



What Matters Most

The Survey Results of Priorities for Atlantic Canadian Business Teams

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What Matters Most

The Survey Results of Priorities for Atlantic Canadian Business Teams

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1. Introduction and Executive Summary

When asked about the most important priorities for their businesses, business people in Atlantic Canada focused on long term rather than short term results.

Where many business leaders fall prey to EDD – Earnings Deficit Disorder – and the myopic focus on short term results at any cost, business teams placed the priority for their organization's success squarely where it should be – providing long term value.

You may be surprised at the survey results. You would have expected bottom-line profitability, new marketing campaigns or creating new product ideas as crucial priorities for business success. The short-term pressure on business today is to produce results – now! Building long-term value is intellectually understood to be vital for success but in daily actions, we do what we have to do to achieve results today.



The survey results emphasized strategic thinking. The goal of strategic leadership is to think and act to create sustainable competitive advantage for the organization. From our survey, we see Atlantic Canadian business people looking in the right places.

From a survey of Atlantic Canadian business people, participants identified the crucial priorities for business success and what would motivate and engage the organization to win their best results.

The client is the most important priority for business success. Survey participants agreed that delivering client service excellence, creating value for clients and focusing employees on the client is what will generate the greatest results for business.

Profits, new business development and product innovation surprisingly fell to the bottom of the survey of important priorities. The underlying theme focused the organization on the client. Building a long-term competitive advantage by creating and delivering value to the client will result in profits and new business as well as directing where innovation is needed.

Participants outlined the gap that exists in many organizations today where leadership is focused on the short-term and not communicating clearly and consistently to their people. Involving employees in focusing on the few vital priorities that drive the strategy of the organization provides the greatest opportunity to engage and invest people at all levels of the organization. Employees want to hear and know how they impact the client, that the organization is delivering to the client and how they are doing.

Leaders need to invest time to ask the audience – talking to clients at all levels of the organization – to be clear on why clients buy from the organization. Leaders have to communicate regularly and openly with employees to keep everyone on the same page, focused on first things first, to deliver what the client needs: an excellent client service experience.

Three actions will focus the organization on what is most important to business success going forward.

- Ask the audience – talk with clients directly to understand the value provided.
- Staple yourself to an order – follow the client contact throughout the entire process of working with your organization
- Provide feedforward – give regular communication honestly and openly discuss progress and next steps

The end results for organizations focused with a client priority – more money, more time and less stress.

2. Background and Mechanics of the Survey

In the Spring of 2007, Bluteau DeVenney & Company informally surveyed business people in Atlantic Canada. The objective was to assess what areas employees and team members felt were the most important priorities for the success of their organization.



The survey asked respondents to rank the importance of eighteen (18) different statements as a priority for their organization. For each statement, participants were asked to provide a ranking between 1 and 10 (1 being the least important and 10 being the most important) for the specific statement relating to their organization.

Results were received electronically and confidentially. Participants ranged from professionals, salespeople, managers, supervisors and executives with participants from both the public and private sectors. The participants belonged to organizations that were both for-profit and not-for-profit in nature and comprised a diverse range of situations.

Respondents answered all questions and consideration was not given to age, gender, or size of organization. Responses were tabulated internally by Bluteau DeVenney & Company with no adjustments made to the participants' scoring.

3. Priorities for Business Success

Survey participants clearly placed the priority for business success in the coming years on creating and delivering value for the client. Rather than focusing internally on profitability and productivity, respondents looked externally, highlighting that sustainable success for an organization rests in providing value for the client.

The top five priorities for business success from our survey are outlined in the following table (the rank showing the level of importance as a percentage to the organization's success).

Area of Priority	Rank
Delivering Client Service Excellence	85%
Creating Value for Clients	84%
Focusing Employees on the Client	82%
Clarity of Competitive Advantage	79%
Reflecting and Celebrating Accomplishments	79%

In terms of delivering client service excellence, 83% of respondents placed this area within the top three crucial priorities for success – 42% of all respondents placed client service excellence as the single most important focus for their organization.

The first four priorities all deal with focusing on the client.

- Delivering client service excellence is clearly about ensuring that the clients of an organization are not only satisfied but are wowed by the experience of working with the organization.
- Creating value for clients again focuses on giving clients what they want, need, and more.
- Focusing employees on the client links people's jobs and contribution to the outcome and experience for the client.
- Clarity of competitive advantage is helping everyone in an organization clearly be aware of what the unique value is for the client and answering the question, "Why you?"

Putting emphasis on the client is a strategic approach to success – building long-term value for the client is the best way to ensure the competitiveness of the organization now and in the future.

The fifth priority, reflecting and celebrating accomplishments, is a direct comment to leaders to not just focus on the result or outcome but also to provide feedback and recognition of what people have achieved. Winning sports teams always have a post-game wrap-up. People need to know they have done a good job, see the positive impact of their work and see where they can build from here.

An interesting contrast to the emphasis on the client as the crucial priority for a successful business can be found at the bottom three areas for priority from the survey.

Area of Priority	Rank
Bottom Line Profitability	69%
Developing New Business	64%
Creating New Products and Services	63%

The implication from the survey is that until an organization can create client value and deliver consistently on service excellence, the business should not be taking on new business or be looking for the next new innovation. Do your job for the client first and then grow. As well, profits will come if you deliver what the client is looking for from your organization.

While there is no question that organizations need to be profitable to survive, the survey outlined the fact that organizations only succeed if clients are finding value and keep realizing value with your organization. The results of the survey are clear that the focus of the business should be on creating and delivering client value and profits will follow.

A further component of the survey outlined what areas of priority engage and motivate teams most. Building involvement and initiative is vital for a high-performing organization and focusing on the most engaging areas is a definite help. The following table outlines the priorities that are most important for participant engagement.

Key Motivators and Areas of Engagement	Rank
Delivering Client Service Excellence	42%
Creating Value for Clients	40%
Clear Team Communications	26%
Clarity of Competitive Advantage	24%
Focusing Employees on the Client	21%
Clear Expectations, Accountabilities and Results	21%

Similar to the table outlining what were the key priorities for the organization’s success, the above table shows that focusing on the client is also important for team engagement and motivation.

As well, clear communications within the team are vital, not only in terms of regular communications but also to provide clear expectations, accountabilities and results. People want to hear it. People want to know what is important, how we are doing, what you want from us and what’s next.

We don't just want to do the work – we want to be involved. We want to understand the impact of our contribution, assess our progress, celebrate accomplishments and enjoy the journey. We need to hear consistently how both the organization and we personally are doing and what is expected.

The survey results were clear and consistent in showing that focusing on the client is most important as a priority for business success and as a method of engaging teams. Creating value for clients and delivering client service excellence are the most significant determinants of business success. Follow up with regular communication and the organization is supported for ongoing success.



4. The State of Organizations Today

The simple truth of business success today is that execution is just not that great. A recent study in Harvard Business Review outlined that the average success rate for strategic initiatives in US organizations is about 65%.

Organizations waste about 35% of their effort in trying to achieve performance.

Having the right priorities is a key hinge factor in executing a strategy to turn vision into reality. A challenge for business leadership today is not only having a clear vision to communicate but also to be able to identify and focus the organization on the key priorities that drive success.

Organizations often have trouble executing from having a stew of priorities – so many initiatives and areas of focus that there really are no priorities.

For leadership, it is absolutely crucial to identify the three to five priorities that will focus the organization and drive success.

Priorities are talked about but not really positioned as a direction for execution and effort. The challenges facing organizations today from the lack of actionable priorities hurt the ability of the business to achieve its potential.

- There is a lack of communication.
- Employees are not focused and do second things first.
- Teams and employees often don't work from the same page.
- Employees are not accountable for results (and are often not clear about what their responsibilities are).
- The organization is not focused on the client.

Communication is a key challenge for business success. A recent global leadership study outlined the communication gap that exists in organizations today – where 74% of leaders believed they communicated vision and strategy effectively to their organizations, only 37% of the employees said the communication from their leaders was clear and motivating.

The result for the organization struggling to focus on the right priorities is a waste of effort – lost money, lost opportunity, lost time and much greater levels of stress. The organization's attention is not focused to execute. Anxiety levels are raised and dampen performance.



What leaders need to do is to set the right priorities. When an organization is focused and working from the same page with clear expectations and consistent communication, results are accelerated and amplified. There is a greater degree of personal leadership at all levels, initiative soars and the organization leverages its talent. Work is simplified and the potential of an organization is turned into performance.

Organizational leaders can focus on the right priorities by working with their employees to develop engagement and involvement. Employees work on the front line and provide a vital perspective. By working with employees in a collaborative approach, leaders can identify the most crucial three to five priorities. Note, less than three priorities is too focused and opportunities may be missed, more than five priorities is too scattered and no real leverage will be achieved. With involvement, employees will understand the strategy and the priorities and invest themselves in achieving the best results.

The key actions to achieve business success are simple – collaborate with the employees to set the key priorities and build engaged teams that focus on the right actions to execute on the priorities.

5. Where Leaders Need to Invest

The key to being a successful and strategic leader is to be able to balance the short-term pressures for results with long-term actions to build a sustainable competitive advantage.

Leaders need to focus strategically and work collaboratively.

The results of the survey of priorities identified the focus needed for organizations to think strategically and build a competitive advantage that lasts over the long-term.

Growth, innovation and results start with the client. The participants of the survey identified clearly the importance of focusing the organization's strategy and execution around the client.

- What is the value created for the client?
- Are the processes of the organization focused on providing that value?
- Is the service delivery giving an excellent experience for the client?
- Is the organization communicating a clear and consistent message of competitive advantage so that clients, prospects and employees know, why you?
- Do employees see their contribution to the client value clearly?
- Is the leadership communicating regularly with the organization at all levels in order to stay focused on the client and reflect on progress?

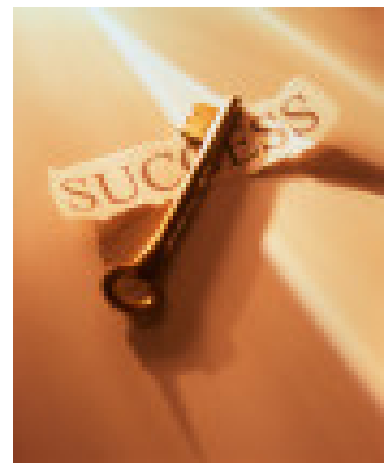
Organizations need to invest more time in the client. In the most simple of terms, the organization needs to continually ask their audience. Talking to clients and hearing directly from them provides the most vital message of all – are we creating and delivering a product or service that is valued?

Before new marketing campaigns are devised, new products and services are innovated and blue skies are plotted, leaders and organizations need to talk to their clients. Make sure that clients are not only happy but loyal and raving. Ask questions to understand clearly how the client uses the product or service.

Leaders need to focus the organization on the client – be clear on the value created for the client, communicate it throughout the business so everyone understands why clients buy from the organization, and ensure excellent delivery of service.

Everyone in the organization needs to understand what makes the business stand out in the market. The competitive advantage needs to be known clearly and consistently throughout the organization so that each employee, when asked, can explain in one sentence why clients buy from the organization and what makes their business stand out in the market. Competitive advantage that is communicated and delivered builds confidence both in the organization and in the market.

Communication needs to be a focus for the leadership. Whenever you think you have communicated enough – communicate more. Employees need to hear directly from leadership with openness, timeliness and honesty. Without effective communication, uncertainty grows and people start making their own assumptions about the organization (which are more likely to be negative than positive). Leaders should strive to invest about 10% of their time communicating the message throughout the organization.





From the survey results, delivering client value, building competitive advantage and communicating consistently are the three best investments for leadership.

Concentrating on these three priorities will yield tremendous returns on investment – a more simplified organization focused on first things first, a leveraging of talent for effective delegation and greater initiative, an acceleration of actions as everyone is working from the same page and the multiplication of results.

6. The Next Steps and Taking Action

Knowledge in action creates results. The survey outlined the most important priorities for business success – what are the next steps?

Three actions are recommended:

- Ask the Audience – set up focus groups or regular one-on-one client surveys at different levels of organization to be clear on what the client needs (their challenges and opportunities), how they use the product or service, what they value about the product or service and what would help them enjoy it more. Salespeople should start here before any selling. Marketing professionals should start here before planning any campaigns. Executives should start here before considering any strategies. Operations managers should start here before assessing any processes. Everyone should start here first. The leader should start here before leading anywhere.
- Staple Yourself to an Order – put the executive and all teams in the organization through the exercise of following through the entire process of the client from starting as a prospect to using your product or service and know first-hand what it is like to work with your organization. When everyone understands what it is like, where value is added (or lost) and how it all connects, people see the impact of their contribution and innovation and improvement can begin.
- FeedForward – on a regular basis, leadership should communicate directly and openly with all levels of the organization to reflect on progress, talk over and over about the key priorities and celebrate the success to date. Focus on the positive, resolve the challenges and enjoy the journey – everyone and everything gets better.

Meet with your executives and teams to review the survey results and answer the questions for reflection in Part 7.

Use the Action Commitment form (included at the end of the report) to identify your key insights, outline the actions you will commit to taking and who you need to communicate with to proceed.

7. Questions for Reflection

Ask yourself – and ask your executive team and all your teams – the following questions:

1. How do clients use our products and services?
2. Why do clients buy our products and services?
3. Where do clients touch and interact with our organization?
4. What is it like for clients to work with our organization at those contact points?

Even more important, ask your organization – who is the client?

You may be surprised. In many organizations, employees are not all in agreement or clear on who the client is – there may be many stakeholders but there is one client. The client is the one paying for your organization’s products or services.

8. Complete Survey Results

The following table outlines the results from all respondents to each of the eighteen areas of priority for business success. The areas of priority are listed in order of ranking of importance (measured as a percentage with the level of importance increasing with the percentage score).

The scores outline where respondents felt organizations should focus.

Summary of Priorities for Business Success

Area of Priority	Rank
Delivering Client Service Excellence	85%
Creating Value for Clients	84%
Focusing Employees on the Client	82%
Clarity of Competitive Advantage	79%
Reflecting and Celebrating Accomplishments	79%
Communicating Clearly with Teams	78%
Developing a More Productive Work Environment	78%
Clear Expectations, Accountabilities and Results	78%
Focus on Operational Processes	77%
Further Training and Development	75%
More Effective Team Working Relationships	74%
Implementing Plans and Following Progress	74%
Management of Team and Process	73%
Developing a 12-18 Month Growth Plan	72%
Clarify Roles and Increase Delegation	71%
Bottom-Line Profitability	69%
Developing New Business	64%
Creating New Products and Services	63%

The following table outlines how respondents saw each of the eighteen areas of priority as a motivator and area of engagement for them to take action. Again, the areas of motivation are listed in descending order of importance and identified as a percentage score.

The scores outline what areas would engage and motivate employees of the organization most.

Summary of Employee Motivators and Areas of Engagement

Area of Motivation	Rank
Delivering Client Service Excellence	42%
Creating Value for Clients	40%
Communicating Clearly with Teams	26%
Clarity of Competitive Advantage	24%
Focusing Employees on the Client	21%
Clear Expectations, Accountabilities and Results	21%
Reflecting and Celebrating Accomplishments	19%
Developing a More Productive Work Environment	19%
Developing a 12-18 Month Growth Plan	19%
More Effective Team Working Relationships	15%
Management of Team and Process	14%
Further Training and Development	14%
Focus on Operational Processes	14%
Bottom-Line Profitability	14%
Clarify Roles and Increase Delegation	12%
Implementing Plans and Following Progress	10%
Developing New Business	10%
Creating New Products and Services	7%



9. About Us

Our company:

Bluteau DeVenney and Company Inc. is a professional firm based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We offer an innovative mix of coaching and consulting. First we help you identify problems, opportunities and strengths. Then we design solutions to resolve, capture and build – helping you to be more effective and achieve meaningful results.

Our Vision:

Our vision is to support achievers at all levels find and grow their natural and true leadership advantage to accomplish their best results.

Our Mission:

Our mission is to provide an innovative learning forum for established leaders to sharpen their edge and for developing leaders to find their path through practical and actionable coaching and training.

Clients access solutions with us through our three platforms:

- For Leaders Only – for personal leadership
- The Achiever's Edge – for leaders and their teams
- The Hiring Edge – for finding the right people

Through workshops, retreats, conferences, analytics and newsletters we help leaders define their compass for natural leadership and stay on track for their best results.

Please visit our website at www.bluteaudevenney.com for further information.





The Action Commitment Form

Meeting & Date: _____

What are the key insights?

1

2

3

What actions do you agree to take from this meeting?

Who does what by when?

1

2

3

Who do you need to talk to/follow-up with about what and by when?

1

2

3

11. Acknowledgements and Disclaimer

Bluteau DeVenney and Company Inc. thanks all participants who responded to the survey.

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