel holes and water damage (caused by ice forming on the roof through the long deep winter followed by its annual retreat as temperatures returned above freezing in the spring), the roof still managed to somehow come together seamlessly with the walls. As I looked closer I saw that the walls and ceilings didn’t connect seamlessly at all, they just appeared to do so because the gaps between the walls were hidden with quarter round, wooden molding that my grandfather’s carpenter loved to use to hide just about everything. As I looked around I realized that quarter round was used to hide every seam in every wall, as well as the floors, the steps, the windows, everywhere. When my grandfather’s carpenter saw a gap he knew it needed quarter round.

Much like my grandfather’s carpenter, when I fly around the world and listen to the problems people lay out in front of me, problems caused when two sides come together but don’t quite connect or even worse collide, I find that the solution to their differences can be found in dialogue. Dialogue to me is like quarter round was to my grandfather’s carpenter. But where quarter round simply hides the problem and leaves you with the impression that all is well (especially when everything is painted the same color), dialogue goes further and aims to rectify the problem by creating a lasting and hopefully optimal outcome for all the stakeholders involved.

My grandfather’s carpenter looked after most of the homeowners in the “Paroisse St-Emile” and used the building materials available locally to build and repair whatever was requested. Back then, if you looked
more deeply at the local supply chain you would have seen two completely different cultures coming together. Our carpenter and his team were born and raised locally and had little formal education; however, he could converse with my grandfather, a surgeon who had lied about his age to fight at Vimy in WWI and who after the war had requested his cottage be built on the shores of the same lake where he grew up as a boy and played with his brothers before the start of the “Great War.”

After electricity arrived at the cottage in the 1950s the little ice-house was converted into a small chalet. In the 1960s, as Kennedy spoke of the Cold War, that little cottage and others like it sprinkled on neighboring lakes and mountainsides throughout the Laurentian Shield, which spans the U.S.-Canada border, seemed totally removed from the rest of the world. This false sense of security is still felt today and while the local carpenter and the international surgeon were able to dialogue sufficiently well together to satisfy both customer and supplier, the quarter round was needed to cover the gaps.

Today, as Atsushi Saito, president of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, states,

> We can no longer pretend to hide our differences if we are to compete globally. We need to continuously dialogue with customers and as their needs evolve our services need to evolve as well. Knowing how to change our services cannot be predicted, the solution results from within the dialogue itself.

Dialogue is not only needed to keep abreast of evolving customer needs, it is also needed to keep abreast of the rapidly changing world in which we live. Indeed dialogue is the fastest way to keep up-to-date and is needed now more than ever before.

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*Today central bankers have to take decisions in an environment marked by a degree of uncertainty in an economic and financial sphere that seems to me largely unprecedented. The acceleration of major advances in science and technology (not only information technology), the ensuing structural transformations or our economies, the ever-growing complexity of our finance and the overall process of globalisation are itself creating a multidimensional acceleration of change.*

—Claude Trichet, European Central Bank Chief

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Unlike the dialogue between my grandfather and his carpenter nearly a century ago, today we are expected to dialogue across cultures effectively and instantly just to stay in business. A tall order, given we are all born into local cultures with local awareness and need to build from there.

Patricia and Mireille—Intergenerational Dialogue

Patricia, a beautiful and fit 87-year-old grandmother, has attentively been listening to one of my travel stories when her face turns grave and she says, “Peter, I want to share something I am very concerned about.” Seeing Patricia has turned serious and wondering what she is about to share I focus on her with all my attention. “My granddaughter doesn’t talk to me. She comes to visit but when she does we watch TV or more often now she just sits on her laptop doing Facebook with her friends.” Patricia goes on, her eyes changing to reveal traces of a much younger girl. “When I was the age of my granddaughter I used to be able to talk to my grandmother for hours. I could talk to her about just about anything, subjects I’d be embarrassed to share with my mother seemed to be so comfortable with her. And my grandmother would tell me things of her life that seemed so important for me to learn. Wisdom was transmitted that way and many of life’s most important lessons I attribute to having learned from my grandmother.” But suddenly Patricia turned serious again. “That’s the problem, if my granddaughter doesn’t care to engage with me how will she learn those things that were so important for me to learn at her age? I’m concerned she can’t engage with anyone. My son tells me that’s just the way she is but I hear similar reactions about their granddaughters from my friends. What can I do to engage my granddaughter in dialogue? I’m 87 and who knows how long I’ll be around.”

Patricia’s call to arms—“What can I do to engage my granddaughter in dialogue?”—is the rallying cry of our age. People who started their careers before the 1990s onslaught of e-mail and Internet surfing detect a problem but the definition of that problem is only becoming apparent and few people have figured out what to do about it. The problem that Patricia has so effectively identified is also a generational issue because people who have commenced their career in
the 1990s or later are communicating faster and more effectively than ever before so they don’t understand what people like Patricia are talking about when they flag existing problems. Some see the older, pre–Internet generation as dinosaurs who just need to get a Facebook account and begin instant messaging.

Patricia’s life isn’t busy. At 87 she curls in the winter and lawn bowls in the summer. The morning paper arrives at her door and her family visits for special occasions. Patricia has a lot of time to reflect and be 100 percent present when her granddaughter visits. Patricia spotted something social scientists are only now coming to recognize. I call it the Digital Tipping Point.

**Digital Tipping Point**

In Patricia’s granddaughter’s case the changes were gradual. She became more introverted, spent more and more time connected with friends online and as she visited her grandmother had less and less interest in talking with her or asking her questions. The phenomenon is not new. People who watch a lot of television believe their favorite TV personalities are actually their friends. Some people report that when they visit family members who have passed their digital tipping point watching TV, it seems their family members know more about their favorite TV stars (who are actually strangers) and express more interest in their lives than they do about their real family members sitting right in front of them.

Boys and PC games are another example of the effects of the digital tipping point. The *New Straits Times* in Kuala Lumpur ran a story entitled “Gamers Gone Wild—children as young as 12 stay out all night to play games at cybercafés.” Although the expressed concern in this article was about youth becoming “so addicted they don’t care about eating and sleeping . . . mingling with adults who gamble, have cybersex as well as download pornography,” my real concern is

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A person has passed their digital tipping point when they spend more than half their time communicating with people digitally rather than in person. Once past the digital tipping point things change.⁴
the opportunity cost of these young people spending hour after hour glued to their digital monitors rather than interacting with human beings. Over time they lose any of the interpersonal skills they might have developed and in due course become less attractive to employers, teachers, and friends.

The digital tipping point doesn’t stop with boys. One study on the effects of cell phones and teenage girls in Hong Kong found a strong correlation between a loss of self-esteem and the number of hours they spent digitally connected, for example, texting friends.6

Several studies in the United States are finding damaging effects of overuse of digital connections. The Pew Research Center found that one in three teenagers in the United States send more than 100 text messages per day, that girls were better connected than boys, and that 69 percent of youth enjoy having their cell phones to overcome boredom.7 Again I think we are partly missing the point with this research. When youth exchange texts or play a game on their cell phones when bored they are missing the multitude of opportunities to connect with the people around them. Over time this has a negative impact on their behavior making them less comfortable connecting with other people.8

It is common nowadays to watch people sit aside each other in a restaurant, coffee shop, bus, or train and instead of talking to each other they stare intently into the tiny screens on their cell phones to send and receive messages with people they are not physically with. This new phenomenon, to ignore the real people we are with in favor of the digital people at the end of a wireless connection, is creating more implications than most people recognize. We have never been connected with as many people as we are today while at the same time being more isolated and unable to dialogue.

One study out of the United States suggests that digital media use is increasing and that 11- to 18-year-olds have already reached their digital tipping point of more than half their waking hours digitally connected.9 This is unprecedented and we are only now beginning to understand the implications.

Many of us spend 8 to 12 hours at the office only to come home and check personal e-mail, surf the Web, or watch TV. If that sounds like your life at the moment then you are already long past your own digital tipping point because your digital home life comes after what
my clients report is easily two to three if not six hours a day glued to their computers “doing their job” at work. Assuming you sleep eight hours then you are already spending more than half your waking hours digitally rather than personally connected with others.

Some people are addicted to their digital connections. Addiction to social networking, e-mail, online gambling, and pornography is contributing to short-term smiles and long-term frowns. All this isolated online time takes away from being with people and this gradual diminishment of connected time has led to a change in people's feelings, work, and skills.

**Life Beyond the Digital Tipping Point**

Life in our new digital era is different. We have become more sedentary than ever before and this is leading to terrible obesity and related diseases. Life beyond our digital tipping point is leading to changes in how we think, what we feel, how we work, and what we are good at.

**How We Think**

Nicholas Carr in his 2010 best seller *The Shallows: How the Internet Is Changing the Way We Think, Read and Remember*, provides a convincing argument through reference to numerous research studies stretching back to the start of the computer that show how the Internet is diminishing our ability to reason and remember complex ideas. Carr suggests that our reliance on the Internet to store and return to us with just a few clicks more information than we can possibly consume, is freeing our brains to become better at multitasking and rapid response. Since the beginning of time our inventions have changed us:

- The invention of printed books eliminated our tradition of dialogic transmission of knowledge.
- The invention of clocks eliminated our ability to know time by looking at the sun.
- The invention of the compass eliminated our ability to find our way by looking at the sky.
- The invention of the Internet is eliminating our ability to think deeply and remember extensive volumes of information.
What use is an encyclopedic mind when all you need is to Google for information? What is considered important today is not knowing more than your competitor but being better able to mine and access the information you need, in a format you can use and at a time when you need it. Carr suggests the change in how we are using our brains, as I describe it, from storing and conceptualizing information to retrieving and reporting information, is changing the way our brains are designed to work and thereby making it harder than ever to do things like dialogue to solve the problems we face today. Just when we need to dialogue the most it would appear that our Internet behaviors are causing changes to our brain that make it increasingly difficult to dialogue effectively. In other words, there is uncontested proof that the more we communicate the more we lose our ability to dialogue. Life beyond our Digital Tipping Point is creating an increasingly large dialogue gap and the implications are only now becoming apparent. Our growing Internet use is diminishing our ability to pay attention, connect disparate pieces of information to form a coherent understanding, and interact with others to negotiate, resolve problems, and create new solutions to the new problems we are facing in our interconnected and overburdened world. Says Carr:

The mental functions that are losing the survival of the busiest brain cell battle are those that support calm, linear thought, the ones we use in traversing a lengthy narrative or an involved argument, the ones we draw on when we reflect on our experiences or contemplate an outward or inward phenomenon . . . the net is . . . diminishing our ability to know, in depth, a subject for ourselves, to construct within our own minds the rich and idiosyncratic set of connections that give rise to a singular intelligence.11

It is only in recent years that we have been able to study the brain in depth by using magnetic resonance imaging and other techniques that we have been able to understand the evolving influences of repeated behavior on brain functions. Neuroplasticity suggests that the inner workings of our brains are constantly re-creating themselves in response to how we use our brain. Carr’s book provides a good collection of the current research into the Internet’s effects on our brains, especially the continuous interruptions and intrusions into our psyches
created by pop-up advertisements, banners, constant e-mail, news feeds, social networks, and hyperlinks. In the next chapter I attempt to list some of the effects that are known to exist but here is a glimpse:

An experiment at the University of Southern California, indicates the more distracted we become, the less able we are to experience the subtlest most distinctively human forms of empathy, compassion and other emotions. For some kinds of thoughts, especially moral decision-making about other people’s social and psychological situations, we need to allow for adequate time and reflection. . . . If things are happening too fast you may not ever fully experience emotions about other people’s psychological states.12

What We Feel
The constant spread of digital communication deeper and deeper into our lives is leading to feelings of isolation, stress, and unhappiness. In Matthieu Ricard’s Happiness he writes for nearly 300 pages on the sources of unhappiness and how to go about changing perspectives to cultivate a more wholesome compassion and happiness.13 Of course, much of what it takes to change perspective is dialogue. Dialogues that connect you with yourself and with others include dialogues between:

- Our emotions and our intelligence
- Our self and our soul/spirit
- Actions and priorities
- Friend and foe
- Parent and child
- Teacher and student
- Partner and you
- Colleague and you
- Supplier and client/customer
- Boss and employee
- Buyer and seller

Throughout this book there are examples of dialogues and because dialogue is so important it is amazing that we have never been taught in school or received training at work on how to conduct dialogues
effectively either with ourselves or with others. Given the state of the world today it seems long overdue that we learn to dialogue effectively.

**How We Work**
At work the digital tipping point is also having significant effect. One of the most prevalent topics for human resource professionals today is **employee engagement**. How to engage an employee? Talk to them. How to motivate someone? Talk to them to find out what motivates them and then respond accordingly. Engagement isn’t difficult but if you hire a smart employee, sit him or her in a cubicle and connect them only via Internet to colleagues, clients, and suppliers, it won’t take long before they too feel isolated, frustrated, and unhappy. Sadly this recipe for disengagement describes most offices today.

When people pass their digital tipping point there is also a drop in **efficiency**. People arrive at work eager to impress their boss, customers, and colleagues. They take their instructions and get on with the job. Meanwhile, because we work in dynamic environments something changes but no one tells the employee so they continue to do as they think best only to complete the project and realize what has been done is no longer needed, or worse, sets the team and project back.

Entire projects can be completed without any impact. In one example, I was hired to study a client’s operations and make suggestions for improvements. A small team interviewed all the key stakeholders and made a report to the chairman for him to review with his board and take actions accordingly. Sometimes consultants are used as an excuse for the board members to say they made changes because the consultant suggested it when in fact it was their idea all along. This was not the case here. Four years after submitting my report I learned that nothing had been done. In this case the chairman decided to leave behind a blueprint for after he was gone so the next chairman would know what to do, which might make sense but he didn’t tell anyone and the report went unnoticed by his replacement for four years. Not surprisingly many of the recommendations remain unfulfilled even today.

Another problem I am witnessing on the far side of the digital tipping point is the loss of tolerance. I see this because as a negotiation consultant and mediator when I am requested to step into conflict situations and work them out I notice that many of the internal conflicts
result from one or more of the employees not recognizing conditions changing and no one in the department or company or on the project has told them of the changes; nor have they otherwise discovered the change because they seldom if ever dialogue with others involved. The fact that conditions were changing and a shift was inevitable are understood but without the awareness that comes with personal contact the changes come as a surprise, often at the last minute after anything more can be done, causing obvious disruption, angst, and sometimes anger. And sometimes these situations also lead to intolerance and mutual dislike between colleagues.

**What We Are Good At**

My many years in negotiation reveal a declining ability of people to negotiate, solve problems together, and resolve conflict.\(^4\) Why? The far side of the digital tipping point is a place where people get to only after falling out of practice with conversing with other people and without regular practice the harder applications of dialogue like negotiation, problem solving, and conflict resolution fall out of reach of most amateurs.

Throughout the book the case studies will reveal various aspects of the challenges involved in achieving optimal outcomes through dialogue. One of the problems the case studies substantiate is what I have coined as *dialogue gap*.

**How We Learn**

Dialogue gap is also getting worse simply because people don’t see as much of it today and because leaders tend to learn from others: If they don’t see their boss using dialogue why would they? Likewise, if people watch bad dialogue they won’t want to repeat it and instead choose autocratic divide-and-conquer methods of decision making.

Dialogue gap is a real problem in companies and society today and is fairly well demonstrated in the case scenarios included in this book. I describe dialogue gap and its implications in the next chapter to make the case for needing to improve dialogue everywhere if we are to survive in the humane civilization that Socrates and others have alluded to.
**Dialogue Triggers**
Before proceeding it is worthwhile to reflect for a moment on the many things that may trigger dialogue to take place. Dialogue triggers include situations like the:

- Need to buy or sell something.
- Need for change such as to improve, resolve, inform, motivate, influence.
- Need to negotiate, lead, parent.
- Need to love, help, care, teach.
- Need to solve, audit, assess, evaluate, appraise.

When the dialogue trigger goes off and the resultant dialogue skills, spaces, or systems are absent or inadequate the resulting outcome will vary from less than optimal to bad. Each of the case studies addresses dialogue gaps in their own way. You might recognize problems similar to the ones you face and hopefully by considering what was done or what might have been done, collect a few ideas to optimize your own outcomes, reduce the dialogue gap you are facing, or turn around a situation confronting you today.

This book is presented in a way that allows you to read it in any order. If it is applications you are looking for then scan the pages for case studies and read those relevant to you. If you are looking to improve your dialogue skills you can start there. If you are wondering about how to sustain dialogue or connect with people facing similar situations to you or if you are looking for people to help you solve some of the dialogue challenges that you are facing then you might prefer to follow the links mentioned in the chapter on sustaining dialogue.

This book and its related website are designed to promote effective dialogue at work, at home, and in society. They are designed to rally the growing dialogic community globally. People who understand the world today understand the only way we are going to survive the twenty-first century is if we learn to optimize our outcomes, minimize the negative effects of our consumer societies, and learn to live together on this wonderfully finite planet, the third planet from the sun.

**From Accountant to Dialogist**
Most everyone I work with asks me the same question: How did you switch from being an auditor in the world's largest accounting firm to
being an international speaker and consultant in negotiation and dialogue? People ask me this question for different reasons. Some people don’t see any connection between the two occupations. Some want to understand the career path one takes to become a specialist in this area. Some people want to know how to garner enough courage to make a change in their own careers. Some are simply curious because there are few people who have made such a change.

To understand my own enlightenment you need to understand my background. I came from a family intricately linked to health care and the helping professions but graduated with a business degree in the midst of the greedy 1980s when Canadian business graduates looked to emulate people like Conrad Black and other icons of the Canadian Establishment. The height of the recession, however, meant that earning a professional degree provided an assured job and in Canada becoming a chartered accountant is one of the most respected professional designations of all. I wanted to find out what made some organizations succeed where others failed, so I chose to become an auditor and use my professional license to go inside the biggest corporations in the world to find the answers. My career as auditor took me inside boardrooms from Montreal to Geneva and then Hong Kong where I landed in 1989 just after the Tiananmen Square massacre. By this time the world was changing. The Cold War had just ended with the breaking open of the Berlin Wall, the Internet was beginning to connect the world as never before, and China was in its ascendancy.

By the time I landed in Hong Kong what separated the good and bad organizations was not the numbers, as I had thought, but rather the people. For the next five years working with behavioral scientists Drs. David West and Robin Stuart-Kotze, we led my employer to develop and restructure its talent to effectively capitalize on the growth of the Hong Kong and China markets. The more I learned about leadership and management development the more I realized that what successful organizations really did well was to align their people to work toward agreed goals.

The problem is that few organizations properly identify or agree on the right goals. If they do agree they struggle to realize these goals because their staff, suppliers, and clients don’t necessarily share the same goals. It appeared to me that what really made the difference was the ability to negotiate well.
I set out to conquer the subject of negotiation so that my clients could benefit from the solutions they really needed. Work flowed in from around the world and in due course I began to realize that everyone said the best negotiators were in Asia, but all the negotiation models we followed were Western. I then set out to identify what people in Asia thought constituted a star negotiator and my findings resulted in the now internationally popular Star Negotiator Workshop. The workshop details and client experiences were eventually published in *Negotiation, Mastering Business in Asia*.

The Star Negotiator model described in the book refers to five essential attributes common to successful negotiators. These attributes are easily remembered as communication tips. The five attributes are:

1. Communication—Manage Communication Effectively
2. Tactics—Use Tactics Strategically
3. Information—Control Information Wisely
4. People—Understand People Fully
5. Situation—Facilitate Situations Productively

As a result of the book on negotiation my client work and international travel intensified. As I delved even deeper into what made some organizations more successful than others I became stuck on the idea
that if the solution was in the dialogue, why didn’t people talk and why didn’t people listen? It is believed that important information will reveal itself only when you ask the right question and over time the answer became the entirely new concept, at least to me, that communication was not the problem but rather dialogue was the problem and that the two were not the same. Whereas communication was about talking and listening, even when this was present negotiations were still not achieving optimal outcomes. Furthermore conflict was still rising and clients were increasingly asking me to resolve situations that were not really negotiation requiring concession making and taking but rather difficult situations requiring dialogue.

I then set out to read all I could to understand fully about dialogue so I could help my clients. Little is written on the subject of dialogue and perhaps that is indicative of the problem—not enough attention has been put on the need to understand dialogue because until reaching the digital tipping point, dialogue had been a human gift passed down from generation to generation through personal contact, stories, teaching, and experience sharing by family members, elders, mentors, teachers, priests, and so on. Dialogue is an obvious underpinning of community.

Once I realized the crucial difference between communication and dialogue I updated the Star Negotiator model to reflect this realization and changed Manage Communication Effectively to read Manage Dialogue Effectively. When communication tips became dialogue tips something else significant changed.

When I began walking into clients’ offices talking about dialogue, the situations I was being asked to consider became much wider, more complicated, and many would say much more important than the commercial buy/sell and change management negotiations I had been addressing in the past.

Now I found myself walking into boardrooms around the world and listening to directors and senior managers as they shared with me the difficult dialogues (many of which are referred to in this book) they were facing. People asked about personal dialogues like marriage, parenting, and career development. In Jeddah our dialogue focused on the treatment of women in Saudi Arabia. In Pakistan and India dialogue moved quickly to resolving the Kashmir dispute, the U.S. war, and competing with China. In Bahrain dialogue focused
on winning the business lost by Dubai after their near economic collapse. In Kolkata we discussed economic growth with a human face to lift the impoverished people of Bengal, the same people for whom Mother Teresa had toiled with her Sisters of Mercy and had even won a Nobel prize. In Washington we discussed the appalling rate of drop-outs in the education sector in the United States where a secondary student drops out of the system every 11 seconds! In Shanghai and Beijing dialogue focused on the Olympics, why the uprising in Tibet was significant and how to solve the Tibet situation that has lasted for so long. In Boston dialogue centered on defense issues in the Middle East, in Toronto we explored environmental activism, and the list of dialogues continues.

By focusing on several of the big dialogues taking place today I hope to help you:

- Recognize the difference between communication and dialogue.
- Learn how to create and sustain effective dialogue yourselves.
- Identify how to achieve optimal outcomes in your lives and organizations.
- Connect with others trying to achieve optimal outcomes through dialogue so that we might all enjoy a sustainable future where we can realize our full potential while helping others realize their potential, too.

Before moving onto the details of dialogue and the rest of this book I should point out one more important change that this path has brought upon me. Years ago I set out to conquer the business world and get rich as this seemed to be the generally accepted thing to do—then. As my career developed and I toured the world I always kept my eyes open. I began noticing people everywhere shared the same goal of increasing happiness and decreasing suffering. Some people defined happiness as owning a fighter jet in the United Kingdom (really), others defined happiness as having a home strong enough to withstand annual typhoons (Philippines). Suffering for some was a significant loss in their investment portfolio while for others it was no access to health care or permanent environmental degradation.
The second thing all these dialogues brought me was the realization that we are all interconnected and that one man’s happiness is another man’s sadness. For example, the profits of the China fund investor are earned at the expense of the low-paid factory worker and polluted environment in China. This interconnectedness is not just about the haves and have nots, it is also about the reality that we cannot air condition our flats without warming the planet and we cannot drive our SUVs to the beach without drilling offshore for oil and risking oil washing onto the sand we are sunning ourselves on. Everything is interconnected.

The realizations arising from working the world of dialogue at the turn of the millennium is further addressed toward the end of this book when I share ideas about a dialogic future—a future where we can all realize our potential while helping others realize their potential. A future that will call on us to have compassion for those who suffer and to use our wisdom to resolve the problems we face. If the twenty-first century has one benefit to mankind it is the forced realization that we can no longer live the dream that we are somehow immune to the problems of every other living creature on earth.
As we have seen, disease can spread instantly around the world, global warming is affecting us all, terrorism in a rich community comes from poverty in a poor community, competition is global, best practices can change overnight, technology is forever evolving how we work. In all these situations the solution is in the dialogue and we need to relearn how to dialogue to survive the twenty-first century.

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*A dialogue is something more of a common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other, but with each other.

In a dialogue, everybody wins.

In dialogue nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if anybody wins. —David Bohm*16

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**Optimal Outcomes**

When I talk about optimal outcomes I am referring to the Nobel Prize–winning economics of Dr. John Nash. Nash’s work was immortalized in the 2001 movie *A Beautiful Mind*, directed by Ron Howard and featuring Russell Crowe. Nash’s work in Governing Dynamics suggested that an equilibrium point can be reached where it is no longer possible for one party to get more from a negotiation without another party losing something. This is what I define as an optimal outcome and anything short of this is suboptimal. In the popular language of negotiation, getting to yes is easy but achieving optimal outcomes is hard work. Sadly, many of the situations that we encounter on a daily basis achieve far less than optimal outcomes and I sense things are getting worse.

Nash’s work left us inspired to aim for optimal outcomes but didn’t help too much in how to achieve them. In my experience optimal outcomes can only be achieved through dialogue. The only way stakeholders can define and identify mutual value is through dialogue and the only way they can achieve the outcomes that derive the value they are after is through dialogue. The solution is in the dialogue. The more effective our dialogue the more likely we will achieve optimal outcomes.

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*Working through your own discomfort and continuing forward in the spirit of dialogue will open people’s minds to see that a different way of working together may be possible.* —Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard*17
Effective dialogue requires the right people to talk about the right issues in the right way and at the right time and place. This sounds formulaic but it is comprehensive, incorporates cultural differences, and inherently makes sense to people everywhere.

**Right People**—By this I am referring specifically to key stakeholders. In many situations when deals break down or negotiations go wrong it is because a group of stakeholders have been omitted from the process. By omitting key stakeholders you also limit the access to the key issues that need to be considered in order to create optimal lasting agreements.

*We need the capability of forming a network with “dialogue inside.”*  
—William Isaacs

To ensure that your dialogues are effective you’ll need to ensure that all key stakeholders are effectively represented in your dialogues. Effective representation is a problem because some representatives are more effective than others, some representatives are effective but are excluded at key
points, and some groups have no representation at all. A classic example of excluding a key stakeholder was when the federal and provincial leaders in Canada attempted to amend the Canadian Constitution in a round of dialogues in 1987 that came to be known as the Meech Lake Accord. This accord ultimately failed because the agreement was crafted without the involvement at a critical juncture of one of the key stakeholders, the Premier of Quebec. The Accord was meant at least in part to ensure Canada would remain whole and not lose its French province to separation but by excluding the French Premier at a key point in the dialogue the deal was eventually lost. Fortunately the province has yet to separate from Canada but the Constitution changes have yet to be agreed and an optimal outcome was never achieved.

There is no truth or wisdom without compassion.
—David Kaczynski

Right Issues—Effective dialogue must ensure that the key issues are tabled, understood, and discussed in a way that addresses the risk and opportunity inherent in each of them. Getting the right issues onto the agenda is not always easy especially knowing that people like
to avoid issues they don’t understand or that will cause conflict. It is also a problem when issues are raised but the people involved don’t fully understand the issues or their implications either when taken individually or when combined with others.

In order to move through that eye of the needle, we must look at old issues in new ways and bring our real selves into the situation.

—C. Otto Scharmer

The chief legal counsel for one of my banking clients did a good job helping the bank’s procurement team understand contracts by explaining the different clauses and then dividing them into three categories:

1. Issues they could negotiate on their own.
2. Issues that would require legal input if the vendor wanted to change the standard bank clause.
3. Issues that definitely required legal input.
By helping the bank procurement team better understand the issues, the chief legal counsel was able to speed up the contract process while alleviating unnecessary work for his legal team so they could focus exclusively on the high risk and legally complicated issues only.

*Human beings create and share knowledge through conversation. It behooves us to heighten our abilities on this score.*

—William Isaacs

**Right Way**—There are a number of ways to manage dialogue and this book will explore some of the more useful dialogue skills, spaces, and systems that are available for you to use as the situation warrants. Professional dialogists understand that different processes or methodologies work better in different situations. I will attempt as best I can to give you insights to the options you have available and when these will be most appropriate for use. Examples of different systems available include using third parties like facilitators or following methodologies like challenge mapping, which get everyone involved and contributing to common challenges.

*Dialogue holds the potential to enable us to perceive and use our ignorance because it helps us to reflect in ways we would not on our own.*

—William Isaacs
Right Time—When we look at the timing of dialogues there are really three factors of importance: start, duration, and deadline. Dialogues should commence when people are ready to talk and listen. If you start before people are ready they won’t participate and if you start too late you’ll have to deal with anger or disappointment before you even proceed to the next stage.

Similarly the duration needs to be balanced because those who are satisfied will want to cut things off and move on while those who feel there is still value to be gained will want to keep things going. It is also problematic in situations where, like North Korea, the people involved believe that as long as they have a platform for dialogue they hold influence but once the dialogue is resolved they will be forgotten and the world will move on. North Korea need only look at the East German government to understand their days of dialogue are limited. The only thing we don’t know is whether the duration of the Six Party talks about the Korean situation will last months, years, or decades.

Finally the deadline of the dialogue is also important because cutting off dialogue can insult and cause an unraveling of the agreement whereas sometimes keeping things going too long prevents
agreement from being achieved. Sales trainers like to use a quick close to prevent analytical buyers from going away and thinking about their purchase because they know that many purchase decisions are made for emotional rather than rational reasons.

My personal view about closing tactics in buying and selling is that a quick close is usually in the interest of only one side of the table and that sooner or later the other side of the table will realize the imbalance and do its best in whatever way possible to rebalance the outcome. If your situation involves long-term relationships I dissuade you from forcing a quick close. An example of attempting to rebalance outcomes is often seen when tenders are won for building contracts based on the lowest bid and then the contractors attempt to win back their lost margins through variation orders during and after the project. This is so prevalent in some parts of the world like Hong Kong that developers include significant percentages (20 to 30 percent) in their budgets to cover eventual variation orders. I worked with one builder that made no money at all building and were it not for their variations they would have been bankrupt. I suggested they weren’t builders at all but rather variation experts and indeed their chartered surveying practice was one of the best paid parts of their payroll.

**Right Space**—The last factor of importance in building effective dialogue is planning where your dialogues should take place. You can for example choose for your location to be more or less formal, comfortable, convenient, or accessible. You can also choose locations and room set-up based on emotional, practical, or intellectual reasons. One classic example often quoted is the selection by the Middle East negotiator to use a venue with a large glass window through which the disputing parties could see children of different nationalities playing in the yard happily together. The underlying message was simple: Wouldn’t you like your grandchildren to enjoy a happy future free of racial conflicts like the children playing on the other side of the window?

*By its very nature, dialogue encourages people to be curious about the thinking behind conclusions and actions, revealing well-thought-through and incoherent decisions alike.*

—Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard

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Life before and after the Digital Tipping Point

Being digitally connected is relatively very new to humanity and in this new era of instant communication we find ourselves increasingly digitally connected. For many people working today we wake, check our smart phone or BlackBerry for messages, then watch or listen to the news (streamed digitally) while we get ready for work. We commute to work listening to our iPods, car radios, CD players, or talking with people on our cell phones. Once we arrive at work we open up our computers, check our e-mail and stay connected all day only taking breaks occasionally to reconnect with our landlines, cell phones, or to exchange text messages. Coffee breaks have become what some observers call “Crackberry breaks” and the traditional lunch hour for many is now a lunch box at their desk and a chance to surf the Web or manage personal e-mail. After work we commute home in a similar digitally connected way as our commute into work. We arrive home just in time to say hello to the family before our favorite TV program and then call it a day sometimes falling asleep listening to the radio.

Occasionally someplace in between our daily digital connections we might talk to our colleagues or family members in person but not for long because we are so busy being digitally connected to our friends and workmates.

When I describe the digital tipping point in this way it sounds like many of us have already passed our own digital tipping point or live or work with people who have. How are their dialogue skills? Perhaps you’ll never find out. How sad. Now consider just a few years ago.

Before the mid-1980s people would wake, share breakfast while chatting about their dreams, their day ahead, or whatever else might be on their mind. During their commute into work they would connect with neighbors or meet new friends and enjoy some light conversation on the way to work. If matters of importance cropped up they were addressed there and then or time was arranged later for personally following up. Coffee breaks were a chance to swap stories, tell jokes, gain a sympathetic ear, or simply catch up with work mates. Lunch hours were
often the best part of the day when you could kick back for a full hour or longer and if you were lucky you’d choose a nice restaurant with friends to while away the time meeting old and new acquaintances at yours and nearby tables. Your lunch encounters might give you some really important piece of information to help your daily responsibilities or private life. The commute home was a bit quieter as people relaxed with a book, watched the sunset, or smelled the flowers. Once home many families waited for the breadwinner to arrive and then would all sit together for their evening meal and talk about the highs and lows of their days. By sleep time all the day’s problems had been solved, all the opportunities for growth explored and all the preparations made for the next day.

To people born before color TV, microwave ovens, and the advent of the Internet the dialogic life is something we remember with fondness but for people who grew up after the 1970s the life of communication lived beyond the digital tipping point is the new normal.

The problem we face in this book, however, is that the new normal comes with implications. To begin to understand the implications of life beyond the digital tipping point it is important to understand the difference as I describe it between communication and dialogue.

**Communication ≠ Dialogue**

Communication is thought of as exchanging information but in the most part it is really sending information to others. The Oxford dictionary actually defines communication as imparting news or the science and practice of transmitting information. Today we send and reply to e-mail, text messages, voice mail, and phone calls. Most of the time we are communicating news, updates, status reports, or simply telling our friends and families what we are doing. Our communications are normally only interrupted by receiving communications from other people.
Whereas communication is about sending information to others, dialogue is different, very different. To understand dialogue today we need to understand a bit of history.

By far the most famous writings on the topic of dialogue are referred to as the Socratic or Platonic Dialogues. The Greek philosopher Socrates lived during the fourth century BCE and became famous for his dialogues on important social issues of the time. Socrates held his dialogues in public and in people’s private homes. They were directed at the idea that people should place less emphasis on worldly matters and instead question their values and place primary importance on improving their souls.

We have come to know about Socrates’ philosophy through the writings of his followers including Plato, Aristotle, and others. Socrates is considered today one of the biggest influences on Western philosophy. The definition of dialogue (dia-logos) at the time of Socrates suggested a shared knowing, allowing people to govern themselves. Polis, which dates from the same Greek era is what we call politics today but back then polis was a space for dia-logos, which allowed for self-governing. Dialogue was seen as the building block of civilization. Socrates was the first on record to suggest the solution is in the dialogue; but ironically people who disagreed with the values he was espousing at the time decided it was not right that he should be telling others how to live their lives and they conspired to have him tried for impiety, imprisoned, and executed in 399 BCE.
Fast-forward through time and possibly the next most famous contributor to the subject of dialogue was David Bohm, a twentieth-century British quantum physicist who, like Socrates, was considered by his followers to be one of the greatest thinkers of his era and who, also similar to Socrates, fell out with those who disagreed with his views. Bohm was working in the United States contributing to the development of atomic energy but in the anti-communist mind-set of post-WWII United States the political leaders saw him as a threat to U.S. security and forced him to leave behind his work with Einstein and move overseas (clearly a sub-optimal outcome). Bohm saw dialogue as a multifaceted process leading to collective thought and in its deepest sense “an invitation to test the viability of traditional definitions of what it means to be human, and collectively to explore the prospect of an enhanced humanity.”

Helping connect the philosophical definitions of dialogue given to us by Socrates and Bohm with the reality of the twenty-first century is William Isaacs’ *Dialogue—The Art of Thinking Together*. Communication is clearly not thinking together and as such it is clearly not the same as dialogue. Although people accept and recognize that communication is not dialogue, they still confuse dialogue and conversation.

To understand this difference we need to again consider the definition of conversation, which Oxford defines as “an informal exchange of ideas by spoken word.” Conversation is in many respects the result of two or more people communicating to each other and as we know, this can happen without any shared understanding or knowing.

Dialogue is more than conversation—it is a thinking together that results in the shared knowing referred to by Socrates and Bohm. In practical terms the shared knowing can be demonstrated by an insight, new idea, new perspective, or shared wisdom (what I graphically refer to in this book as jewels), which would not otherwise have been revealed had the people not come together in dialogue.

The rest of this book is devoted to helping you learn to discover value through dialogue at work, at home, and internationally so that as Socrates and Bohm reminded us, we can live an enhanced humanity in civilization on our shared and increasingly fragile earth.
How Dialogue Gap Arose

It is useful at this stage to list some of the value that dialogue has derived in our clients once they were shown the way to achieve it. Some of these examples are expanded throughout the book in the case scenarios. For some the jewels of dialogue are financial and for others they are better measured with things like motivation, quality, engagement, and creativity.

Examples of Value Derived from Dialogue

Dialogue . . . is more than communication. It is communion in which we are mutually informed, purified, illumined, and reunited to ourselves, to one another, and God.

—Reuel L. Howe

Dialogue in the Headlines

Bahrain King Orders “Dialogue” To End Unrest

—Sky News UK, Saturday, February 19, 2011

In 2009 I published a series of articles on dialogue with the South China Morning Post (SCMP) in Hong Kong. I asked if the SCMP
could do a search for the use of the word dialogue in their stories from 2004 to 2009 versus 1999 to 2004. As expected, the word dialogue appeared twice as often in the more recent period. Although the word dialogue is being used more often in stories, it is appearing at relatively the same rate in headlines (roughly 10 times per year).

My top 10 favorite dialogue headlines from the SCMP since 1993 include:

1. Dialogue Vital on Issues That Define Our Times (July 2009)
2. Dialogue: The Only Real Way Forward (June 1996)
3. Dialogue: The Only Option (December 2002)
8. Time Ripe for Open Dialogue (June 1996)
10. A Dialogue Requires Equal Footing (November 2003)

In addition to the previous headlines 15 more great dialogue headlines from the SCMP since 1993 include:

1. Minister Mulls Online Dialogue with Protesters (January 2010)
2. Climate Change to Top Agenda at First Sino-U.S. Strategic Dialogue (July 2009)
3. Dialogue in Dark Aims to Enlighten (January 2009)
5. Dialogue to Pave Way for Closer Ties with Japan (November 2007)
6. Pakistani Leader Urges Taleban Dialogue (March 2007)
7. Dialogue Is the Only Route to Rescue Nepal (January 2006)
10. Documents Prove Zhao Wanted Dialogue with Students (June 2001)
11. Overdue Dialogue (May 2001)
12. Kissinger Recommends Dialogue (June 1997)
The following SCMP caught my attention and I investigated the story.

In the Beginning Was the Dialogue (Oct 2005)

This article reported on the speech in Hong Kong by Professor Robin Alexander where he stressed the importance of dialogue in schools. Alexander defines purposeful dialogue as “much more than good communication skills but requires willingness and skill to engage with minds, ideas and ways of thinking other than our own; it involves the ability to question, listen, reflect, reason, explain, speculate and explore ideas.”

Dialogue Headlines in the International News

At the time of writing this book I did an online search for the use of the word dialogue in headlines around the world and in just a few seconds the internet reported back more than 500 instances where the word dialogue appeared in current articles.

Catholics are not willing to accept clergymen who are not recognised by the Pope and it’s better for the two sides (Mainland China and Taiwan) to work out their issues through dialogues.

— Taiwan’s Cardinal Paul Shan, as reported by Agence France-Presse in Kaohsiung, February 21, 2011

Examples of current usage of the word dialogue in news headlines from around the world on one day in August 2010 include:

- Kashmir Dialogues
- Resumption of Dialogue with India Positive Development (sify.com)
- India, Pakistan Unlock Dialogue Process (the Himalayan Times)
- China–U.S. Dialogues
• A Dialogue of the Mute (Asia Times Online, referring to the wrong people discussing the wrong issues at the wrong time)
• Palestine Dialogues
• Palestinian National Comprehensive Dialogue Postponed (Xinhua, English)
• Hezbollah Not Interested in Dialogue with US (Yahoo! news)
• UN Says Dialogue with Israel on Human Rights Is Difficult (Deutsche Welle)
• Iranian Dialogues
• Obama Renews Call for Iran Dialogue (CNN.com)
• Iran Letting Chances for Dialogue Slip, Russia Says (Times of Malta)
• Iran Nuclear Envoy Calls for Dialogue, Not Sanctions (Kuwait Times)
• Healthcare Dialogues
• Dialogue on Animal to Human Transplantation (scoop.co.nz)
• Smart Phone App and Desktop Widget Offers Patient Dialogue Tool for a Complex Cardiovascular Disease (newschannel10.com)
• Afghan War Dialogues
• Pakistan-U.S. Strategic Dialogue: Bridging the Trust Deficit
• U.S. Envoy Tells Afghan Insurgents Dialogue Is Vital (Scotsman.com)
• Forward Movement in Pak-Afghan Dialogue Necessary—Holbrooke (RTT News)
• National Dialogues
• Let Us Be a Nation in Dialogue (mmegi.bw, referring to Botswana sliding backward)
• Bilateral Dialogues
• Cuba and the Virtue of Dialogue (Havana Times)
• Multilateral Dialogues
• Indonesia Wants to Spur Two Koreas Dialogue (Jakarta Globe)
• Hugo Chavez Calls for Dialogue and Good Relations (Reuters)
• China Says Kosovo Issue Should Be Resolved through Dialogue (Xinhua)
• Creative Dialogues
• Artist Hopes to Inspire Dialogue, Giving, with Interactive Exhibit (rgi.com)
• Commercial Dialogues
• Offshore Drilling—All Benefit from Dialogue (Naples News)
• Dialogue between PAL and Pilots Not Certain (Sun Star, referring to airline pilots strike)
• Despite Lawsuit Board Seeks Dialogue (Waynesville Daily Guide)
How Dialogue Gap Arose

The environmental and political turmoil in the months since I searched the headlines for use of the word dialogue has caused the word to surface even more than ever before. It is as if world leaders are screaming “Dialogue Gap is preventing us from achieving our full potential.” Adding to the previous list, some of the latest headlines include:

- U.S. Prods Saudis to Promote Dialogue in Bahrain (CBS News, March 15, 2011)
- Jordan's King Sets National Dialogue Deadline (Fox News, March 15, 2011)
- Libyan Authorities Appeal for Dialogue with Rebels (Jerusalem Post, March 7, 2011)
- Fiery Exchange at Climate Dialogue (SCMP, November 5, 2011)

The preceding sample of headlines reminds us of several important things:

- Use of the word dialogue is global.
- Dialogue is referred to for critical issues regardless of them being related to war, politics, health care, business, or personal.
- Dialogue is valuable in situations where conflict exists or opportunity awaits.
- Some problems seem to persist a long time despite people’s best efforts to resolve the conflict.
- We cannot achieve optimal outcomes as long as problems like these still remain outstanding.

I think we all understand the importance of dialogue but have you ever considered the fact that despite its importance we have never taught dialogue skills in school, universities, or in corporate training programs! What other centrally important skill can you name that we rely on every day that we never teach people to do or improve?. We have courses on walking, eating, breathing, communicating, but whatever happened to dialogue? Is it any wonder we have the problems we have given we have never focused on this basic need?

Can you now understand my vision for Dialogue Institutes situated in major markets around the world teaching dialogue and supporting the big dialogues locally to ensure that optimal outcomes are
achieved and our humanity and civilization is enhanced? Part of the answer to the absence of dialogue curriculum around the world can be understood by considering two things: culture and language.

All cultures around the world have been built on dialogue and although some cultures are more expressive and some are more introspective, as we start the twenty-first century, in my experience they all have one thing in common—as communication increases dialogue decreases and as a result the basic human gift of dialogue that has been passed down generation to generation since the start of time and that never really required training because it simply happened everywhere, is now in need of preservation and strengthening.36

**Definition of Dialogue in Other Languages**

Every language brings with it a particular focus for things and dialogue is no different. Through our workshops we are always asking for insights as to the local differentiation of the meaning between dialogue and communication. Here are some examples:

Chinese and Japanese (similar)—Due Hua. Due Hua means “one to one words” or communication as I define it.

In traditional Confucian culture, where leaders tell followers what to do and followers do it without second-guessing their leaders, dialogue has yet to work its way into daily lexicon.37

- Tagalog (primary dialect in the Philippines) Pangu Ngusab—to explain ideas also suggests communication rather than dialogue.
- Urdu (spoken widely in Pakistan) Guftogo (dialogue) is differentiated from Muklama, which means to negotiate and Batt Cheet, which means to communicate. Interestingly it seems that exchange of ideas or brainstorm is a closer explanation in Urdu.

Future research could place local languages on a spectrum spanning from communication through conversation and onto dialogue while looking for correlation between a local language’s definition and practice of dialogue and the local experience of innovation and peaceful living. My suggestion here is that the more dialogic a culture, the more innovative and less conflictual the culture.
Dialogue Skills

It is through dialogue that man accomplishes the miracle of personhood and community.

—Reuel L. Howe

My 20 years of experience in negotiation and dialogue and my exhaustive reading on the subject of dialogue, conversation, and communication has derived what I consider to be the key skills of good dialogists. These are explained in depth in a later chapter but at this stage you should know that there are five categories of skills, two of which you will recognize as communication skills (voicing and listening or what I refer to as expression and absorbing), and then three more skills, which when added to these two, move you from communication onto dialogue (suspending, presence, and respect).

The five skills of a dialogic leader together spell PRESA (presence, respect, expression, suspending, and absorbing) and to succeed in the world today I suggest we need PRESA. A later chapter goes into great detail on each of these skills but here is a quick introduction to each of the five attributes of good dialogists:

1. **Presence**—We are today better at multitasking than at any time in history but this newfound skill has diminished the value we place upon presence, being 100 percent connected with the person or topic at hand, 100 percent mindful, absent of distractions like other thoughts, interruptions, cell phones, and media. When we have 100 percent presence all our senses are focused on the dialogue at hand, the messages (verbal and nonverbal) being exchanged by the participants in the dialogue, and aware of the emerging value as it begins to reveal itself to those looking for it.

2. **Respect**—Respecting the differences is critically important because this allows for the creation of space in which understanding and knowing can emerge for all parties involved. Absence of respect eliminates dialogue altogether because either one or more of the stakeholders simply shuts down and while communication might appear to be continuing, value can never be revealed.

3. **Expression**—We used to call this voicing but the more we examined it the more we realized that really it is expression and while
some people are comfortable speaking others prefer song, art, dance, prose, poetry, or even eye contact, tears, emotion, and body language. In fact even people who are expressionless are in fact sending some sort of a message worthy of investigation.

4. Suspending—All of us have trouble throwing away our conceptions of the world until something better can displace it and many people never update their conceptions of the world because they never make space for another way of seeing the world. We need to suspend our judgments, ego, or whatever else is preventing an opening of space for another worldview to slip in at least long enough for us to consider if our existing view is correct or needs some updating, either shifting to the new view or shifting to some combination of our view and their view creating a third view. Many people never allow the space needed to see things differently thereby preventing themselves the opportunity of growth in humanity and civilization that Socrates and Bohm referred to in their work.

5. Absorbing—Just as voicing has grown to expression so has listening grown to become absorbing because messages are taken in by us in so many ways and dialogue is not just a matter of listening but also seeing, feeling, smelling, touching, sensing. Children are great examples of this when they instantly react to things their senses tell them they either like or dislike. It would seem that as we age we become less in tune with our senses and emotions. As Malcolm Gladwell reminds us in his book on gut feelings, if we listen to our stomachs we’ll usually end up better off than not.39

Dialogue Time and Space

Dialogues take place at a time and space that can either help or hinder the achievement of optimal outcomes. In the chapter on dialogue time and space I address the main issues that affect both of these factors including the importance of the dialogue PATH, which is useful to mention here since readers will wonder where these factors fit into the dialogue puzzle.

• P—Place addresses the issues related to the physical venue where you meet.
• A—Agenda addresses when and how to include dialogue in your meetings.
How Dialogue Gap Arose

• T—Trust includes the soft factors needed for people to dialogue together.
• H—Health includes the impact of the dialogue on a stakeholder’s head, heart, and soul.

Dialogue Systems

Dialogue systems refer to established methodologies, which create dialogue for the stakeholders involved. Dialogue systems can be led by the stakeholders themselves or by a facilitator who is expert in the system being used. There are many different systems and the goal of this book is to help collect the main systems into one place and describe what conditions or situations warrant their use above other alternatives. The main systems are covered in the chapter on sustaining dialogue.

Dialogue is not just for groups to come to an agreement, engages citizens or make a decision. Dialogic methods are also used to help groups think faster, more creatively, and more productively while engaging all the knowledge, wisdom, experience and diversity in the room in an interdisciplinary, intercultural, dynamic manner. . . . Think how amazing we could be in business, government and community if we could tap into the wisdom and experience in diverse groups in a better way than linear, presentation-based meetings. It is already happening—my recommendation is to teach these tools and to work with facilitators to raise our capacity to engage each other in discussion, dialogue, interchange and innovation.

—From a collection of ideas to improve government posted on a website created by the U.S. National Academy of Public Administration, http://opengov.ideascale.com/a/dtd/3872-4049

Potentialism

The underlying philosophies of this book combine to provide a socioeconomic direction for consideration by political leaders in the twenty-first century.

Nash’s Nobel Prize-winning economics proves that optimal outcomes are only possible when you focus on what’s best for you and
the other stakeholders involved. Socrates, Bohm, and others remind us that optimal outcomes are only achieved through dialogue. We have a duty to help people improve their dialogue skills, spaces, and systems so that optimal outcomes can be achieved.

Given the recurrent failures of capitalism and communism witnessed in the twentieth century and given the global acceptance of the fact our human existence on earth is inextricably intertwined and now in jeopardy, I offer the reader and politicians everywhere a new “ism” for the twenty-first century. I call the new “ism” potentialism and I define potentialism in this way: It is our duty to realize our potential while helping others realize theirs. This may sound rather basic but it clearly is not. It aims to build on the obvious attractions of both capitalism and socialism without the drawbacks, which inevitably prevent the realization of individual and collective potential.

Potentialism leverages the Pareto Principle and suggests that taxation should be limited to 20 percent of income, CSR outreach by companies and individuals should be able to qualify toward satisfaction of the 20 percent, bureaucracy and inefficiency in the public sector must be eliminated to allow it to operate on the 20 percent allocation, infrastructure must be upgraded everywhere to help realize potential. Examples include:

• Improving public transportation to eliminate human time lost in traffic.
• Improving access to education throughout life so people continue to be useful to others while finding their own gift, calling, or potential.
• Improving diets, exercise, and health care to ensure that people live healthily sufficient to realize their full potential.

How This Book Holds the Space—Real Case Scenarios

Throughout this book are sprinkled real-case scenarios and as you will soon discover—if you have not already—many of these cases do not represent dialogue successes. We want to offer this book itself as a dialogue place where contradictions can be captured and addressed and in so doing demonstrate to you the reality that the solution is in the dialogue and that if we really want to begin achieving optimal outcomes around the world we have to start with the suboptimal outcomes that we are living within our own lives.
Before launching into the rest of this book I also want to offer to you the reader the chance to leave aside the written word and delve into other options also offered with this book. By visiting our website (www.PotentialDialogue.com) you can open dialogue with other readers and in time contact people dealing with dialogues similar to the ones you are grappling with, access video, and sound files.

Once you are comfortable with all that is being offered in this book and its accompanying materials we can meet again in the next chapter, which goes deeper into dialogue gap and its pervasive effects in companies, societies, and the international scene.

Dialogue is the collective way of opening up judgments and assumptions.

—David Bohm

Dialogue Cases for Consideration

Talent Management Dialogues

Thomas, a senior government prosecutor working in Asia, finds himself in a corporate culture that focuses entirely on legal matters to the detriment of managing and developing its human resources. The result? A crisis situation where the department isn't attracting young bright lawyers, turnover of existing staff is high, and succession planning has become problematic. The chief executive position seems to be untenable and has seen rapid turnover making it even more difficult to correct the underlying problems. An outside consultant was recruited from overseas to have a look at how things could be improved and most of the recommendations related to a lack of dialogue inside the department. Although this might well have a significant impact on the quality of justice being achieved, it also has an impact on career development for current prosecutors. Thomas has been given a few performance appraisals several years late and written by people with whom he has had none or very little face-to-face communication at all.
Service Dialogues
In 2009, www.verint.com reported that “global consultancy Bain & Company recently asked 362 companies whether they believed they had delivered a superior experience to their customers. Eighty percent of the companies said they had. However, when Bain turned the question around and asked customers whether these companies had provided them with a superior experience, only 8 percent of the companies were flagged as actually having done so.” Verint is trying to overcome dialogue gap by leveraging voice analytics and other technology to help its clients learn more from customer dialogues; for example, analyzing voice records in call centers. Verint understands that the solution is in the dialogue and has made a business of helping its clients recognize what they were missing the first time around in dialogue with their customers.

Project Management Dialogues
One of our ASEAN-based banking clients asked us to address the following scenarios when working with them to achieve optimal outcomes through dialogue. We worked through the situations applying various approaches, methods, and processes to ensure that each situation best achieved its possible outcomes:

• How to get a hold of data to analyze and report to others when the people from whom we need to get the data either don’t understand, don’t cooperate, or both.
• How to minimize the problems on project rollout when there exists poor dialogue between country and region and when country and region have conflicting objectives.
• How to manage teleconference dialogues that have multiple stakeholders from several countries and that deal with complex issues and tight deadlines.
• How to push stakeholders to provide timely and accurate information to auditors when the request for information is
How Dialogue Gap Arose

new and not easily satisfied due to system limitations, a lack of understanding and ownership, and tight deadlines.

- How to select and run a two-day off-site for the group that satisfies most people's expectations.
- How to engage in dialogue with a colleague of higher rank who doesn't appear to value you or your work but with whom you need to garner cooperation.

Sourcing Dialogues

In working with my clients in Asia we have identified the top 12 buy-side challenges making it difficult to achieve optimal outcomes and that require greater training and preparation than used to be the case. These challenges include:

- Business line decides on vendor before negotiating.
- Ownership and accountability of contracts is lost over time.
- Lack data on vendors’ relationships with business units and others.
- Deals are done in silos. For example, what has been done before in other parts of the company?
- Dynamic needs keep changing requirements.
- Budget is more important than quality.
- All stakeholders are not included in discussion.
- Too many stakeholders make decision making hard—need a process.
- Business doesn't give the procurement department enough time, usually because it invites procurement too late in the process (see first bullet).
- Business doesn't learn from mistakes.
- Operational impact of contractual arrangements is not previewed.
- Businesspeople don't look far enough ahead into the future because people want it right away.
Sales Dialogues

Working with my professional services clients we have identified the **top sales challenges** preventing achievement of optimal outcomes. These include:

- Lack confidence selling.
- Can’t find buyers.
- Can’t find buyers with a need to buy.
- Can’t choose which opportunities to pursue first.
- Can’t easily convert leads into sales.
- Hard to win follow-on business.
- Don’t know how to stay in touch when I have nothing new to sell.
- Don’t negotiate well.
- Don’t handle conflict well.
- Have no time for after-sales service.
- Can’t displace favored suppliers despite better solutions.
- Go after low-lying fruit and miss the big orders.

Leadership Dialogues

In *Performance, The Secrets of Successful Behaviour* (Prentice Hall), Dr. **Robin Stuart-Kotze** describes how leadership behavior can block, sustain, or accelerate momentum in an organization. Having worked closely with Robin for a number of years I greatly admire his ability to link the science with the practice of everyday business. In his book he looks into the following behaviors, all linked to dialogue and all having a direct impact on the achievement (or not) of optimal outcomes:

**Defensive-aggressive behaviors**

- Lose your temper when you get frustrated.
- Make it difficult to challenge your opinions or decisions.
- Openly criticize people’s failures.
How Dialogue Gap Arose

Conflict-avoidance behaviors
• Go to some lengths to avoid disagreement.
• Give the appearance of agreement to avoid argument.
• Sit on the fence on disputed issues.

Responsibility-avoidance behaviors
• Distance yourself from others’ failures.
• Avoid sharing information with others.
• Cut yourself off from people at times.

Notes
2. Psychologists call this heightened awareness flow and readers interested in focusing their attention might be interested in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s writings on the topic.
4. Tipping point was first coined by Malcolm Gladwell in his book of the same name. In that book he referred to the point at which trends pass from being local to being global. What I am contending is that once people spend more than half their time connected digitally rather than in person, things begin to change and seldom for the better.
8. Evidence of the growing discomfort of people to connect with strangers is the explosion of networking training, which is now being run in companies everywhere to build their sales, account management, and client service standards.
9. In the report Generation M2, Media in the Lives of 8–18 Year Olds, Kaiser Family Foundation, January 2010, the authors find that 11- to 18-year-olds are spending 8 hours per day digitally connected and if they are Black or Hispanic the average soars to nearly 10 hours per day.
10. The U.S. Army study Too Fat to Fight reported that between 1995 and 2008 the number of new recruits rejected because they were too fat increased 70 percent. *International Herald Tribune*, September 1, 2010.


22. Challenge mapping is part of the Simplex Applied Creativity process developed by Dr. Min Basadur of Canada. His approach to creative problem solving can be further explored in his books *The Power of Innovation*, FT Pitman, 1995, and *Simplex, A Flight to Creativity*, Creative Education Foundation, 1994.


27. Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*.

28. British scientist David Bohm (1917–1992) was considered by his contemporaries as possibly the greatest quantum physicist of all time and richly deserving of the Nobel Prize. Sadly the suboptimal political dialogues that colored U.S. politics during the post–WWII McCarthy anti-communist era forced Bohm to plead the fifth amendment instead of addressing the congressional inquiries into his left-leaning politics. Having worked with Einstein at
Princeton, Bohm was eventually forced to leave the United States where his ideas had ironically contributed to Oppenheimer’s Manhattan Project, which eventually led to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Bohm believed in the socio-therapeutic qualities of dialogue and believed that more people should experience dialogue groups to overcome the isolation and fragmentation of society.

30. Ibid.
32. Readers can find the articles at www.scmp.com/classified.
33. www.robinalexander.org.uk/docs/EaDform2.pdf.
36. I refer the reader here to consider cross-cultural studies by researchers like Gert Hofstede and others who have clearly demonstrated cultural differences between cultures on traits like expressiveness, which affect dialogue. www.geert-hofstede.com/.
37. Many commentators on this will refer to the rote learning tradition of Chinese and Asian cultures.
40. Italian researcher Pareto was the first to discover that you get 80 percent of your return from 20 percent of your efforts. Since then the 80/20 rule has been applied to many different situations.