Cycle Time

Driving value

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This issue of the Journal examines business process management, calling attention to digital asset management (DAM) as a business strategy and as an enabling capability for medium to large enterprises.

This begs a set of larger questions: To what end? Why bother? What's the payback? Let's examine DAM and business process management in a *strategic context*.

What do I mean by a strategic context? My use of the term strategy, as I have written previously, defines both a concrete plan and mechanisms for directing or marshaling available resources for maximum competitive advantage.

While simple in formulation, many firms do not have a crisp, cogent and attainable strategy. Yes, they say that they have one; however, ask any number of front-line managers to communicate or recreate their firm's strategy. Even senior executives stumble about. Just ask one.

This all supports my initial assertion: most firms do not have a strategy. What evidence supports this claim? In quite literal and factual terms, front-line managers execute corporate and marketing strategies! And they rarely know why, to what end, or how to connect their daily experience to the mission, core value and strategy of the firm. Let me reiterate a deceptively obvious point: the front-line workers and managers deliver value to customers, clients or users. These workers and managers comprise one of the largest, most potent resources of their organizations; strategy entails directing these

resources with the aim of delivering superior value, satisfying customers and beating the competition; most of these workers and managers have no clue about what senior executives intend, nor how these individuals can support the execution of another solid if not brilliant strategy.

Figure 1 depicts some of the most insightful and effective work of the execution of strategy by Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton and co-authors of *The Strategy-focused Organization*, *The Balanced Scorecard* and *Strategy Maps*. I have taken a generic strategy map and overlaid a sequence of strategy execution steps or initiatives.

Strategy maps provide an elegant and powerful way to communicate an otherwise complex and nuanced strategy to everyone in a for-profit organization, especially front-line workers and managers.

The figure depicts four primary domains of strategy; you might call them the *four management attentions*. *Financial Focus* emphasizes three strategic objectives that comprise specific and measurable economic outputs within given periods of time. In previous columns, we examined all three; in fact, the title of our column, Cycle Time, calls attention to a key benchmark for measuring improvements in productivity.

The *Customer Focus* calls attention to a primary goal for achieving each of the three strategic objectives. Customer surveys, voice of the customer programs and social media monitoring would provide some of the

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Figure 1: Depicts a generic strategy map, emphasizing three overall strategies and a suggested sequence for deploying DAM in support of these three strategies

hard-data evidence for measuring progress toward these three customer-focused goals.

The *Process Focus* highlights to how the organization will use its systems, processes and accountabilities to deliver value to customers and, thus by doing so, achieve the three strategic objectives. Each encircled element in the figure defines a concrete initiative — a highlighted investment of time, money and resource.

The *Learning and Growth Focus* emphasizes how the organization must invest in people and skills. In future columns, I will continue to

explore this particular focus, further examining breakthroughs and best practices in adult learning, self-directed skills development and peer-workgroup insight sharing.

Finally, the figure suggests a sequence, addressing the particulars of DAM and business process management:

1. *Improve supply chain efficiency and effectiveness* starts with basic benchmarks: how long does it take us to make, move and sell our products (or find and service clients).

Collection of basic and needed data will reveal among other things, missing or incomplete data sets — the need for better data integration and analysis.

2. *Expand and build strategic skills, capabilities and expertise* often starts with external consultants that help identify the gaps and how to fill those gaps with existing labor sources and outsourcing partners.
3. *Build and maintain strong customer relationships* should start with a voice of the customer program or some other systems-based approach for documenting the typical and atypical journey to satisfaction and payback as reported first-hand in 30–50 monthly customer-interview transcripts.
4. *Excel at technology, product development, and life cycle management* often entails outsourcing or

renting key IT infrastructure and managed services, building up operational capabilities.

5. *Optimize customer profitability* starts with customer histories and transaction analyses; however, it will require specialized analytic databases and enriched data from external information sources (eg credit reporting services). Optimization of customer profitability will typically require levels of multichannel marketing analytics, dynamic messaging and content optimization not yet supportable in an organization — why I suggest it follows last.

In future columns, we will continue to explore the strategic implications of DAM, including how organizations use strategy maps such as the one shown above.