

Analysis of Internal Capabilities in The Event Pitching Process: A Case Study of DAMN! Inc

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ABSTRACT

The Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in Indonesia is growing rapidly, driving the proliferation of Event Organizer (EO) companies, yet an EO's success in securing projects depends heavily on the internal capabilities that support a competitive pitching process. This study analyzes the internal capabilities of DAMN! Inc and their contribution to each stage of the pitching process, while also evaluating their strategic value as a source of competitive advantage. A descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study method was employed. Data were collected through triangulation of semi-structured interviews with six cross-divisional informants, field observation during actual pitching conditions, and documentation including pitching invitations, client briefs, and proposals. Internal capabilities were analyzed using the McKinsey 7S Framework and evaluated using VRIN criteria from a Resource-Based View (RBV) perspective. Findings reveal that three elements, Staff, Skills, and Shared Values, consistently satisfy all VRIN criteria and form the core of the company's sustainable competitive advantage, while Structure and Systems remain generic and informal, making them operational vulnerabilities. DAMN! Inc's competitive advantage stems from a capability configuration that is complementary and causally ambiguous to outsiders, making it difficult for competitors to replicate as a whole. This study recommends standardizing the cross-divisional brief handover process and formalizing the pitching workflow SOP as steps toward sustained strengthening of the company's competitive position.

Keywords: Event Pitching, Internal Capabilities, McKinsey 7S Framework, Resource-Based View, VRIN

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's tourism industry has shown a significant post-pandemic recovery, with foreign exchange earnings reaching USD 16.71 billion in 2024, nearly matching the pre-pandemic peak of USD 16.91 billion in 2019 (Swabawa et al., 2025). This recovery has also driven the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) sub-sector, whose market value in Indonesia reached USD 2,319.7 million in 2023 (Astute Analytica, 2024). This growth has fueled the proliferation of Event Organizer (EO) companies as technical operators that plan and execute clients' event requirements (Arfiyanto & Faris, 2016), with the number of national events projected to average 9,209 per year and demand for EO services growing by 18% (Kompasiana, 2025).

This intensifying competition requires every EO to build strong differentiation (Turnip & Benazira, 2025), since the sole pathway for an EO to secure a project is through the pitching process, namely the competitive submission of proposals and concept presentations to prospective clients (Synta, 2023). Pitching is not merely an idea presentation but a comprehensive evaluation of a

company's capacity to execute an event optimally, encompassing experience, financial capability, organizational structure, and technical capability (Berridge, 2010; Westerbeek et al., 2002). Pricing and creative concept quality are consistently identified as the primary determinants of pitching success (Aryanti & Rudatin, 2022; Berridge, 2010).

DAMN! Inc, legally registered as PT Drupadi Artha Mulia Nusantara, is a Jakarta-based corporate EO that has operated for more than a decade and has handled over 758 projects since its founding in 2014 (DAMN! Inc, 2026). For DAMN! Inc, pitching is the sole gateway to securing projects. Throughout 2025, the company received and processed 203 pitching briefs, yet won only 53 projects, a win rate of 26.11% (DAMN! Inc, 2025). No published win-rate benchmark exists for Indonesian event organizers against which this figure can be directly compared. As an indicative reference from an adjacent creative-pitching sector, industry surveys of advertising and marketing agencies report average new-business pitch win rates in the region of 32 to 50 percent, though these operate under different competitive and cost structures (AgencyAnalytics, 2025; Duval Partnership, 2022). DAMN! Inc's 26.11 percent should therefore be read not as underperformance against a validated norm but as a descriptive baseline for a single firm, whose interpretation is one motivation for the internal-capability analysis undertaken here. Internal evaluation identified three recurring loss patterns: budget mismatch, concepts insufficiently aligned with client needs, and cases of "formality pitching" in which the client had already predetermined its preferred vendor. In this study, formality pitching denotes a tender that is procedurally open but substantively pre-decided: the client issues an invitation and receives proposals to satisfy an internal procurement or budgeting requirement, while the winning vendor has effectively been chosen in advance, so that competing agencies expend full pitching resources on a contest whose outcome is not genuinely contestable. The first two factors align with success determinants documented in the literature, yet both are fundamentally outcomes of a company's internal capabilities rather than standalone variables (Rahmatullah et al., 2023; Westerbeek et al., 2002).

Beyond price and creative concept quality, Berridge (2010) further observed that in competitive event-agency pitches the manner of presentation can matter as much as the idea itself, since clients evaluating an event that does not yet exist often lack sufficient technical grounds to assess execution risk before delivery. This makes the internal configuration of resources and skills within an EO, rather than isolated pitching techniques applied only on presentation day, the deeper explanatory variable behind win rates. Studies that treat pitching success primarily as a function of technique or procedural compliance (Aryanti & Rudatin, 2022; Rizki, 2024) stop short of asking which organizational elements generate that technique consistently, an inward-facing question this study takes up directly.

Prior studies on pitching and internal capabilities have generally been conducted separately. Rizki (2024) and Synta (2023) focused on the technical aspects of proposal preparation and project management without examining the underlying internal capabilities; Aryanti and Rudatin (2022) identified nine general stages of the pitching process without linking them to a specific company's capability conditions; while organizational capability studies such as Lubis (2022) on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Tracey and Blood (2012) on the McKinsey 7S Framework were conducted in industry contexts different from EOs. This gap indicates the absence of research that specifically bridges the internal capability analysis of an EO company with the day-to-day practice of its pitching process. Beyond this empirical gap, a theoretical gap is also evident in how prior studies have applied organizational capability frameworks independently rather than sequentially.

Barney's (1991) VRIN criteria supply that missing evaluative layer, but VRIN applications within the RBV tradition, including Lubis (2022) and Rahmatullah et al. (2023), have generally treated a firm's resources as an undifferentiated bundle instead of decomposing them into interacting organizational

elements. Tracey and Blood (2012) demonstrated that the seven 7S elements can be diagnosed jointly within a single organization, a craft brewery, but did not subject each element to a VRIN evaluation, leaving open which elements of an internally aligned configuration are strategically valuable rather than simply mutually consistent. More recent applications have extended the 7S diagnosis to service and knowledge-based organisations and to Indonesian creative MSMEs (Jain & Kansal, 2023; Anam & Churiyah, 2023), yet these too map internal alignment without ranking the elements by strategic value, reinforcing the need for the evaluative layer that VRIN supplies. Sequencing the two frameworks, first mapping alignment through the 7S lens and then evaluating strategic value through VRIN, as undertaken in this study, addresses this methodological gap and has not, to the researchers' knowledge, previously been applied to a project-based creative service firm such as an event organizer. Combining the two frameworks is therefore not merely additive but compensatory: the 7S Framework identifies which internal elements are present and mutually aligned but is silent on their strategic worth, whereas VRIN adjudicates strategic worth but presupposes that the relevant resources have already been identified and does not, on its own, reveal how they interlock into an organisational configuration. Applied in sequence, 7S supplies VRIN with an element-level unit of analysis, and VRIN supplies 7S with the evaluative layer it lacks, yielding a diagnosis of which aligned elements are also genuine sources of sustainable advantage — an analytical value neither framework delivers alone.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to (1) analyze the condition of DAMN! Inc's internal capabilities, and (2) analyze how these internal capabilities contribute to supporting each stage of the pitching process, in order to formulate development recommendations that can strengthen the company's competitiveness in winning pitches.

METHODS

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach using a single case study method (Sukmadinata, 2014), with the research object being DAMN! Inc's internal capabilities within its pitching process. DAMN! Inc was selected based on the company's high pitching activity intensity (203 briefs in 2025) and its more than decade-long track record in Indonesia's MICE industry, making it representative for addressing the research questions.

Internal capabilities were analyzed through the seven elements of the McKinsey 7S Framework, as adapted by Tracey and Blood (2012), namely Strategy, Structure, Systems, Staff, Skills, Style, and Shared Values, whose strategic value was then evaluated using VRIN criteria (Valuable, Rare, Imperfectly Imitable, Non-Substitutable) from a Resource-Based View perspective (Barney, 1991). Consistent with recent applications that treat VRIN primarily as a diagnostic instrument for assessing the intrinsic quality of firm resources (Zimuto & Zvarimwa, 2022), the criteria here adjudicate the strategic value of each 7S element rather than model market dynamics. The pitching process was analyzed with reference to the nine stages identified by Aryanti and Rudatin (2022), from the receipt of an invitation through to the announcement of the winner.

Data were collected from March to May 2026 at DAMN! Inc's Jakarta office through triangulation of three techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with six informants selected through purposive sampling to represent the key divisions in the pitching process: Graphic (MGC), and Production (PRO). Second, field observation was conducted passively and continuously from January 2026, with the researcher positioned as an observer-as-participant, and intensively on 19–20 May 2026, when DAMN! Inc was running three active pitches in parallel, including the pitch for the GIIAS 2026 event, allowing observation of internal capabilities under actual work pressure. Third, documentation was collected in the form of pitching invitations, client briefs, vendor registration documents, and two pitching proposals (one won, one lost) for comparative analysis.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification conducted simultaneously. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source and technique triangulation, referring to the Lincoln & Guba trustworthiness criteria, with the intensive observation session also serving as a cross-verification process against the preceding interview findings. Analytically, this interactive model was operationalised in three explicit stages. First, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded deductively against the seven McKinsey 7S elements, which formed the initial coding frame, while data that did not fit an existing element were retained inductively. Second, within each element the codes were grouped into themes describing that element's condition in the pitching process, and evidence from different sources and informants was cross-checked so each theme rested on triangulated rather than single-source data. Third, each element was evaluated against the four VRIN criteria, with a criterion recorded as met only where supported by convergent interview and observational evidence, partially met (~) where evidence was mixed, and not met (—) where the element proved generic or replicable; this element-level classification is the basis of the competitive-advantage assessment in Table 1.

RESULTS

Findings indicate that DAMN! Inc's seven McKinsey 7S elements do not contribute equally to the company's competitive advantage in the pitching process. On the Strategy element, DAMN! Inc applies a structured brief-selection mechanism based on event type fit, budget estimation, manpower capacity, location, and timeline feasibility; AEX confirmed that the company once declined a national-scale pitch because the team's capacity was deemed insufficient at the time. Concept development follows an Observe-Imitate-Modify (ATM) approach, starting from a deep understanding of the client's objective. This element is closely intertwined with Shared Values, manifested in three core values: Bold-Different-Forward, Responsive and Always Ready, and Quality Beats Quantity. Documentation of incoming pitching invitations further revealed considerable variation in channel and completeness, ranging from formal e-mails with fully attached client briefs to brief WhatsApp messages lacking budget or scale information, indicating that DAMN! Inc's screening capability begins the moment a brief is received rather than only at the formal accept/decline decision. Pitches with comparatively modest budgets were nonetheless still pursued when the client was judged to hold long-term relational value, indicating that the selection logic weighs relational value alongside immediate financial return.

On the Structure element, coordination runs functionally, with the Account Executive (AE) as the sole official communication channel with the client and the central link to all internal divisions. The AE receives the client brief, after which the Planner conducts a breakdown and brainstorming session with the Art Director before distributing the brief in parallel to the 2D, 3D, Motion Graphic, and Production teams. Field observation during the GIIAS 2026 pitch confirmed that the AE actively monitored each division's progress through a WhatsApp Group and periodic online check-ins throughout the process. However, a structural gap was identified at the handover point between the creative team and the 3D team: briefs passed down were frequently described by D3D as insufficiently detailed, a condition that triggered repeated and inefficient revision cycles rather than a single clean execution pass.

On the Systems element, the pitching workflow relies on a consistent set of tools: Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, After Effects, and Premiere Pro for the 2D and Motion Graphic teams, and SketchUp and 3ds Max for the 3D team, alongside generative AI tools such as Gemini, ChatGPT, Envato AI, and MidJourney used to accelerate production under tight deadlines. Document submission runs through e-mail or the client's digital vendor portal depending on each client's procurement system.

Despite this consistency, field observation confirmed that the entire workflow, from brief intake through post-pitch evaluation, operates informally based on team habit and has not been documented in a written standard operating procedure (SOP), leaving the system dependent on the continuity of specific individuals, particularly at the Planner position, which the company acknowledged experiences comparatively high turnover.

On the Staff element, the pitching team consists of 10 Account Executives, 7 Planners including a Creative Head with a MICE educational background from Politeknik Negeri Jakarta and prior experience at Expo Dubai 2020, 7 2D designers with graphic design backgrounds, 6 3D designers with interior architecture backgrounds and close to eight years of average experience, 4 Motion Graphic staff active in the creative industry since 2018, and 4 Production staff with long and varied career histories. PLN described the Planner team as "not merely adequate, but genuinely capable," while PRO characterized the four-person Production team as generally sufficient though occasionally stretched under simultaneous pitching loads. Team chemistry built over more than a decade allows coordination to remain adaptive even when three active pitches run simultaneously alongside another large ongoing project, without destructive friction between divisions; D2D, who previously worked at a smaller EO where design roles were not fully specialized, noted the contrast with DAMN! Inc's more clearly defined and solid role structure.

On the Skills element, each division holds critical competencies that mutually reinforce one another. The Planner interprets client briefs using a 5W1H framework combined with an Observe-Imitate-Modify (ATM) approach, drawing references from Pinterest, Behance, generative AI tools, and direct site visits to comparable events. The 2D team produces key visuals consistent with each client's brand character, including a recycling strategy that adapts and varies visual assets from prior pitches to improve production efficiency. The 3D team generates realistic booth, stage, and venue-layout visualizations using SketchUp and 3ds Max, while the Motion Graphic team produces animated bumpers under extremely tight deadlines with AI assistance. The Production team evaluates technical feasibility and Occupational Health and Safety (K3) considerations for each proposed concept. MGC noted that the consistent inclusion of motion graphics in every pitching proposal is "not commonly done by other EOs," functioning as a visual differentiator, while D2D, drawing on experience at a previous EO, observed that DAMN! Inc "maintains a fairly high quality standard across production, design, concept, and client service" relative to competitors. The use of generative AI functions as a production aid that accelerates output rather than a substitute for the team's creative judgment and client-specific business understanding.

On the Style element, the leadership style is collaborative, egalitarian, and based on two-way discussion. Regroup sessions are held two to three times, and sometimes more, per pitch, described by PLN as occasions where "we are team players; all input is accommodated, and no one insists on defending their own idea alone." Every division is given space to voice its perspective, including the Production team, which may redirect a design if the concept is judged unfeasible on budget grounds, and briefing between the Planner and design teams runs bidirectionally rather than as one-way instruction. Field observation during the three simultaneous active pitches in May 2026 confirmed that no destructive friction emerged between divisions even under hectic conditions; obstacles were blame culture when a pitch is lost further sustains team resilience, as PLN emphasized that post-pitch evaluation is focused on improvement rather than assigning responsibility: "the culture at DAMN! Inc is not to blame one another; we move on and focus on doing our best for the next project."

On the Shared Values element, five values were identified as consistently manifested in day-to-day work behavior rather than existing merely as slogans: (1) an orientation toward concept relevance to the client's objective, with every proposal built on a specific understanding of whether the client is pursuing awareness, hard selling, or loyalty; (2) a team-player spirit free of sectoral ego,

in which input from every division is accommodated without any division insisting exclusively on its own idea; (3) a no-blame culture following a lost pitch, with evaluation focused on improvement rather than fault; (4) the Bold-Different-Forward principle, treating creativity as a continuous process and every project as a laboratory for innovation; and (5) a long-term commitment to clients and vendors, reflected in active post-pitch follow-up and a consistent, on-time vendor payment record. PRO linked this last value directly to production outcomes, noting that DAMN! Inc's key production-side advantage is "its commitment to timely vendor payment, supported by the company's healthy cash flow." These values were observed directly under high-pressure field conditions rather than inferred solely from interview accounts.

Table 1. Summary of Damn! Inc's Internal Capability Assessment Based on VRIN Criteria

7S Element	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Non Substitutable	Competative Status
Strategy	✓	✓	—	—	Significant advantage, vulnerable to long-term imitation
Structure	✓	—	—	—	Operational foundation, brief handover needs improvement
Systems	✓	~	~	~	High operational value, SOP formalization needed
Staff	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strong advantage, team chemistry hard to replicate
Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strongest advantage, directly affect win rate
Style	✓	✓	—	—	Supporting advantage, reflection of Shared Values
Shared Values	✓	✓	✓	✓	Strongest advantage, foundations of all elements

Note: ✓ = criterion met; ~ = partially met; — = not met

Source: Primary data, processed (2026)

A comprehensive VRIN assessment of the seven elements shows that Staff, Skills, and Shared Values fully satisfy all four VRIN criteria, thereby forming the core of the company's sustainable competitive advantage. Strategy and Style satisfy the Valuable and Rare criteria but are not yet fully Inimitable or Non-Substitutable, while Structure and Systems fully satisfy only the Valuable criterion. A summary of this assessment is presented in Table 1. This pattern indicates a three-tier structure of competitive advantage within DAMN! Inc's capability configuration: a fully protected core (Staff, Skills, Shared Values), a significant but imitable middle tier (Strategy, Style), and an operationally valuable but easily replicated foundation (Structure, Systems). The basis for each classification can be made explicit. Staff, Skills, and Shared Values were coded as fully VRIN because supporting evidence converged across sources: their value appears in outcomes (e.g. MGC's account of motion graphics as a differentiator "not commonly done by other EOs" and D2D's comparison with a former employer's quality standard), their rarity in capabilities competitors are observed not to match, their inimitability in decade-long team chemistry and tacit coordination, and their non-substitutability in the absence of any tool or hire that reproduces the same internalised values. Strategy and Style met Valuable and Rare but not Inimitable or Non-Substitutable, because the brief-selection rule and collaborative regroup practice, though effective, are procedural and could be adopted by a comparably mature competitor. Systems met Valuable strongly but the others only partially (~), because the parallel workflow is a widely known principle whose advantage lies in the tacit, undocumented coordination sustaining it. Structure met Valuable alone, its functional coordination being standard practice and its brief-handover gap a weakness rather than an advantage.

Contribution of Internal Capabilities to the Pitching Process Stages

Beyond the condition of each 7S element, the intensive observation during the parallel handling of three pitches in May 2026 allowed the mapping of how these elements support the pitching process. DAMN! Inc's process follows a sequence largely consistent with the nine general stages identified by Aryanti and Rudatin (2022), from the receipt of a pitching invitation to the announcement of the winner, but is enriched by four additional stages that reflect the depth of the company's internal capabilities: preliminary research and analysis, internal review and revision prior to submission, presentation rehearsal, and post-pitch internal evaluation and knowledge base updating. Consolidating these stages into an operational workflow, the pitching process typically runs within a three-to-five-day window, and occasionally within two days under peak pressure, with the parallel cross-divisional execution stage made possible only when the creative brief handed down by the Planner is sufficiently specific for each division to proceed independently.

At the intake and selection stage, the Strategy element is the dominant contributor, as the brief-selection mechanism based on event type fit, budget estimation, manpower capacity, and timeline feasibility determines whether a brief proceeds to the concept development stage. Concept development itself relies heavily on Skills and Shared Values, where the Planner's 5W1H interpretation of the brief is filtered through the ATM (Observe-Imitate-Modify) approach and grounded in the value of Quality Beats Quantity. Once a concept direction is set, execution moves into a parallel, cross-divisional stage supported jointly by Structure and Staff: the Account Executive relays the brief to the Planner, who breaks it down for the 2D, 3D, Motion Graphic, and Production teams to work simultaneously. It is precisely at this handover point that the structural gap between the creative team and the 3D team becomes most consequential, translating a Structure weakness identified in the 7S assessment into repeated revisions at the internal review stage.

The internal review and revision stage, together with the presentation rehearsal stage, is supported chiefly by Style, through the two-to-three regroup sessions per pitch in which every division, including Production, may challenge a design on technical or budget grounds. This collaborative, egalitarian style allows inconsistencies to surface before the client-facing presentation rather than during it. Finally, the post-pitch internal evaluation and knowledge base updating stage is sustained by Shared Values, particularly the no-blame culture that keeps evaluation focused on improvement rather than assigning fault, as emphasized by PLN. Taken together, these findings indicate that no single 7S element supports the pitching process in isolation; rather, each stage draws on a different combination of elements, and it is the same elements identified as fully VRIN, Staff, Skills, and Shared Values, that recur most consistently across the stages that most directly determine pitching outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The finding that staff, Skills, and Shared Values form the core DAMN! Inc's competitive advantage confirms that the company's competitive position rests on human-based intangible assets: multidisciplinary team chemistry built over more than a decade, cross-sector skill depth internalized as tacit knowledge, and a collaborative, no-blame work culture. This is consistent with Dierickx and Cool's (1989) proposition that strategic assets accumulated through long-term experience are inherently difficult for competitors to acquire instantly (time compression diseconomies). The strong alignment observed between Style and Shared Values also aligns with the concept of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), whereby a psychologically safe work climate encourages cross-divisional team members to openly voice creative input and constructive criticism without fear, as reflected in the two-way regroup dynamics between the Planner and design teams.

The Strategy element's satisfaction of the Valuable and Rare VRIN criteria, without yet reaching full Inimitability, is consistent with Porter's (1996) proposition that strategic fit, the deliberate alignment of a firm's activities with a chosen competitive position, is itself a source of advantage even when the underlying decision rule is not proprietary. DAMN! Inc's structured brief-selection mechanism, illustrated by its decision to decline a national-scale Smartfren pitch on capacity grounds, exemplifies a firm choosing not to compete on every front, echoing Porter's (1996) argument that strategy is defined as much by what a firm declines to do as by what it pursues. Because such selection criteria are procedural, however, and can in principle be learned by competitors of comparable organizational maturity, the element remains only imperfectly imitable, consistent with its VRIN classification in Table 1. The persistence of this selectivity also depends on Shared Values that privilege long-term relational value over short-term revenue; without that internalized value, the pressure to accept every incoming brief to maximize short-term income would erode the very selectivity that makes Strategy valuable, indicating a causal dependency between the two elements that the original 7S hexagon (Waterman et al., 1980) does not itself specify direction for.

Conversely, the vulnerability of the still-generic and informal Structure and Systems elements indicates that DAMN! Inc's competitive advantage is not yet fully protected at the operational level. The ambiguous brief-handover gap and the absence of a written SOP create a dual risk: workflow inefficiency due to repeated revisions, and the potential loss of tacit knowledge during turnover at critical positions such as Planner. This risk resonates with Cohen and Levinthal's (1990) argument on the importance of a documented organizational absorptive capacity so that knowledge does not remain entirely dependent on specific individuals. Thus, while Structure and Systems are not primary sources of competitive advantage, they function as the operational foundation that determines the extent to which the advantages held in Staff, Skills, and Shared Values can be consistently leveraged. The parallel cross-divisional workflow that allows DAMN! Inc to complete a full pitch deck within three to five days is further illuminated by the concept of concurrent engineering (Krishnan & Ulrich, 2001), in which multiple functional teams work simultaneously on interdependent components of a single deliverable rather than sequentially, and by organizational ambidexterity (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004), whereby the 2D, 3D, and Motion Graphic teams simultaneously explore new creative directions for each brief while exploiting established production routines and reusable visual assets to meet compressed deadlines. Both mechanisms are structurally contingent rather than self-sustaining: concurrent engineering functions only if the Planner's initial brief to each division is unambiguous enough for teams to proceed independently, which is precisely why the Structure weakness at the creative-to-3D handover translates directly into the inefficiency this study identifies. This also explains why Systems satisfies the Valuable criterion strongly but Rare and Inimitable only partially: the parallel workflow itself is a widely known project-management principle that competitors could adopt, but the tacit coordination that keeps it functioning without a written SOP, built from years of shared habit among the same individuals, is what is actually difficult to replicate.

The collaborative, non-hierarchical leadership style observed at DAMN! Inc, most visibly in the two-to-three regroup sessions held per pitch, lends further support to the proposition that team creativity flourishes under conditions of autonomy and supportive risk-taking (Amabile, 1996). Because members of the Production team can openly challenge a creative direction on budget grounds without triggering defensive conflict, the ideas that ultimately reach the client have already been stress-tested internally in a way that a more hierarchical structure would suppress. The no-blame culture observed after a lost pitch is likewise consistent with organizational resilience theory (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007), which holds that a firm's capacity to learn from failure without triggering defensive routines is itself a competitive resource, particularly relevant for a firm that wins barely a quarter of

the pitches it enters. Yet in the VRIN analysis, Style satisfies only the Valuable and Rare criteria, because it functions, in this study's reading, as a behavioral expression of Shared Values rather than an independently chosen leadership approach. Competitors could in principle declare a similarly collaborative culture, but without an equivalent multi-year history of internalized values underpinning it, such a declaration would remain superficial. This causal ordering, in which Shared Values generates Style rather than the reverse, refines the original 7S Framework's treatment of the seven elements as mutually reinforcing without specifying directionality among them (Waterman et al., 1980).

The consistent inclusion of 3D visualization and motion graphics in DAMN! Inc's proposals illustrates a further mechanism through which Skills converts into competitive advantage, one rooted in services marketing rather than design alone. Because an event does not yet exist at the moment of pitching, the client is asked to commit significant funds against something inherently intangible (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985; Shostack, 1977). Moving-image visualization functions as a tangible cue that allows the client to evaluate a service quality that would otherwise remain unobservable prior to purchase (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991), narrowing the gap between what a proposal promises and what a client can actually perceive before deciding. Because this capability depends on an in-house, multidisciplinary 3D and Motion Graphic team rather than outsourced production, it satisfies both the Rare and Inimitable VRIN criteria simultaneously: a competitor could hire individual 3D or motion graphic freelancers, but could not immediately replicate the tacit coordination between designers who have refined a shared visual language across hundreds of prior pitches.

A further, less visible determinant of pitching quality is DAMN! Inc's relational capital with its vendor network. A consistent, on-time payment record cultivates reciprocal loyalty in the form of price priority and rapid turnaround from vendors precisely when quotations must be finalized under tight deadlines, a dynamic consistent with the relational view of competitive advantage (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Lavie, 2006) and with supply chain resilience theory (Ponomarev & Holcomb, 2009), which frames a firm's capacity to sustain a reliable supplier network under pressure as an operational advantage not easily replicated by new entrants. In sociological terms, this reflects an accumulation of social capital, trust and reciprocity norms built through repeated exchange (Putnam, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), that a new competitor cannot purchase outright but can only build over an equivalently long history. In 7S terms, this capability sits at the intersection of Shared Values, the same long-term relational orientation the company extends to clients, and Systems, operationalized through a centralized vendor procurement database that shortens quotation turnaround.

DAMN! Inc's pitching process demonstrates how internal capabilities operate stage by stage rather than uniformly. Compared with the nine pitching stages identified by Aryanti and Rudatin (2022), DAMN! Inc's pitching process exhibits a similar pattern but with additional stages that reflect the depth of its internal capabilities, such as preliminary research and analysis, internal review and revision prior to submission, presentation rehearsal, and post-pitch internal evaluation and knowledge

base updating. This finding extends Aryanti and Rudatin's (2022) framework by demonstrating that the effectiveness of general pitching stages is highly dependent on the quality of the internal capabilities that respond to them, a linkage not yet explicitly explored in prior research.

Overall, DAMN! Inc's competitive advantage does not rest on a single element but on a capability configuration that is complementary and causally ambiguous. A competitor may be able to replicate the coordination structure or adopt similar work tools in a relatively short time, yet would find it far more difficult to simultaneously build multidisciplinary team chemistry, cross-sector skill depth, and

shared values that are genuinely internalized into everyday work behavior. These findings provide empirical evidence that the McKinsey 7S Framework and VRIN criteria can be applied synergistically and sequentially to assess the internal capabilities of project-based service firms, while bridging the study of the event pitching process with organizational capability analysis, two strands of literature that have thus far developed separately.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that DAMN! Inc's internal capabilities are not evenly distributed across all McKinsey 7S elements but are concentrated in Staff, Skills, and Shared Values, which consistently satisfy all four VRIN criteria and form the core of the company's sustainable competitive advantage in the pitching process. These three elements contribute tangibly throughout the pitching stages, from probing client needs and developing concepts, to executing the proposal in parallel across divisions, to delivering a convincing presentation to the client, and further extend into the internal review, rehearsal, and post-pitch evaluation stages identified in this study. Conversely, the still-generic and informal Structure and Systems elements represent critical points requiring strengthening, as both determine the extent to which the advantages held in other elements can be optimally leveraged at the operational level. Together, these findings answer the two objectives of this study by describing the condition of DAMN! Inc's internal capabilities and by demonstrating how each capability contributes to a specific stage of the pitching process.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that the McKinsey 7S Framework and VRIN criteria can be applied sequentially, first to map internal capabilities and then to evaluate their strategic value, in a project-based service firm outside the industry contexts in which they were originally developed. It further extends the nine-stage pitching process identified by Aryanti and Rudatin (2022) by showing that the effectiveness of each stage is contingent on a specific combination of internal capabilities rather than on generic procedural compliance, a linkage not previously made explicit in the pitching literature. Practically, the strategic implication for DAMN! Inc is that its priority going forward lies not in building new capabilities, but in protecting and stabilizing its already-superior core capabilities through strengthening the still-vulnerable supporting elements. To this end, this study recommends four development steps: standardizing the visual brief template from Planner to the 3D team, developing a knowledge management system based on internal case-study documentation, reviewing the Motion Graphic team's time allocation within the workflow, and formalizing the pitching workflow SOP in written form. Although these recommendations are addressed to DAMN! Inc, the underlying principle generalises analytically to other event organizers and, more broadly, to project-based creative service firms that compete through pitching — design studios, advertising and branding agencies, and architecture or consulting practices. For such firms, the study implies that competitive advantage is unlikely to be secured by acquiring new tools or replicable procedures, which competitors can match quickly, and is better pursued by protecting the harder-to-imitate configuration of experienced-team chemistry, cross-disciplinary skill depth, and internalised shared values, while shoring up the operational elements — documented workflows and knowledge-retention systems that determine whether those core capabilities can be exercised consistently. The sequential 7S–VRIN diagnosis demonstrated here offers such firms a transferable method for locating which of their own elements warrant protection and which warrant formalisation.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, it relies entirely on the company's internal perspective without incorporating the client's perspective on what ultimately determines a winning pitch. Because the client is the party that ultimately decides the outcome of a pitch, an internal-only

vantage can establish which capabilities the company believes to be decisive but cannot confirm which of them actually move a client's selection; the present findings should therefore be read as an account of internally perceived sources of advantage, and future work incorporating the client's perspective is needed to validate them against the criteria buyers actually apply. Second, the observation window was confined to a single active pitching period in May 2026, which has not captured how DAMN! Inc's capability configuration behaves under lower or more sustained pitching volumes. Third, as a single case study, the findings describe the specific capability configuration of one corporate EO and are not intended to be statistically generalized to the wider MICE industry.

For future researchers, it is recommended to explore the client's perspective to obtain a fuller picture from both sides of the selection process, to develop comparative studies of internal capabilities across EOs of different scales, and to consider quantitative approaches for measuring the relationship between internal capability dimensions and pitching success rates using broader longitudinal data.

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