Doctrine 05 — Scoring and Price-to-Win

One durable concept: turn hope into arithmetic, and arithmetic into a decision.

Somewhere between "this opportunity looks interesting" and "we are writing a proposal," an organization must decide **how much this pursuit is worth and how likely we are to win it.** That decision is the score, and the score is the arithmetic of the pipeline.

The score is a probability times a value

The most durable shape of a pursuit score is two numbers multiplied together:

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Score = (probability of win) × (estimated value)
        —— "how likely?" ——      —— "what is it worth?" ——
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The probability of win — **pWin** — is an honest, disciplined estimate of your chance of winning if you pursue well. It is not hope; it is a judgment assembled from evidence. The classic inputs are the same few everywhere: *Do we know the customer? Do we have the past performance? Can we price competitively? Do we have the right team and capacity? Does it align with our strategy?*

The value is what the pursuit is worth if you win it — the expected contract or award value. Multiply the two, and you get a number that lets you compare wildly different opportunities: a $200,000 pursuit you have a 60% chance of winning scores higher than a $2,000,000 pursuit you have a 5% chance of winning — and the score tells you so without an argument.

The threshold gate

A score is only useful if there is a line. Organizations set a **threshold** — a minimum score, or a minimum pWin, or a minimum value — and the gate says *pass or fail*: above the line, the pursuit advances; below it, the pursuit is dropped or parked. The threshold is the bridge between Doctrine 03 (the pipeline) and Doctrine 04 (the gates): it is the criteria the qualify/score gate is testing against.

The exact number matters less than the discipline. A threshold forces the hard conversation *before* resources are spent, and it gives an organization the courage to say no to a pursuit that is exciting and un-winnable. If your threshold is honest, you will occasionally decline opportunities that others chase — and you will be fine.

pWin is an opinion you have to defend

Here is the subtle part: **pWin is not measured; it is estimated, and the estimate has to survive a room.** The professionals who do this well do not trust one gut. They break the estimate into factors, score each factor, and weight them — which makes the estimate auditable. *Why did we give customer* *relationship a 2 out of 5?* Because the last contact was nine months ago. *Then the composite is honest.*

Do not fear the subjectivity. Fear the subjectivity that is not surfaced. A scoring rubric exists to drag the assumptions into the light, where they can be argued with evidence instead of vibes.

Price-to-win: the second arithmetic

The score decides *whether* to pursue. **Price-to-win** decides *what to bid* — the price that is low enough to be competitive and high enough to be real. It is a separate discipline, and it is the one that makes MBA students' eyes light up.

The core idea is that **price is not a guess; it is a position.** The right bid is set against your understanding of the competitive field:

- **What does it cost us?** The honest cost of doing the work — the floor you cannot price below and stay healthy.
- **What will the market bear?** The competitive range you estimate the field will land in.
- **What does the evaluation reward?** If the agency buys on lowest price technically acceptable (LPTA), price is nearly everything. If it buys on best value, a defensible higher price with a stronger technical story can win.

Price-to-win is the intersection: inside the competitive range, above your floor, and priced to your position. A bid that is too high loses on price. A bid that is too low wins a contract that bleeds you — the worst outcome in the whole discipline.

Where the score lives in the doctrine

The score sits between *qualify* and *pursue* in the pipeline:

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qualify ──[bid/no-bid?]──→ score ──[threshold?]──→ pursue
                             |
                        pWin × value
                        above the line?
```

And note what the score does not do: it does not replace judgment. It *informs* the gate, and the gate remains a governance decision owned by a person. The arithmetic makes the conversation honest; the human makes the call. That division — arithmetic for honesty, governance for the call — is the whole philosophy of scoring in this doctrine.

What this means for your career

Scoring literacy is decision literacy. The ability to turn "this feels like a good opportunity" into "this scores 0.31 against a 0.42 threshold — let's talk about why" is a skill that transfers everywhere: grants portfolios, sales pipelines, product decisions, investment theses. The pattern — *estimate the probability, estimate the value, set a threshold, argue with evidence* — is a general-purpose decision machine.

For the MBA student, price-to-win is where the business analysis lives: cost structures, competitive ranges, and the profitability of winning. For the MPA student, the threshold is where accountability lives: public money spent only on pursuits that clear a defensible bar. For the Strategic Initiative student, scoring is the portfolio question: how the organization bets its attention across the whole landscape.

Self-check

1. What two numbers make up a pursuit score, and why does multiplying them matter?
2. What does a threshold gate do, and why is the *discipline* of the threshold more important than its exact value?
3. What is price-to-win, and why is a bid that is too low sometimes worse than a bid that is too high?