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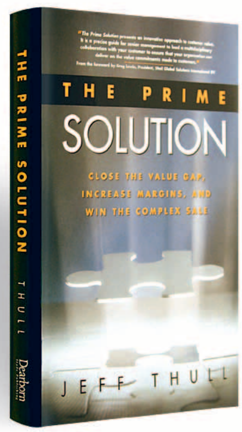

By Jeff Thull

Close the Value Gap, Increase Margins, and Win the Complex Sale

THE PRIME SOLUTION

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In his previous book, Mastering the Complex Sale*, sales strategist and adviser Jeff Thull wrote, "Spectacular success is always preceded by unspectacular preparation." Achieving and sustaining profitable growth in a highly competitive global market requires this kind of extensive, yet unspectacular preparation, in order for you to harness the full range and depth of expertise in your organization, and to use that expertise to provide value to customers — value that will help you create and sustain crucial, long-term customer relationships.*

To succeed in this value creation, you must have technical expertise in service and support, you must know how to sell your wares to needy customers, and you must be able to position your company as a "sole source" to customers over time. These are the essential tenets of this summary: a detailed explanation of how businesses can close the value gap that separates the value that is promised to customers from the actual value achieved. Many fine companies have disappeared into that gap: Don't let yours be one of them.

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What You'll Learn In This Summary

✓ **The three eras of value dilution.** The evolution of the value gap has been driven by an ever-shifting definition of value. Noting the history of this evolution is helpful when preparing for value strategies today.

✓ **The barriers to keeping value promises.** There are five essential barriers that keep sellers from delivering promised value: relevancy, inflation, comprehension, dilution and implementation.

✓ **You can't solve a nonexistent problem.** Every solution must help a customer solve a problem or otherwise meet an urgent need.

✓ **You're selling solutions, not products.** Closing a sale is not the end of a transaction, but the beginning of a long-term relationship — one of mutual trust and benefit, as well as constant, consistent communication.

✓ **Complex sales demand a solid process.** To sell a prime solution, you must be able to find the customer, diagnose the customer's problem, design the appropriate solution, and implement it with efficiency and flexibility.

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THE PRIME SOLUTION

by Jeff Thull

— THE *COMPLETE* SUMMARY

PART ONE: SWALLOWED UP IN THE VALUE GAP

The Elusive Prime Solution

When Lou Gerstner was hired as IBM's CEO in 1993, most of IBM's managers and employees saw their company as what Gerstner describes as a "piece part" manufacturer. From his firsthand experience as a business-to-business buyer of IT systems, Gerstner knew that customers in IBM's markets had little or no interest in the hardware and software of information technology. Just like any business-to-business buyer, IBM's customers wanted solutions to their business problems and challenges, solutions that delivered on the value promised.

Accordingly, that is where Gerstner focused his attention. He took a subsidiary unit of IBM's sales force, Integrated Systems Services Corp., and transformed it into IBM Global Services. The expanded aim of the new business unit was to deliver integrated IT services to customers — whole solutions that ranged from system definition and construction to providing fully outsourced operations. Global Services quickly became the driver of IBM's recovery and the company's fastest growing business, contributing 80 percent of total revenue growth during Gerstner's tenure.

Create and Capture Value

Creating and capturing value is a strategic cornerstone of most organizations in today's business-to-business marketplace. Your company works to create value-laden solutions, you strive to ensure customers can comprehend the value that your solutions deliver, and you have customers willing to compensate you for that value. This is challenging work, particularly in a competitive market in which it is difficult for customers to differentiate solutions, because all of the players in the market are using the same words to describe their value propositions.

Customers increasingly demand solutions that come with something more concrete than just a promise of value. They want solutions that are capable of leveraging value to the highest level of the customer's business; are a result of the careful identification of needs and present the best answers to their problems; and can, through proper implementation and value enhancement, help them achieve the return on investment they anticipated. ■

Three Eras of Value Dilution

Radical changes jolt us out of complacency and demand attention, but slow changes creep up, pass us by and often leave us behind. The "value gap" was created by a steady escalation of capabilities, requirements and expectations — a slow change whose underlying causes are not well understood or articulated. The evolution of the value gap has been driven by the ever-changing definition of *value*. The development pattern of value promises (both stated and understood) over the last 20 to 30 years is usually characterized by the term *added value*. Through innovation and advances in technology, business-to-business solution sellers strive to add value to their products and services in their race to gain competitive advantage.

It is useful to approach the complexity challenge associated with business-to-business solutions in terms of three eras of evolutionary change. These three eras offer an accessible, accurate means of understanding today's paradoxical situation, in which the expansion of the value promise by the seller can dilute value achievement for the buyer.

Era One: Obvious Value

In the 1950s — Era One — business-to-business sellers created products and sent them off to "hungry" consumers. Prospective customers were shown the product and decided whether to buy it. This sounds overly simple, but it is a

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Three Eras of Value Dilution

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generally accurate reflection of that time. If a company provided a product that customers truly wanted, it only needed to notify them of the product's availability. The customer would clearly see the value and write a check.

Salespeople in this era were seen as persuaders who were focused almost exclusively on presentation, closing and the manipulation of the customer. In Era One, buyers easily understood their own problems and the seller's products, and could achieve value on their own, willingly accepting responsibility for achieving that value.

Era Two: Augmented Value

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s —Era Two — business-to-business transactions became more sophisticated: a sophistication embodied in a changing view of the value inherent in products and services, and how that value should be presented and delivered to customers. Products had a "range of possibilities" — they were generic (the thing itself with no added value), expected (added value was limited to the expectations of the customer), augmented (the seller added value to the product beyond the customer's expectations) or potential (it encompassed all of the value possibilities that could be imagined).

Sellers responded by revamping their marketing and sales efforts to reflect the customer's need for assistance. The consultative approach to sales emerged, emphasizing questioning, collaboration and trust. The salesperson thus acted as a problem solver. In Era Two, buyers could still understand their own problems, but they needed help to understand the augmented products being offered.

Era Three: Complex Value Networks

In the mid-1990s, the business-to-business sector moved into Era Three when the speed of change and the complexity of problems began to expand beyond the buyer's easy comprehension. Other forces, such as environmental, safety and workplace regulations, began to play a critical part in changing products and systems, making decisions far more complex.

Technological advances created much of this change. Complex developments make it more difficult for buyers to understand their own situations, needs and problems. They may know what their end goals are, but they find themselves in the dark when they are trying to understand which components are most important and how existing systems impose unique restraints.

Sellers are concurrently using the same technological advances to develop ever more complex and expensive solutions. No wonder then, that the customers in Era Three have difficulty understanding their problems, the proposed solutions and the solution implementation process. Under those conditions, how can they be expected to choose, implement and successfully achieve the value from "best" offerings? They cannot.

In Era Three, value complexity is the primary feature of the business-to-business landscape. Customers need more help than ever in diagnosing their problems and in designing, evaluating and implementing solutions, and achieving the complex, customized and unique value they promise.

In Era One, business-to-business sellers were persuaders. In Era Two, they became problem solvers. In Era Three, they must become sources of business advantage for their customers. This is a tall order. It requires your company to work hard at getting beyond the limiting construct of value promises and into a new world in which you ensure sustainable value achievement. ■

Prime Solutions Over the Years

The characteristics of an Era Three organization are by no means unique to the 21st century. Think about the major innovations that might not have been accepted had certain forward-looking organizations not provided a Prime Solution: the first computers sold by IBM, the first cash registers sold by NCR, or the first Western Union fax machines. All required a unique knowledge of their customer's business and the ability to support the customer as it implemented the many changes required by the new technology. The Prime Solution is not unique to the 21st century, but it is quickly becoming the price of admission.

Five Barriers to Keeping Value Promises

There are real barriers to a company moving into Era Three, one of which is a dependence on outmoded processes and techniques. Others are the defense mechanisms that buyers have adopted to protect themselves from the residual effects of the Era One and Era Two sellers, and current methodologies that continue to reflect those bygone eras. These barriers must be defined and addressed before the value gap can be closed. Five barriers that must be addressed by a Prime Solution seller are:

1. Relevancy. Sellers unilaterally define the solution and, thus, are unable to create value that is meaningful to customers. Iridium LLC, a company formed in the late 1980s when cell phones were rare, ran into this barrier in 1999 because the value of its solution — a global wireless telephone network — had shrunk until there was not enough demand to support the business. The result was bankruptcy.

2. Inflation. Sellers focus on benefits and features, sidestepping their duty to inform customers of the hurdles and risks to value achievement.

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Five Barriers to Keeping Value Promises

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3. Comprehension. Sellers incorrectly assume that customers are capable of understanding their own complex problems and the complex solutions to those problems.

4. Dilution. Sellers accept the widely used, price-based commodity approach to buying decisions and allow customers to unknowingly strip the value out of their solutions.

5. Implementation. Sellers avoid accountability and blame customers for solution failures.

Bringing Down the Barriers

Three considerations lead us to believe that these barriers must be treated as a monolithic set of obstacles.

First, while it is critical to understand the causes of the barriers, the purpose of that understanding is not to assign blame. The seller is identified as the guilty party in each barrier because the seller must overcome the barriers to create successful sales and strong relationships with buyers. In reality, buyers sometimes act as a catalyst behind a barrier. When they do this — acting contrary to their own self-interest — sellers need to uncover and address the reasons.

Second, one barrier often supports and reinforces another. Because the barriers tend to be interrelated, sellers need to be prepared to recognize and address all five. Further, as they create strategies to overcome one barrier, sellers must also ensure that the consequences of those strategies do not turn other barriers into insurmountable obstacles.

Third, the point at which the consequences of a barrier manifest is often not where the collision actually takes place. While the consequences of the barriers tend to appear toward the end of the value process, those barriers often crop up throughout the process. Preventing them involves a range of functions across the seller's organization. ■

PART TWO: PRIME SOLUTIONS AND THEIR PROTOCOLS

Value Leverage for Business Performance

Prime Solutions come in an infinite number of forms and are created for a wide variety of business-to-business markets, but they all encompass these three protocols:

1. Value maximization. In developing Prime Solutions, we must identify the business drivers that critically impact our customers, address the absence of value, and link our solutions to customers' business strategies and goals. It is through this value maximization that a Prime Solution leverages your organization's value capabilities or your "sources of value" to positively impact your customer's organization at the highest possible level. We cannot leverage our complex solutions and organizational capabilities unless we can define, address and connect with value *on our customer's terms*.

2. Decision acuity. In the marketing and selling of Prime Solutions, we need to provide a collaborative decision process that enables customers to diagnose and quantify the absence of our value, design a solution that will deliver optimal value impact, establish selection criteria, and verify and select the solution that best fits their criteria. Decision acuity begins by recognizing the multiple dimensions of a high-quality decision about priorities, change, investment, commitment and risk. This decision creates a secure foundation for predictable value achievement.

3. Implementation optimization. In the delivery of Prime Solutions, we play an integral role in the management of implementation risks; the optimization of the value achieved; and the provision of value measurement, sustainability and enhancement. ■

PART THREE: IN PURSUIT OF PRIME SOLUTIONS

Creating the Prime Solution

Prime Solutions emerge from a holistic approach capable of overcoming cross-functional dysfunction, isolationism and adversarial selling practices, as well as the incomplete value accountability that often separates businesses from their customers. A Prime Solution enables your company to do the following:

- Discover and engage the markets and individual customers who are most likely to be experiencing the absence of the value that your company provides.
- Diagnose and quantify the problems, inefficiencies and performance gaps experienced by your customers, and stimulate their incentive to change.
- Design and produce solutions that minimize the risk of change, maximize your customers' return on investment, and provide them with the confidence to invest.
- Deliver, measure and improve on the value promises that you make to customers.

If We Build It, They May Not Come

The concept of selling solutions, which has been widely embraced by today's businesses, only works if you have solutions to sell. Many self-proclaimed solution sellers, however, only sell as if they were offering solutions to their customers. They accomplish this artifice by relabeling existing products and services as "solutions" and instructing their salespeople to act as if it were so. These companies concentrate on solution selling, not solution success.

Delivering solutions that offer customers maximized

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Creating the Prime Solution

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value, decision acuity, and optimal return must start at the beginning of the value chain by developing a solution that encompasses those three characteristics.

IBM tells its salespeople to talk to customers about their biggest business problems and to try to figure out how IBM might be able to help solve them. By linking with a customer as early as possible in the development process, IBM ensures that its solutions have the only essential form of value relevance — value on the customer's terms.

No Problem, No Solution

The frequency of new product failures is astounding. New products fail for many reasons, such as poorly conceived market segmentation strategies or a flimsy connection to a quantifiable problem. The magnitude of the losses that result from these and other problems is a function of time. The longer it takes to discover that the customer's value assumptions are not shared by the "solution" provider, the greater the potential loss of investment.

There is no such thing as a solution without a problem. Customers do not need to be aware of the problem the solution addresses, but there must be an actual problem. A solution without a problem is a disaster in the making.

A Broader Context for Solution Development

Prime Solution development requires a broader context than normal in the product development process. This context encompasses the complete consideration of the following:

- **Value outcomes that the solution will generate.**
- **Decisions that will underlie its purchase.**
- **Challenges of implementation and usage.**

Product development projects often mistakenly focus their full attention on a too-narrow definition of the problem. The problem is "solved," but only in a limited sense of features and benefits. The broader context of Prime Solution development must encompass solving the problem, but in this context, the process is framed in terms of the customer's desired outcomes. A broader context also expands the development focus to include the decision process that the customer must undertake in purchasing the solution.

Full consideration of the customer's decision path inevitably leads to one of two outcomes. Either the seller thinks it through, discovers that a viable path to the sale exists, and proceeds with the solution's development, or the seller discovers barriers to a positive decision and terminates or reframes the project before investing more money.

A broader context also expands the development focus to include the implementation and usage of the purchase solution, since barriers to these can be substantial. An early understanding or visioning of implementation and usage factors can inform and add value to solutions.

An Inclusive Development Team

A sound connection to customer problems and a broader context for development requires an inclusive solution development team — a cross-functional team, including the following constituencies:

- **The Customer Constituency.** Customers are the most indispensable part of the development process. Most companies solicit their views and opinions. However, their role continues to be limited to traditional forms of participation, such as focus groups. Customers must be offered a more active and integral role in issue identification and solution development. They must control the primary source of information about the problem to be solved. Their cooperation is also essential to understanding the decision, implementation and usage considerations inherent to the solution. Their participation is particularly important for solutions that require changes in existing processes and employee behavior to deliver all of their potential value.
- **The Employee Constituency.** The internal membership of the development team must be expanded beyond the R&D department. Experts in all affected areas — marketing, sales, service, support and others — play a critical role in development efforts.
- **The Supplier Constituency.** The seller's suppliers provide the final perspective essential to complex solution development. Suppliers should be treated like collaborators instead of commodity sellers, so they can contribute to solution development in as many ways as possible. For example, they can add value to the solution through the application of their own existing and emerging technological capabilities. They can also identify poorly conceived design elements before losses occur. ■

Boeing's Outsourced Dreamliner

The Boeing Co.'s strategy for the design of its new 7E7 Dreamliner jet is an explicit acknowledgement of the critical contribution that suppliers can make in the development process. The company plans to design the plane at half the cost of its last flagship plane and cut final assembly from the current standard of 13 to 17 days, to only three days.

Boeing intends to accomplish this by outsourcing 70 percent of the plane to suppliers, ensuring integration of supplier perspective into all aspects of design and development by mandating the use of a single software system by all suppliers and designers. The software, created by Dassault Systèmes of Paris, will provide a single data-set and life-cycle simulation tool from which all involved parties will work. The Dreamliner will be the first Boeing model that relies on its suppliers for this much of its design and production.

Marketing the Prime Solution

Regardless of how well you plan and/or execute your solution differentiation strategy, that strategy could end up becoming a one-way ticket to the value gap and result in a painful no-sale scenario. Twenty years ago, Harvard Business School emeritus Theodore Levitt foresaw such scenarios when he said: "The search for meaningful distinction is a central part of the marketing effort. If marketing is about anything, it is about achieving customer-getting distinction by differentiating what you do and how you operate. All else is derivative of that and only that."

Salespeople en masse have subscribed to this perspective. They first focused on the most obvious element of Levitt's distinction formula and attempted to differentiate based on the what-you-do part of the equation. They also created ever more complex bundles of products and services. This focus on solution benefits was legitimate, but two things eventually rendered it ineffective:

1. The competition quickly imitated the features that proved popular with customers, so the distinction between solutions disappeared.

2. A race to add features ensued, and feature-based distinctions soon exceeded customer requirements and saturation points. When customers cannot use or recognize benefits, differentiation schemes that depend on them become meaningless.

Companies then turned their differentiation efforts toward the how-you-operate part of Levitt's formula for customer-getting distinction.

The Problem With Solution-Based Differentiation

New business models, if properly connected to customer problems, can be a rich source of profit. The ability to create a distinctive position in the customer's mind using a new business model is usually a longer-lived advantage than a features-based distinction. Competitors will, however, tend to adopt similar value-delivery models, lessening those models' differentiation power.

Indeed, solution-based differentiation is predisposed to failure. Solution-based differentiation of any kind is an Era One and Era Two marketing strategy in an Era Three environment. In complex products and services markets, the majority of customers don't care how cool your solution is.

Diagnostic Marketing

What customers do care about are their strategies and how to execute them, as well as their problems and how to solve them. This is why problem-oriented differentiation, or diagnostic marketing, is the most effective way to bring complex solutions to market. The goal in diagnostic marketing is to craft targeted messages that engage customers and move them along the progression to change — measured by physical and objective characteristics, identifying a customer's propensity to solve a problem.

As individuals advance along the progression to change, they also move through the dimension of time, progressing from the present to the future. As they consider changes, they mentally journey into the future, which undoubtedly holds their greatest desires along with their greatest fears.

The fundamental principle guiding behavior change is that people will not change unless the pain experienced by staying the same is greater than the pain to be experienced by changing. Recognizing the tangible nature of this progression so as to craft marketing materials and messages to connect with customers precisely where they are — and be in sync with their progression to change — creates the powerful effectiveness of diagnostic marketing.

Speaking in the Proper Tense

There are two fundamental prerequisites of diagnostic marketing. The first is that all marketing communication must be centered on the customer's reality, situation, problems and the physical symptoms that bring those problems to reality. The second prerequisite suggests that, in complex markets, addressing customers in the negative-present tense is the most effective path to constructive engagement, even though this might feel counterintuitive to optimists.

Marketing messages can be crafted in these four tenses:

- **Positive-present.** When solution sellers craft marketing messages in the positive-present tense, they are describing the customer's current situation in positive terms, reinforcing benefits they've already provided to the customer.
- **Positive-future.** Solution sellers use this tense to build messages around the customer's need to create a better future. Unless the message reaches a customer who has already decided to change, however, it stands a sizable chance of falling into the "so what?" category.
- **Negative-future.** When sellers craft messages in this tense, they are speaking to dangers that the customer does not yet face but someday might.
- **Negative-present.** Sellers use this tense to create messages that speak to customers' current problems and their tangible symptoms.

Because complex solutions require extensive change efforts, and the decisions to buy them are fundamentally decisions to undertake change, marketing messages that speak in the negative-present tense are the most effective. ■

Selling the Prime Solution

As a primary objective, closing a sale leaves much to be desired. A finalized sale is presumed to be a "win" for the seller, but in reality, the quality of that "win"

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Selling the Prime Solution

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depends largely on the terms of the deal and the performance of the solution. From the customer's perspective, the signed deal is just another expense, and it is a loss if the promised value is not achieved.

A High-Quality Decision

Because a Prime Solution is designed to align sales professionals and their customers in a mutually agreed objective, the true goal of a sale is a high-quality decision — a sound decision based on an honest, thorough and rational evaluation of the correlation between the customer's problem and the seller's solution. A customer's decision not to buy is also a valid outcome. Not every customer is in a position or situation that requires action.

The most effective sales approach is not the one that artificially prolongs a customer engagement when the solution is not required or effective. Salespeople must "go for the no" — a process that facilitates the efficient diagnosis of a negative correlation between the customer's problem and the seller's solution and, as quickly as possible, redeploys the team in pursuit of other possibilities.

The decision to purchase does not mean the end of the seller's work with the customer. The solution provider's journey to create the full value of which the solution is capable, and the customer's journey to achieve that value, continue through the successful implementation of the solution. While there is nothing wrong with closing deals, the outcome is more effectively accomplished when salespeople are seriously engaging customers who can achieve the highest level of value from the solutions being offered.

Diagnostic Business Development

This Era-Three revision of the sales process is called Diagnostic Business Development (DBD) — a four-stage process that recognizes the critical importance of customers and their problems in the diagnostic engagement. It also recognizes that transaction-based strategies are inappropriate and ineffective in the world of complex sales.

The DBD process encompasses the decision-making process that is required in the successful sale of Prime Solutions. Its stages — discover, diagnose, design and deliver — serve as a path that sales professionals can follow from the identification of customer opportunities, through the intricacies of the sales engagement, to the establishment of ongoing, long-term customer relationships.

Aside from being a considerable differentiator in competitive markets, the ability to provide customers with and guide them through a sound decision process such as DBD can also create new profit streams for an organization. Clients of Shell Global Solutions, for example, regularly contract for the firm's "opportunity confirmation process."

The core elements of the process are extensive diagnosis and design. Shell identifies key areas for improvement, sets measurable improvement targets and creates a comprehensive business improvement plan. The process is an effective way of establishing an independent review of a client's operations and of developing with the client a realistic and practical plan to realize its potential.

Stage One: Discover

The first phase of selling Prime Solutions — discover — focuses on identifying customers with the highest probability of experiencing, or who are already experiencing, the greatest negative impact in the absence of the value provided by your solutions. These high-probability customers are the most qualified prospects to purchase your solutions.

In DBD, sales professionals qualify customers within the dimensions of value. In a "Prime Solution Cycle," the marketing effort provides the sales force with a value proposition, or a generic statement that defines the value drivers in the markets addressed by the solution, the indicators that demonstrate the absence of value, and the value potential inherent in the solution. Salespeople then identify prospects that fit that proposition and establish a value assumption. This is an initial, informal verbal agreement between the solution provider and the prospect that establishes the relevancy of the decision process and provides the impetus to proceed with it. This agreement is the result of pre-contact research and initial customer conversations that confirm the validity of the initial findings.

Stage Two: Diagnose

The mutual acceptance of a value assumption is the foundation for the diagnose phase of DBD. The process of diagnosis is a continuation of the customer qualification process in greater detail — a hyperqualification. The full extent of the customer's problem is explored, measured, evaluated and communicated. The goals of this phase are to raise customers' awareness of the problems they are experiencing and create the incentive to change.

While it is natural for customers to want to self-diagnose, it is imperative that this self-diagnosis not be accepted as complete until the solution provider confirms it and digs even deeper. Self-diagnosis, while understandable, is one of the most significant contributors to the value gap for a number of reasons, including:

- Customers often misdiagnose their problems before and during the sales process.
- Self-diagnosis represents a missed opportunity for sellers to demonstrate their expertise by taking the diagnosis to depths the customer would never have considered.
- Self-diagnosis represents a missed opportunity for customers to get an outside view from professionals.
- Because self-diagnosis is often a less-than-comprehensive process, the total cost of the problem is not established.

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Selling the Prime Solution

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In terms of value, the diagnose phase is complete when value has been detected, the physical symptoms are verified, and your team and your customer reach a verbal value agreement about the dimensions of a problem. The value agreement is an informal statement specifying the scope of the customer's problem. More importantly, it serves as a mutual agreement regarding the cost of the problem and how it is prioritized in the customer's business. By the end of the diagnose phase, your team will have established exceptional credibility with your customer.

Sun Microsystems recognizes the problems inherent to poor diagnosis. In the past, when a prospective customer was searching for a storage solution, a salesperson would ask the customer how much storage was required, then work up a price and proposal. This process proved ineffective, because the sales force never got to the root needs of its prospects. Sun now uses a relationship management software product that enables its 100-member field representative team and its customers to identify and share the parameters of a given problem and create a solution based on those requirements.

Stage Three: Design

The goal of the design phase of DBD is to define the parameters of a high-quality solution in reference to the customer's problem. Your team identifies the optimal solution as a series of product and service parameters designed to minimize the customer's risk of change and maximize the value to be achieved. Your team also identifies and confirms the customer's desired outcomes and how to achieve them. Sellers of Prime Solutions use the design phase to focus the customer's search on the best solution.

In the design phase, your company has the opportunity to address competing alternatives head-on, reinforcing the cooperative partnership between your team and your customer's team, and enabling your team to reinforce its position. You can ensure that the customer properly recognizes and weighs the inherent value advantages of a design that matches your solutions.

In value terms, the design phase of DBD is completed when your team and your customer establish and specify the dimensions of the solution. Another informal statement, the value agreement, defines the customer's solution expectations and the criteria that will determine the solution's features. It also serves as the basis for the discussion document — a written statement confirming the findings of the decision process and ensuring all parties are in accord.

By the end of the design phase, your team has demonstrated its integrity to your customer and created a solution framework based on mutually agreed-upon facts. ■

Delivering on the Value Promise

The final phase of the Prime Solution Cycle — value promise delivery — encompasses solution implementation, reporting results, and ongoing enhancement of returns. These can all be centers of high potential profit for you and your customers. When poorly executed, they can easily become centers of significant loss in both financial and relationship capital.

Your ability to manage and facilitate change is the core competency in Prime Solution implementation. Successful organizations are accountable for guiding and ensuring the success of the changes which customers must make throughout the cycle. In this phase, sellers serve as change navigators for their customers. As such, they bring customers a process that can carry them from their current state to the future state promised by the solution.

Every successful change management process must fulfill two conditions: It must be adaptable and it must account for technology, processes and people.

- **Adaptability.** The implementation/change process must respond to differences between and within customers. It must assess existing systems and design customized strategies for change. It must also solicit customer input and transform that input into process terms.
- **Technology.** The change management process must identify potential technology conflicts, resolve them before installation, test to ensure compatibility, and plan for unexpected problems. Sellers must be able to plug in their solutions without disrupting the customer's existing technology.
- **Process.** The change management process must identify the processes that the solution will affect, both upstream and downstream, and redesign the work flow as needed to ensure a smooth implementation.
- **People.** Solution providers must identify and address the impact of their solutions on people. An effective change management process must identify and provide the physical skills and the behavioral and belief sets that are required to accept and use the situation. ■