

The following article appeared in *CW Bulletin*, December 2003, IABC, San Francisco

## "Balanced Scorecard Step-by-Step: Maximizing Performance and Maintaining Results"

Author: Paul R. Niven

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002

*Book Review by: Angela Sinickas, ABC*

Paul Niven's book would be invaluable for communicators whose companies are implementing a Balanced Scorecard, and it can also provide a great deal of useful information on setting measurable goals for a staff function like communication to ensure it aligns with a company's strategy.

Robert Kaplan and David Norton launched the concept of using a Balanced Scorecard to measure multiple aspects of organizational performance -- not solely financial results -- in a book they published in 1996. Paul Niven helped implement this approach so successfully at his former employer, Nova Scotia Power, that he became a management consultant to help other organizations do the same. Now he has written this book to help even more companies develop their own scorecards and integrate them into the way their organizations are managed. Niven generously includes dozens of highly practical worksheets, lists, agendas, sample plans and suggested research questions throughout the book.

This book would be most valuable for communicators whose companies are in the early stages of implementing a Balanced Scorecard, though it offers many practical suggestions for improving the way existing Scorecards could be used. The one weakness from a communicator's perspective, however, is Niven's rather narrow definition of internal communication in the four pages (of 334) he devotes to it. He seems to see it primarily as tactical top-down mass messaging through creatively selected delivery channels and "drawing on the resources of that most reliable of information sources -- the company grapevine." Niven also discusses mass audience segmentation rather than more specific identification of unique stakeholder groups for different elements of Balanced Scorecard metrics.

On the other hand, Niven provides useful ideas about processes, such as obtaining buy-in, conducting interviews and focus groups, employee education and two-way cascading of information. Niven is an advocate for measuring the effectiveness of communication, from the dissemination and education to the outcomes of awareness, enthusiasm, engagement and participation. However, he doesn't show how to quantify the impact the communication activities have on the outcomes; he simply assumes there would be a connection.

Niven also provides useful information on how to set meaningful goals and objectives that are aligned with corporate strategy that communicators should be able to adapt to their own function. One of my favorite concepts in the book is the distinction between "leading" and "lagging" metrics. He says that most of the traditional financial measures are "lagging" in that they tell you where you've been, and often too late to be able to change results.

Niven reinforces the importance of identifying the right "leading" measures that have a cause-and-effect relationship, using the lagging measures as predictors of the financial measures. This will attribute value to measurement in order to illustrate sales that a company might see later.

The book is filled with ideas communicators at all organizations can adapt to help make business strategy more relevant to employees' jobs. There is a chapter on developing and communicating mission, vision and values that includes a list of specific questions to ask employees in focus groups or interviews as part of the development process.

The book also provides easy-to-understand summaries of how various business processes work, such as supply chain management, for communicators who want to better understand their businesses. Niven's

book is easy to read from beginning to end with a very practical perspective that is refreshing for a business book. It truly is a "how to" guide.

*At Amazon.com:*

["Balanced Scorecard Step-by-Step: Maximizing Performance and Maintaining Results"](#)

*Reviewer:*

*Angela Sinickas is CEO of [Sinickas Communications, Inc.](#), an international communication consultancy helping corporations achieve business results through targeted diagnostics and practical solutions. Angela's work has been cited in Harvard Business Review, Investors Business Daily, HR Magazine, Executive Solutions, PR News, Journal of Communication Management, Ragan Report and Communication World, among many other publications.*