Catalyst Portfolio™

Companion to Becoming a Catalyst | John Coné

Making Deliberate Choices About Where You Add Value

Purpose

Becoming a Catalyst does not mean abandoning the work you already do.

You may still design programs. Lead initiatives. Manage vendors. Build processes. Develop content. Run meetings. Respond to requests. Deliver solutions. You wouldn't be doing it if you (and especially those you serve) did not think it is important. Some is expected. Some may be work that you are particularly good at. And some simply must get done.

Especially early in your transition, **traditional Talent work may dominate your portfolio**.

That is not evidence that you are failing to become a Catalyst.

There is no ideal Catalyst Portfolio. There is no correct percentage of traditional work and Catalyst work. Your mix will reflect what the organization needs, what your role requires, what your boss and stakeholders expect, what others are capable of doing, and where you are in your own development.

The objective is not to maximize the amount of work that looks catalytic. **The objective is to be a Catalyst where being a Catalyst adds value—and to make deliberate choices about where you invest your Catalyst capacity.**

The Catalyst Portfolio™ helps you step back from the individual demands competing for your attention and see your work as a whole.

Its purpose is simple: **See the portfolio you have. Understand why you have it. Decide whether you want to change it.**

1. SEE YOUR CURRENT PORTFOLIO

What is consuming your attention?

Begin with the work you are actually doing—not the work your job description says you do. Identify the six to ten significant pieces of work currently consuming your time, attention, or influence. These might include:

a program you deliver;

an organizational problem you are helping solve;

an initiative you lead;

a stakeholder relationship requiring substantial attention;

a capability you are helping build;

a recurring process you own;

an emerging issue you are investigating;

a conversation you are trying to create;

or a problem that repeatedly finds its way to you.

Don't list every task. Look for the **meaningful bodies of work** that make up your portfolio.

My Significant Work	Why Does It Matter?	Why Am I Involved?
1.		

My Significant Work	Why Does It Matter?	Why Am I Involved?
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		

Catalyst caution

Don't describe the portfolio you wish you had. Start with the one you actually have.

2. LOOK FOR THE CATALYST OPPORTUNITY

Where would a Catalyst approach add value?

Now look at each piece of work again. Do not ask: **Is this Catalyst work?** That creates a false distinction. Instead ask: **Would bringing more Catalyst thinking or behavior to this work improve the outcome?**

Perhaps the work needs you primarily to deliver. Or perhaps there is an opportunity to:

SENSE — notice an emerging issue, pattern, or possibility.

DIAGNOSE — understand what is really producing the problem before accepting the requested solution.

CONNECT — bring together knowledge, people, perspectives, or parts of the organization that are currently separated.

CONVENE — create a conversation in which something new can emerge.

QUESTION — challenge an assumption or help people reframe the issue.

EXPERIMENT — replace premature certainty with a useful test.

ENRICH WORK — help existing work produce more learning and capability.

MOVE KNOWLEDGE — help useful learning travel to where it can be used.

BUILD CAPABILITY — strengthen the system that enables people or the organization to perform.

BUILD MORE CATALYSTS — help others begin doing some of these things themselves.

For each significant piece of work, ask:

What am I primarily doing today?

_____

_____

Would a more catalytic approach add value?

☐ Not particularly
☐ Perhaps
☐ Clearly

If so, what might I do differently?

_____

_____

Catalyst caution

Traditional work is not inferior work. If an excellent program needs to be delivered, deliver it. If someone needs an answer now and you know the answer, you should give it. If a process works well, don't disrupt it merely to make your portfolio look more catalytic. **Catalyst is a way of adding value, not an ideology.**

3. LOOK AT THE MIX

What does your portfolio tell you?

Now step away from the individual items and look at the pattern.

Most of my attention currently goes to:

☐ Delivering established programs, services, and processes

☐ Responding to requests

☐ Solving defined problems

☐ Building capability

☐ Diagnosing before solving

☐ Connecting people and knowledge

☐ Creating useful conversations

☐ Experimenting and learning

☐ Helping work become more learning-rich

☐ Sensing emerging issues and opportunities

☐ Building Catalyst capacity in others

What do I notice about the mix?

_____

_____

What surprises me?

_____

_____

Is there work here that consumes more attention than its value warrants?

_____

_____

Is there work receiving less attention than its potential value warrants?

_____

_____

Catalyst caution

Do not turn this into a ratio. There is no 70/30, 50/50, or other ideal mix. A portfolio dominated by traditional work may be entirely appropriate. The question is whether the portfolio reflects **deliberate choices or accumulated demands**.

4. UNDERSTAND THE CONSTRAINTS

Why does your portfolio look this way?

Some of the forces shaping your portfolio are under your control. Others aren't. Ask what is keeping the current mix in place.

Which of these influence my portfolio?

☐ My boss expects me to do this work.

☐ Stakeholders expect Talent to provide it.

☐ The organization genuinely needs it.

☐ Nobody else currently has the capability to do it.

☐ I have always owned it.

☐ I am particularly good at it.

☐ People automatically bring this work to me.

☐ The work is highly visible or rewarded.

☐ Catalyst work is less visible or harder to explain.

☐ I am more comfortable doing this work.

☐ I haven't yet built the credibility to operate differently.

☐ I haven't created the time or capacity.

☐ I am unsure where Catalyst work would add the most value.

☐ Other: _____

Which constraints are real and should be respected?

Which might be negotiable?

Which might be assumptions I should test?

Which have I helped perpetuate?

That last question deserves some thought. Sometimes the organization keeps asking us for a particular kind of work because we have become extremely reliable at providing it.

Catalyst caution

Do not interpret every constraint as resistance that must be overcome. Some expectations are legitimate. The Catalyst's job is not to escape traditional work. It is to make thoughtful choices about **where a different contribution would create greater value**.

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5. MAKE THE PORTFOLIO CHOICES

What should happen to the work?

Now look again at each significant piece of work and make a deliberate choice. I would consider four choices.

KEEP

This work matters. My current contribution is appropriate. I should continue doing it largely as I do today.

CATALYZE

This work should remain in my portfolio, but I could create more value by approaching it differently.

CREATE SPACE

This work may still need to happen, but I should reduce my involvement, delegate it, redesign it, transfer ownership, simplify it, or perhaps stop it.

ADD

Something important deserves Catalyst attention but isn't currently in my portfolio.

Then complete the Portfolio Map:

Significant Work	KEEP	CATALYZE	CREATE SPACE	What Will I Do Differently?
1.	☐	☐	☐	
2.	☐	☐	☐	
3.	☐	☐	☐	
4.	☐	☐	☐	
5.	☐	☐	☐	
6.	☐	☐	☐	
7.	☐	☐	☐	
8.	☐	☐	☐	
9.	☐	☐	☐	
10.	☐	☐	☐	

Notice that **KEEP is a positive choice**. You are not trying to move every item toward CATALYZE. Sometimes consciously deciding *this work is important and I am contributing to it in the right way* is exactly the decision the Portfolio should help you make.

6. FIND WHAT IS MISSING

What deserves Catalyst attention that isn't getting it?

Your most important Catalyst opportunity may not appear anywhere in your current portfolio. Look beyond the work already assigned to you. What are you noticing? Where is the organization struggling? Where are people solving the same problem separately? What capability will soon matter more than it does today? What important knowledge isn't moving? Where is work changing faster than people's capability? What assumptions deserve examination? What conversations aren't happening?

What emerging technology—including AI—is changing the work or the capability required to perform it?

Where might a small intervention unlock disproportionate value?

Something I am noticing that isn't receiving enough attention:

_____

_____

Why might it matter?

_____

_____

Why might Catalyst involvement help?

_____

_____

What is the smallest move I could make?

This does not necessarily mean launching an initiative. The first move might be:

talking to someone;

asking a question;

looking for evidence;

connecting two people;

observing the work;

convening a conversation;

or running a small experiment.

_____

Catalyst caution

Do not go looking for problems simply because you want more Catalyst work. Follow **organizational value**, not the desire to practice the role.

7. CREATE SPACE

What will make the new portfolio possible?

Finding Catalyst opportunities is easier than creating capacity to pursue them. If something enters the portfolio, ask what can change elsewhere.

I could create space by:

☐ stopping something.

☐ doing less of something.

☐ simplifying something.

☐ automating something.

☐ using AI to reduce routine work.

☐ delegating something.

☐ transferring ownership.

☐ changing stakeholder expectations.

☐ helping someone else become capable of doing it.

☐ declining a request.

☐ redesigning an existing activity so it requires less of my involvement.

☐ other: _____

The work I will try to create space from is:

The first conversation I need to have is:

Catalyst caution

Don't quietly abandon work that others still expect you to do. Sometimes changing your portfolio requires first changing **the agreement about your role**.

8. BUILD CAPACITY, NOT DEPENDENCY

Does the work increasingly require you—or increasingly enable others?

Catalyst work can create its own trap. You become the person who asks the good questions. the person who connects everyone. You are the person who convenes the conversation, who sees the system. The person everyone calls when something is stuck.

That may feel like success. But if everything still depends on you, you may have created Catalyst activity without creating Catalyst capacity. Look across your portfolio.

Where am I still essential?

_____

_____

Where could someone else begin taking on part of the Catalyst role?

_____

_____

What could I give away?

_____

_____

Where could I deliberately step back?

_____

_____

What would tell me that Catalyst capability is spreading?

_____

_____

Catalyst caution

Your value is not measured by how indispensable you become. Sometimes the most catalytic move is making yourself **less necessary**.

9. YOUR NEXT PORTFOLIO

What deliberate changes will you make?

Do not redesign your entire portfolio. Choose a few changes.

KEEP

One piece of work I will consciously continue as it is:

_____

Because:

_____

_____

CATALYZE

One piece of existing work where I will try a more catalytic approach:

_____

The different move I will make:

_____

_____

CREATE SPACE

One demand I will try to reduce, redesign, delegate, or stop:

_____

My first step:

_____

ADD

One issue or opportunity that deserves Catalyst attention:

_____

My smallest useful first move:

_____

REVISIT YOUR PORTFOLIO

A Catalyst Portfolio is a snapshot. Your work will change. The organization's needs will change. Your credibility will change. Other people will become capable of doing things you once needed to do yourself. And opportunities you cannot see today will emerge.

From time to time, return to five questions:

What has entered my portfolio?

What has left it?

Where am I adding value as a Catalyst?

Where am I still doing work someone else could now own?

What important issue or opportunity still has no Catalyst attention?

Do not expect every review to produce a change. Sometimes looking at the portfolio and deciding **this is the right mix for now** is a perfectly good outcome.

THE CATALYST PORTFOLIO AT A GLANCE

	Ask
SEE	What significant work currently consumes my attention?
CATALYZE	Where would a Catalyst approach add value?
EXAMINE	What does the mix of my work tell me?
UNDERSTAND	What expectations and constraints are shaping the portfolio?
CHOOSE	What should I keep, catalyze, or create space from?
NOTICE	What important opportunity is missing?
CREATE SPACE	What needs to change to make room?
BUILD OTHERS	Where can I reduce dependency on me?
REVISIT	How is the portfolio changing?

As we've said, there is no perfect Catalyst Portfolio. The goal is not to make everything Catalyst work. **The goal is to make deliberate choices about where being a Catalyst will add value.**

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