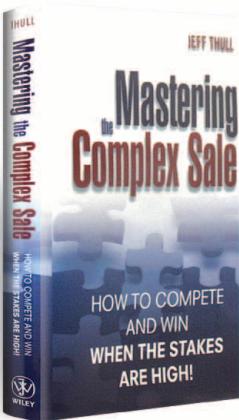


# SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®

FILE: SALES



By Jeff Thull

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**How to Compete and Win When the Stakes are High!**

# MASTERING THE COMPLEX SALE

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*To compete successfully and win more business in today's turbulent world of business-to-business sales, sales professionals need a new business paradigm that is specifically designed for the complex sales arena, one that offers a system and the skills and the mental discipline needed to execute it. They need, says business strategist, consultant and speaker Jeff Thull, a smarter way to sell.*

*A smarter way to sell transforms the conventional sales pitch that customers must endure into a high quality decision-making process that customers value. It transforms salespeople from predators into valued business partners in the customer's mind. It transforms the sales process from premature presentations to a process of mutual confirmation. And it transforms the conventional solutions-based, seller-first approach to sales into a diagnostic-based, customer-centric approach. In fact, a smarter way to sell, Thull persuasively argues in Mastering the Complex Sale, is to stop selling in the conventional sense and adopt a practical proven approach called Diagnostic Business Development (or the Prime Process).*

## What You'll Learn In This Summary

In this summary, you'll learn how to:

- ✓ Gain access to and manage multiple decision makers at the highest levels of power and influence in the customer's organization.
- ✓ Differentiate yourself from the competition early and often.
- ✓ Dramatically reduce the sales cycle time.
- ✓ Avoid the trap of "unpaid consulting."
- ✓ Identify untapped sources of opportunity and develop new business instead of chasing the usual suspects along with the rest of the crowd.
- ✓ Develop a common process and language with which the entire sales, marketing, and support team can present a unified voice to the customer.

# MASTERING THE COMPLEX SALE

by Jeff Thull

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### The High Stakes World of Complex Sales

Complex sales are primarily business-to-business and business-to-government transactions. They involve multiple people with multiple perspectives, sometimes from multiple companies and across multiple cultural and country borders. Complex sales cycles can run from days to years. Undertaking this level of sale requires significant investment in time and resources.

There is no single buying decision in the complex sale. The buying process is actually a long chain of interrelated decisions, impacting multiple departments and disciplines in the customer's organization. There is no single decision maker. The complex sale has multiple decision makers, each seeing the issues of the transaction from his or her own perspective and operating in the context of his or her job responsibilities and self-interest. These are not run-of-the-mill transactions; the customer requires help to complete the sale.

#### ***The Forces Squeezing Sales Professionals***

Experiences with more than 10,000 salespeople each year confirm that, in the complex environment, the outcome of the conventional sales process is increasingly random and unpredictable. Two opposing forces are squeezing these sales professionals: rapid commoditization and increasing complexity.

**Commoditization**, the pressure from customers to devalue the differences between goods and services and reduce the buying decision to the lowest common denominator — selling price — is a phenomenon that salespeople face every day.

**Complexity** is the second force squeezing sales professionals. The very structure of organizations is becoming more complex. Customers are demanding more complex relationships. They are drastically reducing their supply bases and asking the remaining vendors to take a more active role in their business process. Increasing levels of complexity can also be found in the situations and problems our customers face — their business environments are more competitive than ever, technological advances are radically altering their industries and markets, and their margins for error are always shrinking.

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### Is Your Hand Raised?

Conventional selling, on which many of today's most popular sales methodologies are based, depends on the ability of salespeople to understand and fit into the customer's decision process. When Thull asks the participants in his seminars if this is what they have been taught and are encouraged to do, the room is full of hands held high. Then, he asks the participants to keep their hands up if they think that their customers have a high-quality decision process for evaluating the specific complex offering they sell. Seldom is a single hand left in the air. The disconcerting realization flashes from face to face: *If our customers don't have a high-quality decision process, why are we trying to understand it and fit into it?*

#### ***Trapped by Conventional Thinking***

The common response to the squeeze produced by the converging forces of commoditization and complexity is to sell harder. The sad reality is that "selling harder" fits the popular definition of insanity: You are doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result. This happens because the conventional selling process — prospect, qualify, present and close — that most sales people use has not kept pace and adapted to the new realities of the complex sale.

When salespeople follow conventional thinking, they

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### **The High Stakes World of Complex Sales**

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run head first into a series of traps that grow progressively more difficult to avoid and that make a positive outcome for the sale less and less likely.

● **The assumption trap.** The first trap of conventional selling causes salespeople to depend on their customers' decision-making processes, which frequently are missing key elements. The belief that customers have a high-quality decision process leads to a second erroneous assumption: Customers' ability to understand their own problems and evaluate all the solutions available allows them to discern the true value of the salesperson's unique solutions.

● **The presentation trap.** The above assumptions cause salespeople to fall into the second trap of conventional sales. Because they assume higher levels of comprehension and decision-making ability on the part of

### **The Mother of All Procurements**

The stakes in complex sales can be high indeed, and the \$200 billion defense contract that Lockheed Martin won in 2001 may be the largest complex sale in history. This contract grew out of the U.S. Defense Department's Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program, which was conceived in the early 1990s, when the Pentagon decided to replace the aging fighter fleets in all branches of the nation's military with a next-generation jet built on a single standardized product platform.

The contract to design and manufacture jets for the JSF program was so large that it caused a fundamental reconfiguration in the aerospace industry. In fact, the winner of the contract would become the nation's only fighter jet manufacturer. In 1996, when the Pentagon announced that Lockheed Martin and Boeing had each won a \$660 million prototype development contract and would be the only companies allowed to compete for the program's final contract, one competitor, McDonnell Douglas Corp., sold itself to Boeing. Northrop Grumman, another spurned competitor, tried to merge with Lockheed Martin; after the government blocked that deal, Northrop Grumman declared it would no longer compete as a prime contractor in the military aerospace market and joined the Lockheed team as partner.

In October 2001, the final contract, the largest single defense deal ever, was awarded to Lockheed. It called for the eventual delivery of more than 3,000 aircraft to the U.S. military alone, and the Congressional Budget Office valued it at \$219 billion over 25 years.

### **The Right Questions**

The most successful salespeople know that they gain more credibility through the questions they ask their customers than anything they can ever tell them. The best questions to build credibility and truly understand the customer's situation are diagnostic questions:

● **A to Z questions**, which frame a customer process and then ask customers to pinpoint specific areas of concern within it.

● **Indicator questions**, which uncover observable symptoms of problems.

● **Assumptive questions**, which expand the customer's comprehension of the problem in nonthreatening ways.

● **Rule of Two questions**, which help identify preferred alternatives or respond to negative issues by giving the customer permission to be honest, without the fear of retribution from the salesperson.

their customers than actually exist, salespeople focus the majority of their efforts on presentation. In doing so, they largely ignore the customers' world, the most significant source of credibility, differentiation and decision criteria in any sale — thus creating a major disconnect between customers and solutions.

● **The adversarial trap.** Finally, the emphasis on sales presentations exacerbates the communication gap between buyer and seller, leading to frustration, misunderstandings, conflict and adversarial relationships — all of which impede the salesperson's ability to create cooperative and trust-based relationships with customers. This schism is the major cause underlying the protective behaviors customers so often adopt when dealing with salespeople.

### **A New Approach to Complex Sales**

Top-performing salespeople can't rely on traditional selling techniques, but they still need a dependable, professional body of knowledge. A professional body of knowledge has three primary elements: a *system*, which defines "what to do;" *skills*, which show "how to do it;" and *discipline*, which supports the "will to do it."

The discipline, or mind-set, with which salespeople approach their work is perhaps the most critical component of their success. First, the most successful people in complex sales recognize that the process of buying goods and services is all about a customer making a decision to change. Second, they focus on business development, that is, they think more like business owners than like traditional salespeople. Finally, they build

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## Mastering the Complex Sale—SUMMARY

### The High Stakes World of Complex Sales

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customer relationships based on professionalism, trust and cooperation.

The skills of the complex sale are encompassed in the tools that professionals use to execute their system. These tools enable salespeople to assemble the right people and ask those people the right questions in the right sequence to help customers reach a high-quality decision.

The system for complex sales is the organized process and set of procedures that leads to a successful sale. Thull's system is called the *Diagnostic Business Development®* process or the Prime Process. The foundation intent of the Prime Process is to provide the customer with a high-quality decision process and the leadership of the sales professional to guide the customer through the decision process. ■

For Additional Information on whether you are trapped in the conventional sales process, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

### Four Phases of the Prime Process

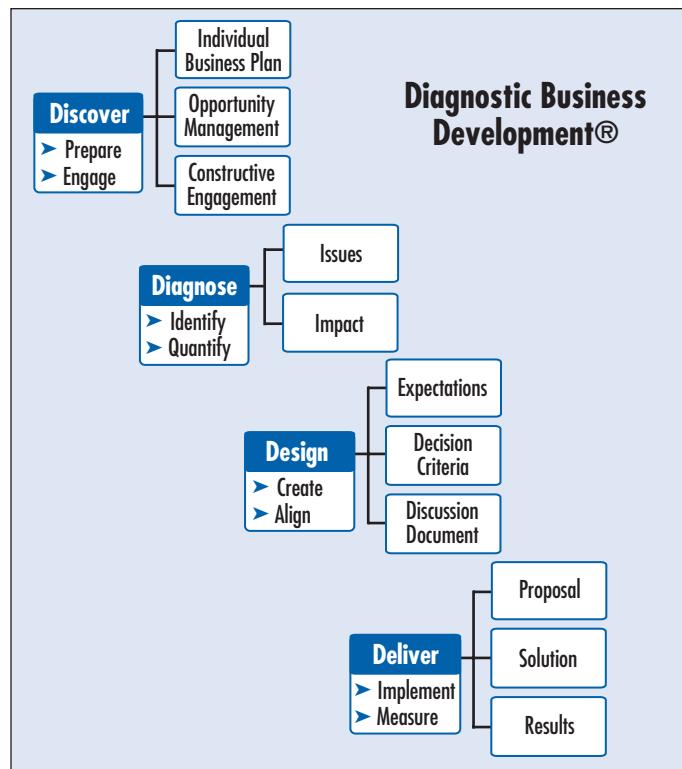
The four phases of the Diagnostic Business Development process, also called the Prime Process, represent a re-engineering of the conventional sales process. The decision process approach eliminates the inherent flaws in conventional sales processes and directly addresses the challenges that salespeople face while trying to master complex sales in today's marketplaces.

#### *Discover the Prime Customer*

The Discover phase of the Prime Process is about research and preparation. It encompasses how salespeople get ready to engage and serve customers. Everyone who sells starts at the same point — the identification of a customer. In conventional sales, this is called prospecting and qualification, which, unfortunately, is often characterized by minimal preparation. In Discover, however, this preparation is expanded into a process that is aimed at the identification of a specific customer who has the highest probability of change.

Discover means pushing beyond the traditional boundaries of prospecting to create a solid foundation on which to build a long-term, profitable relationship. It recognizes the fact that *every “qualified” prospect will not become a customer*. And it embraces that realization by actively looking for reasons to disqualify a prospect and by refusing to unnecessarily waste the time and resources of the prospect or the sales professional.

The tasks in the Discover phase include pre-contact



research of potential customers and their industry. Discover also includes the preparation of an *engagement strategy*, which includes an introduction, some basic assumptions about the value that could be created, and a conversational bridge designed for that specific customer. In addition, it includes the initial contact with the prospective customer, during which this information is communicated. Then, customer and salesperson mutually decide whether the sales process should continue.

In the Discover phase, as in each succeeding phase of the Diagnostic Business Development process, salespeople are actively building a perception of themselves in the customer's mind. In this case, that perception is one of professionalism. You want customers to understand that mutual respect and trust govern your relationship. You want them to see you as competent, well versed in their business, and a source of competitive advantage.

#### *Diagnose the Complex Problem*

The Diagnose phase encompasses how salespeople help their prospects and customers fully comprehend the inefficiencies and performance gaps they are experiencing. It is a process of hyperqualification during which you pursue an in-depth determination of the extent and financial impact of the customer's problems.

Most selling methodologies recognize the importance of understanding customers' problems and, accordingly, often tack some form of needs analysis onto their process. However, the true intention of needs analysis is

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### **Four Phases of the Prime Process**

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usually subverted. First, it is used to get the customer's conclusion as to the nature of the problem and the required solution. In essence, customers are asked to self-diagnose their own problems. As problems become more complex, the customer's ability to self-diagnose accurately decreases significantly along with the validity of the needs analysis. Second, the questions salespeople ask their customers are more often about the customers' buying process than their actual needs. Finally, and in the worst cases, needs analysis is used as a highly biased review to justify the salesperson's solutions.

With the Prime Process, diagnosis is not subordinate to solutions or the sale. It is meant to maximize customers' objective awareness of their dissatisfaction, whether that dissatisfaction supports the salesperson's offerings or not.

The Prime Process most radically diverges from conventional selling in the Diagnose phase. It is during a well-executed diagnostic process that most customers actually make the decision to change and to buy as well as decide from whom to buy. In the more traditional approach, salespeople are looking for this decision after the presentation and during the close. Therefore, Prime sales professionals get a jump on the competition.

The salesperson's tasks during the Diagnose phase begin when he or she shifts the emphasis of the fact-finding to the customer's internal issues. At this point, the salesperson needs to deepen his or her understanding of the customers' business, job responsibilities, perspectives and concerns. Diagnosis also includes measuring the assumptions about the customer's problem that were presented in the Discover phase against the reality

### **Is There Someplace Better You Could Be?**

Keep the idea of the Prime customer in the front of your mind by continually asking yourself a simple, but fundamentally radical, question: *Is there someplace better I could be?* Successful salespeople understand that the best place to be is the place where they can leverage their efforts and maximize their overall performance as well as their customer's. They are continually moving toward that optimal engagement. As elements of success decrease with a current customer, at a certain point, the odds of success become greater with a new customer. There is someplace better you can be, and you need to take yourself and your resources elsewhere.

### **Pain Is the Vehicle ...**

**...that drives the decision to buy — the cost of the pain is the accelerator!** When you define the cost of the problem, you put a price tag on the dissatisfaction the customer is experiencing. That tag enables customers to prioritize the problem and then make a rational, informed choice between continuing to incur its cost and investing in a solution. In fact, establishing an accurate cost of the problem is the *only* path to defining the true value of a solution. Cost is also the surest way to shorten the customer's decision cycle. Think of the customer's pain as the decision driver and the cost of the pain as its accelerator. The higher the cost of the problem, the faster the decision to solve it.

of the situation and quantifying the actual cost of the problem. It includes a collaborative effort to evolve a comprehensive view of the problem to customers, thus allowing them to make an informed decision as to whether they need to change.

In the Diagnose phase, you want your customers to perceive you as credible. You establish your credibility by your ability to identify, evaluate and communicate the sources and intensity of customers' problems, as well as helping them recognize opportunities they are not aware of. You reinforce that credibility by refusing to alter the customer's reality to fit your own needs.

### **Design the Complex Solution**

In the Design phase, salespeople help their customers create and understand the solution. It is a collaborative and highly interactive effort to help customers sort through their expectations and alternatives to arrive at an optimal solution.

In a more conventional sales approach, design equals presentation, and, in presentation, the customer is not involved in the design of the solution. As a result, the customer does not develop a significant degree of ownership of that solution. The conventional salesperson may say, "This is the product we offer that is best suited to your situation." Then, the salesperson proceeds to reel off a litany of features and technical information specific to that solution.

In the Prime Process, however, the Design phase is not focused on a specific solution. Its goal is to get salespeople and customers working together to identify the optimal solution to the problems that were uncovered and quantified in the Diagnose phase.

There is an important distinction here. An optimal solution does not mean that the product or service that

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### **Four Phases of the Prime Process**

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you are charged with selling right now is best suited to the customer's problem. *Rather, the optimal solution is a series of product or service parameters that minimize the customer's risk of change and optimize return on investment.* If you stay true to the objective of a quality business decision for the customer, where that solution will be found is a secondary consideration at this stage in the process.

The tasks included in the Design phase are aimed at establishing and understanding the decision criteria the customer will use to find a solution to the problem. This aim requires sales professionals to establish the solution results the customer will expect, the quantifiable business values for those outcomes (and thus, the available funding), and the timing in which the solution must be delivered. You manage customer expectations during the Design process by introducing and exploring alternatives, including solutions offered by competitors. You also teach customers the questions they should be asking of all potential suppliers to assure their quality decision.

In the Design phase, you want your customers to perceive a high degree of integrity in all your behaviors. You establish your integrity by creating a solution framework that best solves their problems. It frames a set of decision criteria that you would unhesitatingly use to determine what to select for yourself or would recommend without hesitating if your best friend were experiencing this particular problem.

The Design phase concludes with a *discussion document*. This document provides a summary of the diagnosis with a “pencil sketch” of the solution. It is used to do a final sanity check before completing a formal proposal and presentation. It’s the dress rehearsal to the successful conclusion of the sale that ensures there will be no surprises during the final presentation.

#### ***Deliver on the Prime Promise***

In the Deliver phase, the work of the previous phases comes to fruition. It encompasses how the salesperson

### **No Surprises!**

Lawyers are taught to never ask a witness a question unless they already know how the witness is going to answer. The same advice holds true for proposals in the complex sale: Never put anything in the proposal that the customer has not already agreed to and confirmed. When you surprise your customers with new information in proposals, they will surely surprise you with unexpected, and usually negative, responses.

ensures the customer's success in executing the solution.

While the conventional sales process forces salespeople to overcome objections and try to close the sale, the Prime Process allows customers to evolve their own decisions. Customers who have traveled through the Prime Process have a clear understanding of their problems, and they know what the best solution will look like. In fact, they are co-authors of that solution. *Salespeople who use the Prime Process and have not disqualified the customer by this point in the process experience exceptional conversion ratios.* The ultimate goal in the Deliver phase is to maximize the customer's awareness of the value derived from the solution that is being implemented.

The tasks in the Deliver phase begin with the preparation and presentation of a formal proposal and the customer's official acceptance of the solution.

The next steps include the delivery and support of the solution and the measurement and evaluation of the results that have been delivered. The final task of the Deliver phase is the maintenance and growth of the relationship with the customer.

In the Deliver phase, you want your customer to perceive you as dependable. You literally do what you said you were going to do. As you complete the sale, your customer should be thinking: You are there for me; you will take care of me; I can depend on you. ■

**For Additional Information on learning three common pitfalls in designing solution expectations, go to: <http://my.summary.com>**

## **Leading the Complex Sales Organization**

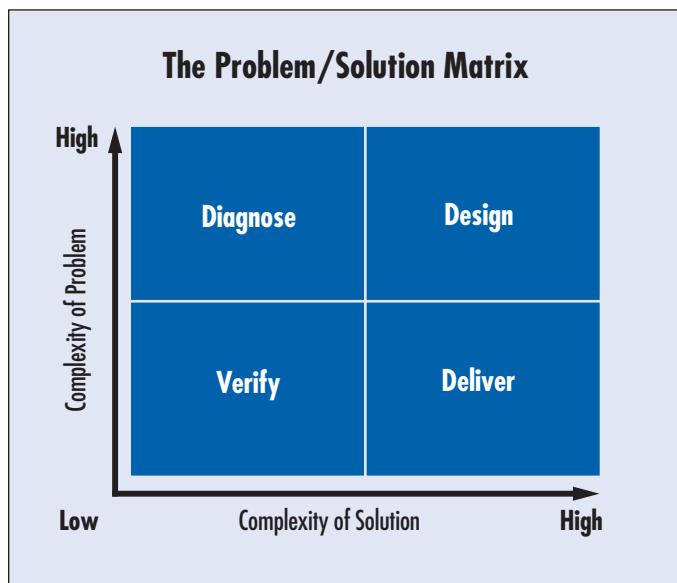
In the previous pages, a decision-focused, diagnosis-based selling system called the Prime Process has been identified and explained. The question now is how to create a decision process based on your products and services, and hire and develop a sales force capable of executing that process.

#### ***Customizing the Prime Process***

The Prime Process is a meta-model for the successful execution of complex sales, but to turn it into a more detailed blueprint, it must be customized according to the unique value proposition and offerings your company brings to market. All four phases of the Prime Process must be aligned to your unique situation, but most organizations also find that there are specific phases of the Diagnostic Business Development process that are particularly important in their selling system.

Thus, when the complexity of your customers' problems is high, but the complexity of your solution remains

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### **Leading the Complex Sales Organization**

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low, the diagnosis phase becomes the most critical aspect of the Prime Process. When both the problems and solutions are complex, you would place special emphasis on the Design phase of the Prime Process. (When problems and solutions are complex, customers find it difficult to connect the two. Thus, the solution designer's ability to align the problem to the best solution becomes a paramount concern.) Finally, if your solution is complex, but the problem is not, you should put special emphasis on the Delivery phase of the Prime Process. The quadrant that represents your business is the best place to begin analyzing and customizing the decision process that you will bring to your customers.

### **Hiring the Prime Sales Professional**

Why do sales managers keep hiring salespeople based on personality? Because without a systematic method for determining the true ingredients of sales success, they have little choice but to attribute it to some random genetic permutation.

Assessment instruments remain the best way to quickly and accurately predict the performance of sales candidates. With that said, you must be sure to carefully explore what characteristics the assessments you use actually measure. A combination of three assessments can be used to reveal the candidate's behavioral style, personal interests and values, and attitudes and motivations.

Once you've hired a candidate, training and development are imperative. The problem in the complex sales world is that sales training is generally relegated to product knowledge. Customer and market knowledge, and the integration of the systems, skills and discipline of the profession are largely ignored.

Typically, 90 percent of sales training is devoted to the products and services being sold, and almost all of the remaining 10 percent is spent on conventional selling techniques, such as prospecting, cold-calling, presentation and closing skills. The amount of training that is devoted to understanding the customer, market knowledge, and the integration of skills that complex salespeople need to diagnose customer problems, design solutions, and deliver results is negligible at best.

What is needed is an educational mix that more closely mirrors the medical profession. Seventy percent of the training that doctors receive is focused on diagnosis, and the remaining 30 percent is evenly split between learning about the human body (product knowledge) and learning about treatment alternatives (solutions). Companies in complex sales would do well to emulate that learning mix. ■

**For Additional Information on calculating your sales training mix, go to: <http://my.summary.com>**

## **Turning Organizational Strategy Into Sales Results**

The translation of a company's value proposition into bottom-line profitability is accomplished through its go-to-market strategy. A go-to-market strategy is an umbrella that encompasses a company's market, competitive and product strategies, that together feed into the sales strategy.

### **Keys to Successful Go-to-Market Strategies**

Many go-to-market strategies fail to generate profitable results precisely because one or more of four prerequisites listed below are ignored. For your go-to-market strategy to succeed there must be:

- 1. A high level of understanding of, and agreement on, the business strategies in place to acquire, expand and retain profitable customer relationships.** Is everyone in the company united by a shared vision and a common effort?
- 2. A successful transfer of business strategies to departmental and individual responsibilities that encompasses both quantitative and qualitative objectives.** Does everyone in the company know what he or she, individually and as part of a group, must accomplish to successfully achieve the defined objectives?
- 3. A monitoring and measurement capability that enables leadership to assess the performance of the departments and individuals as they progress toward their objectives.** Can everyone monitor his or her progress toward the achievement of those objectives?
- 4. A capacity to anticipate and correct the most frequently occurring issues and obstacles blocking the**

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### Turning Organizational Strategy Into Sales Results

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**successful execution of the strategy.** Can everyone learn from his or her mistakes and respond and adapt to changing conditions?

Two mechanisms must also be present during the creation and execution of a go-to-market strategy.

First, there must be a mechanism that can create a cohesive team, communicate and reinforce messages, get everyone working toward the same goal, and measure the progress toward that goal. Everyone in the organization should be concerned with how to create and capture value for customers. Everyone should feel a responsibility for the welfare of the customer.

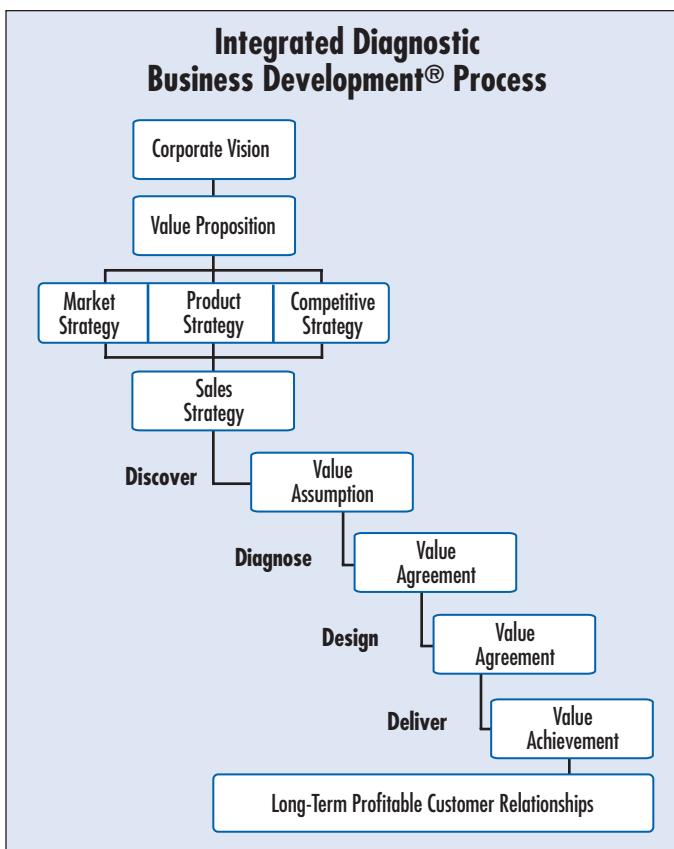
One way to generate alignment around corporate goals is to require that each function involved in the formulation and execution of the go-to-market strategy cycle must go through the four phases of the Prime Process. The four stages of the Diagnostic Business Development process — Discover, Diagnose, Design and Deliver — offer a single, customer-centered process through which each organizational function can explore the marketplace and ensure that its efforts are aligned with the functions.

Second, there must be a mechanism for communicating and applying the learning that is generated as the strategic plan bumps up against the realities of the marketplace. Whether an organization must respond to new opportunities, changes in the market environment, or correct miscalculations in its own go-to-market strategy, it must have a mechanism capable of capturing and responding to feedback. It needs to be able to identify, communicate and respond to customer needs throughout the value creation process. Again, when the Prime Process is distributed across the organization, it can serve as that mechanism.

The Prime Process requires that the various functions within the organization charged with delivering value to customers take to the field in one voice and one process. To effectively discover, diagnose, design and deliver, they must frame their assumptions in terms of the customer, and they must test those assumptions against the reality of the customer's world. This ongoing diagnostic feedback loop creates a learning flow that, in turn, can be used to generate continuous improvement and breakthrough innovation.

#### **Making the ‘Black Box’ Transparent**

Once the go-to-market strategy is clear, sales strategy can be formulated and aligned. That is how to avoid the “black box” view of sales. The black box view of sales is an attitude that is frequently found among senior executives who do not have sales experience. To them, the workings of the sales department are largely a mystery. They can set goals and send them into the black box of



the sales force, and they can tell whether those goals have been reached — after the fact. But they can't effectively manage what happens between the two points. Sales are a black box that senior management hopes will deliver the required results.

What executives need is a process that can make the black box transparent, that is capable of connecting the sales function to the rest of the organization in strategic terms and creating a common language and process through which the go-to-market strategy is formulated, executed and monitored.

This process should also allow management to pinpoint the source of performance shortfalls. As one senior vice president in a Fortune 100 company has said, Thull, “The most frustrating things about poor sales results are not knowing where the problem originates within the organization and the finger pointing that results when you try to trace it.” The Prime Process enables executives to pinpoint inefficiencies in their strategies and tactics, and avoid the black box of sales.

When the Prime Process is successfully traversed and the go-to-market strategy is realized, value is delivered to customers and value is returned to the business in the form of increased margins. The byproduct of this end result is the lifeblood of corporate success — long-term, profitable customer relationships. The corporate vision has been transformed into bottom-line results. ■