



Navigating Business Decisions

Insights and Strategies from Northeast Ohio Business Leaders

A Collaborative Study with LaConte Consulting and Students at Kent State University



Navigating Business Decisions:
Insights and Strategies from Northeast Ohio Business Leaders

A Collaborative Study with LaConte Consulting and Students at Kent State University

Published January 2025

Copyright © 2025 by LaConte Consulting

All rights reserved. This publication may be freely utilized by the general public for educational, charitable, nonprofit, and/or other non-commercial purposes. Such use does not require prior or written permission and should include acknowledgement that it is “with the permission of LaConte Consulting.” Any other use is prohibited without the prior written permission of LaConte Consulting. For permission requests, please contact the Grace LaConte at grace@laconteconsulting.com or (936) 380-1756.

LaConte Consulting
Conroe, TX
<https://laconteconsulting.com>

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction 5
 - Welcome Message 5
 - Purpose Statement 6
 - Acknowledgments 6
- 2. Executive Summary 8
 - Hypotheses..... 8
 - Key Insights and Takeaways..... 9
- 3. Research Overview 11
 - Study Timeline..... 11
 - Methodology..... 11
 - Participant Roles, Geography, and Industries..... 13
 - Study Limitations 16
- 4. Findings and Trends..... 17
 - Leadership Structures 17
 - Leadership and Decision Styles 18
 - Decision-Making Challenges and Risk Behavior 20
 - Gender-Based Leadership Patterns 22
 - Industry and Regional Comparisons 24
 - Surprising and Unexpected Findings 28
- 5. Leadership Insights from Interviews..... 29
 - Meet the Leaders 29
 - Perspectives and Leadership Insights 29
- 6. Practical Recommendations..... 34
 - Hypothesis Results and Strategic Insights..... 34

Industry-Focused Strategies.....	36
7. Themes and Future Outlook	39
Insights from Kent State University Students	39
Expert Data Analysis	39
7 Takeaways from Leader Interviews	40
8. Appendices and Resources	42
Business Resilience Checklist	43
Business Resilience Scorecard.....	45
Survey Questions.....	47
Word Cloud Visualizations	61
Resources for Further Reading.....	62
9. About the Authors	63
Contributors to the Study	63
Contact Information	64

1. Introduction

Welcome Message

I am pleased to share the results of this study, which was conducted in collaboration with students at Kent State University. In today’s fast-moving business landscape, leaders must recognize the essential factors that drive success. We surveyed 53 business leaders from Northeast Ohio to explore their decision-making processes, financial strategies, and crisis management approaches.

Why Do Some Businesses Thrive While Others Struggle?

That’s the question that shaped our research. We spoke directly with business owners to uncover what drives their resilience and effective leadership. In this report, you’ll find insights to navigate challenges, strengthen decision-making, engage employees, and drive sustainable growth. Included are practical tools and strategies to refine leadership, leverage workforce strengths, and enhance crisis management.

Our goal is to provide clear and actionable guidance about how to run a business more successfully. We hope these insights will help you anticipate risks and tackle challenges with greater confidence.

Thank you for reading this report. If you have questions or feedback, I would love to hear from you.

Regards,



Grace LaConte
Founder and Growth Strategist
LaConte Consulting
grace@laconteconsulting.com



In collaboration with students at Kent State University

Purpose Statement

The goal of this study is to identify which decision-making challenges are faced by small and mid-sized business leaders, focusing on bottlenecks that hinder effective decisions. We explore the tools, strategies, and leadership styles that can overcome these obstacles. By examining decision-making tools, long-term planning, and crisis management strategies, we aim to understand how these practices contribute to resilience and operational performance to uncover factors that drive business success.

Specific Objectives

- **Identify Decision-Making Challenges:** Examine barriers such as time constraints, limited expertise, and resource shortages that hinder effective outcomes.
- **Understand Industry and Regional Variations:** Assess how decision-making challenges and solutions differ across industries and geographic regions.
- **Analyze Decision-Making Patterns:** Explore how leaders approach critical decisions and the factors that shape these processes.
- **Provide Actionable Recommendations:** Develop practical, industry-specific strategies to address challenges and promote sustainable growth.

By achieving these objectives, we aim to help leaders refine their decision-making frameworks, confidently adapt to evolving business challenges, and cultivate a culture of strategic growth within their organizations.

Goals for Students

With input from Professor James Ferguson, the Kent State University students were given the following instructions:

“Students will design, distribute, and analyze a survey aimed at understanding the challenges and strategies business owners use to enhance resilience. The project will give students firsthand experience in survey methodology, data collection, and analysis while providing valuable insights on the current state of business resiliency in the consultant’s target market.”

Acknowledgments

We want to extend heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this project, including the following:

James Ferguson, adjunct professor of Management & Information Systems at Kent State University, who shepherded students’ involvement in the survey development and execution.

The 10 students in Kent State University's Fall 2024 Business Consulting and Practicum class who provided significant help on this project. They showed dedication, curiosity, and creativity in designing the survey, inviting local business leaders to participate, analyzing responses, and providing a thoughtful analysis.

Aliyu Muraina, a Strategic Project Manager and Database and Security Expert, contributed a strategic analysis of the data collected.

Much gratitude to **Kent State University** for providing access, support, and a commitment to academic excellence through this project. The university also shared a press release announcing the launch of our survey:

[Northeast Ohio Business Leaders Invited to Share Insights On Regional Growth and Leadership](#)
(click to read the entire press release).

The image is a screenshot of a news article on the Kent State University website. The header features the Kent State University logo and navigation links for 'Faculty/Staff News Now', 'News', 'New & Familiar Faces', and 'Recognition'. The article title is 'NORTHEAST OHIO BUSINESS LEADERS INVITED TO SHARE INSIGHTS ON REGIONAL GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP'. The main text includes an introductory paragraph, sections for 'ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY AND CONSULTING FIRM', 'SPECIAL INVITATION FOR BUSINESS DECISION-MAKERS', 'SURVEY CONFIDENTIALITY AND PURPOSE', and 'LIMITED TIME TO PARTICIPATE'. It also provides contact information for Grace LaConte and a 'GET INVOLVED TODAY' section. The article is dated Tuesday, October 8, 2024, and includes a 'We use cookies...' notice at the bottom.

Lastly, we want to express appreciation to the **53 business leaders across Northeast Ohio** who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights through the survey. Their openness and willingness to participate were crucial in identifying significant challenges and developing meaningful recommendations for other business owners. This project reflects a shared commitment to equip leaders with the tools and insights they need to achieve meaningful change. We are incredibly grateful for everyone's valuable contributions and insights.

2. Executive Summary

Making strong business decisions is tougher than ever in today's fast-changing world. This study looks at how Northeast Ohio leaders are facing these challenges and the strategies they are using to succeed.

Study's Initial Hypotheses

We tested 3 specific hypotheses to uncover how business leaders could improve their operational performance and outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: Advanced Decision-Making Tools Drive Success

We posit that business leaders who leverage advanced tools (such as analytics and financial forecasting) will see greater improvements in revenue, profitability, and strategic outcomes.

Hypothesis 2: Long-Term Planning Fuels Growth

We posit that business leaders who consistently review and refine long-term plans—by setting measurable goals, investing in technology, and building strategic partnerships—will achieve higher operational efficiency and sustained growth.

Hypothesis 3: Crisis Management Builds Resilience

We posit that business leaders who regularly use and update a crisis management plan are better equipped to handle unexpected challenges and enjoy greater [resilience](#) and stability.

Initial Hypotheses

- 1. Advanced Decision-Making Tools Drive Success*
- 2. Long-Term Planning Fuels Growth*
- 3. Crisis Management Builds Resilience*

Key Insights and Takeaways

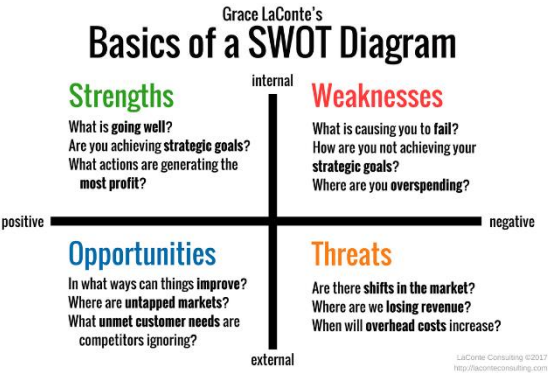
The following provides a snapshot of survey analysis, demonstrating the critical factors that influence decision-making, leadership dynamics, and business strategies. By understanding these trends, business leaders can better prepare for future challenges and opportunities.

Our findings reveal several significant trends that highlight common challenges and opportunities for growth:

1. Overreliance on Intuition in a Data-Driven Era

Despite the availability of advanced decision-making tools, an astonishing **64% of respondents rely heavily on intuition or gut feelings** to make critical decisions, leaving them exposed to unforeseen risks.

Over 60% of respondents rely on **manual tools** like spreadsheets, while adoption of advanced analytics remains under 30%. Although 51% of respondents use **business analytics tools** and 36% rely on **SWOT analysis**, we found that leaders often make essential decisions **without input from employees or primary stakeholders**.



2. Underestimating Employee Contributions

Although **talent retention** is a top challenge for 62% of respondents, many overlook their workforce’s potential for innovation and growth. Despite this, only 35% of surveyed companies have a **formal leadership development plan** in place.

Decision-making remains heavily concentrated at the leadership level, with minimal involvement from boards (11%), advisors (2%), private equity firms (2%), or sales teams (2%). **Employees are rarely included in strategic discussions**, representing a missed opportunity to enhance engagement and drive more well-rounded, effective outcomes.

Businesses where employees **strongly align with company values** report a 30% higher retention rate than those with less culture integration and businesses that **invest in leadership training** reported a 20% higher likelihood of **successfully navigating crises**.

3. Gaps in Succession and Scenario Planning

Resilient businesses often rely on robust contingency plans, but only **34% of respondents have a formal succession plan** and just **19% use scenario planning**. Nearly a quarter (23%) of respondents do not have any crisis management strategy in place.

Long-term planning is primarily handled by **leadership teams** (81%), financial teams (34%), and operations teams (32%), while **only 2%** of respondents use a **fully collaborative, team-based approach**. Additionally, 4% say they have no long-term planning process at all. The widespread **absence of succession or scenario plans** further suggests that long-term strategies may be at increased risk.

Nearly a quarter (23%) of companies **lack any crisis management strategy**. While many businesses “manage debt carefully” (74%), “build cash reserves” (68%), more than half “reduce operational costs” (60%) and “diversify revenue streams” (57%) to achieve stability and growth. These gaps in planning leave companies vulnerable to unexpected challenges.

4. Overlooked Growth Opportunities

One notable trend from this survey is the **frequent and unexplored profit potential resources** such as under-utilized assets, lack of goal clarity, and neglected customer segments. Strategic decisions often prioritize long-time revenue growth over operational efficiency, which can create challenges including:

- Cash flow management issues (64% of respondents)
- Economic uncertainty (45% of respondents)

This survey showed that **62%** of respondents admit their **company’s values are not consistently reflected in daily operations**. Integrating core beliefs and culture into decision-making processes has been shown to enhance employee engagement and customer loyalty. Without it, companies often experience misalignment and diluted brand trust. ([Deloitte 2013 Core Beliefs & Culture Survey](#)).

Unlocking Potential: Gaps, Growth, Resilience

1. **Gut Feeling & Intuition Over Data**

64% of leaders rely on gut instincts for critical decisions, despite advanced tools being available.

2. **Untapped Workforce Potential**

62% face talent retention challenges, yet few specifically leverage employee input when making strategic decisions.

3. **Planning Gaps Create Risks**

Only 34% have formal succession plans and 19% use scenario planning, leaving businesses vulnerable to unexpected disruptions.

4. **Missed Profit Opportunities**

Unexplored resources and misaligned values frequently hinder growth and brand trust for many businesses.

3. Research Overview

Study Timeline

This study was conducted in collaboration with an undergraduate class at Kent State University during the fall 2024 semester for 12 Weeks (September 3–November 23, 2024).

Responses to the survey were actively collected using an online form between September 30 to November 7, 2024.

Methodology

For this study, we used a **mixed-methods research approach** that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive insights from business owners and leaders across various industries.

1. Survey Research

A big component of the study was an online survey distributed to business owners and senior leaders in small to mid-sized companies. The survey included a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. This allowed us to capture quantitative data on decision-making practices, challenges, and the use of decision-making tools. We also included qualitative questions to gain deeper insights into the experiences and strategies that leaders are making in their company. The survey was distributed online to collect responses as quickly and efficiently as possible, using Google Forms and Google Sheets.

You can find the [complete survey in the Appendix](#).

Sample Size

Our survey collected responses from **53 participants** across various industries including Manufacturing, Technology, Healthcare, Retail, Financial Services, Professional Services, and others (Energy, Logistics, Construction, and more). All respondents are **based in Northeast Ohio**.

Survey Design

Questions were designed to evaluate decision-making challenges, preferred tools, leadership styles, and the impact of these factors on organizational success.

2. Interviews

In addition to the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with a select group of business leaders to explore their experiences and gain detailed insights into decision-making challenges. Interviews helped uncover common missteps, success stories, and strategies to overcome decision-making barriers.

A total of 7 business leaders participated in these one-on-one interviews. Interviewees were selected based on their extensive experience in leadership roles and their willingness to share insights about business processes. You will find interview summaries in section 5, [Leadership Insights from Interviews](#).

3. Data Analysis

All quantitative survey data were analyzed using statistical tools to identify trends, patterns, and correlations between decision-making challenges and business performance. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews were categorized to uncover recurring themes and insights.

This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive view of the decision-making landscape in small to mid-sized businesses in Northeast Ohio, offering both broad trends and individual perspectives.

Students' Descriptions of Methods

The students shared these final thoughts about the survey methodology:

“Working alongside Grace, we constructed a Google Forms survey to distribute to local businesses to fill out. The questions ranged from a brief description of the business to guided questions regarding their decision-making process and crisis management systems.

“Based on the results of these questions, and whether or not the business owners requested one, they were set-up with a follow up consultation with Grace as well as emailed their results of the survey taken.”



Participant Roles, Geography, and Industries

We are thankful for the insights shared by business leaders across various industries, company sizes, and roles. Understanding their diverse backgrounds helps provide context for the findings and sheds light on the experiences and challenges they are navigating.

Roles and Leadership Levels

The study primarily targeted business owners and senior leaders. Respondents included:

- **Business Owners/Founders:** 87%
- **CEOs/Presidents:** 9%
- **Other Senior Executives (COOs, CFOs, etc.):** 4%

Nearly all of those surveyed are top-level leaders. This focus provides direct insights into the decision-making processes and the challenges faced by those at the helm of their organizations.

Geographic Representation

All participants are based in the northeast quadrant of Ohio. By focusing on this specific region, we gathered insights that reflect its unique economic and geographical context.

Invitations were sent to leaders in the following targeted areas:

Akron	Cuyahoga Falls	Mogadore
Alliance	Eastlake	Newbury
Amherst	Elyria	North Canton
Ashtabula	Fairlawn	North Olmsted
Aurora	Garfield Heights	North Ridgeville
Avon Lake	Highland Heights	North Royalton
Barberton	Hudson	Northfield
Bay Village	Independence	Olmsted Falls
Beachwood	Kent	Painesville
Bedford	Lakewood	Parma
Bedford Heights	Lorain	Peninsula
Berea	Macedonia	Perry
Brecksville	Maple Heights	Rocky River
Broadview Heights	Massillon	Shaker Heights
Brook Park	Mayfield Heights	Solon
Brunswick	Medina	Strongsville
Burton	Mentor	Tallmadge
Canton	Mentor-on-the-Lake	Warren
Chardon	Middlefield	Willoughby

Survey responses were collected from leaders in these locations:

Cleveland (16 responses)	Canton-Massillon (2 responses)	Cuyahoga Falls (1 response)
Akron (5 responses)	Mansfield (2 responses)	Garrettsville (1 response)
Strongsville (4 responses)	Brunswick (2 responses)	Medina (1 response)
Lorain-Elyria (3 responses)	Kent (2 responses)	Mentor (1 response)
Solon (3 responses)	Avon (1 response)	Middlefield (1 response)
Youngstown-Warren-Boardman (3 responses)	Avon Lake (1 response)	North Olmsted (1 response)
	Columbiana (1 response)	Norton (1 response)
		Shaker Heights (1 response)

Large vs. Medium vs. Rural Communities

Large Cities: 24 responses (45%)

- Akron, Cleveland, Youngstown-Warren-Boardman.

Medium Cities: 22 responses (42%)

- Avon, Avon Lake, Brunswick, Canton-Massillon, Lorain-Elyria, Mansfield, Medina, Mentor, North Olmsted, Shaker Heights, Solon, Strongsville.

Rural Communities/Small Towns: 7 responses (13%)

- Columbiana, Cuyahoga Falls, Garrettsville, Kent, Middlefield, Norton.

Geographic Insights

- Large cities had the highest number of responses (45%).
- Mid- sized cities and towns (42%) and rural communities (13%) constituted the rest of participants' locations.

Note: While a 54th response was collected from a senior leader based in Nashville, Tennessee, the study primarily focused on answers from the 53 leaders based in Ohio.



Industry Groupings

The participants represent a wide range of diverse industries. We categorized sectors into the following groups to highlight common decision-making trends and industry-specific differences.

1. Manufacturing and Industrial

- 18 companies surveyed
- **34%** of all companies

Includes: Manufacturing, Industrial Distribution, Metal Recycling, Automotive, Field Services, Energy, Trade Compliance, Environmental Services

2. Construction, Real Estate, and Related Services

- 4 companies surveyed
- **8%** of all companies

Includes: Construction, Real Estate, Landscaping, Security

3. Consumer Goods, Food & Beverage, and Hospitality

- 9 companies surveyed
- **17%** of all companies

Includes: Retail, Luxury Retail, Food and Beverage, Hospitality, Jewelry Retail/Service, Fitness

4. Financial, Professional, and Technology Services

- 13 companies surveyed
- **24%** of all companies

Includes: Financial Services, Insurance, Consulting, IT and Software, Marketing, Graphic Design, Marketing and Display Production

5. Healthcare, Arts, and Personal Services

- 9 companies surveyed
- **17%** of all companies

Includes: Healthcare, Arts & Entertainment, Entertainment and Media, Beauty & Personal Services

Organizational Size

Our study collected responses from leaders of small to mid-sized independently owned businesses, with respondents leading organizations that generated annual revenues between less than \$1 million and over \$30 million.

The breakdown of company sizes is as follows:

- **Less than \$1M** in annual revenue: **34%** of respondents
- **\$1M to \$5M** in annual revenue: **21%**
- **\$5M to \$10M** in annual revenue: **7%**
- **\$10M to \$30M** in annual revenue: **17%**
- **Over \$30M** in annual revenue: **17%**
- **Prefer not to disclose: 4%**

Organizations range between established, expanding, and early stages of growth. Decision-making challenges were pronounced across all sizes, but resources to address these challenges seemed more limited with smaller companies compared to larger corporations.

From the Kent State students

- *We had 54 total responses to the survey throughout the semester; 53 were based in NE Ohio.*
- *The majority of businesses who took the survey were in the manufacturing industry (30.2%). The top 3 other industries of respondents were in the construction, IT or food/beverage fields.*
- *45.3% of respondents were from small businesses with 1-10 employees.*
- *Interestingly, the majority of respondents said they relied on gut feelings/intuition (64%) in decision making.*
- *The two biggest challenges respondents faced were workforce issues and economic uncertainty.*

Study Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the decision-making challenges faced by business leaders, there are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting our findings:

Limited Geographic Focus

We chose to focus on the northeast quadrant of Ohio, where Kent State University is based. This allowed us to capture data specific to a region that has undergone significant change and presents opportunities for economic growth. This allows us to explore the unique decision-making challenges and strategies faced by Northeast Ohio business leaders. While our insights are valuable, we recognize that varying economic conditions, cultural factors, and industry trends from other regions may lead to different outcomes.

Small Sample Size and Representativeness

Although our survey reached a diverse group of business leaders, the limited number of responses does not fully represent all industries or business sizes. The results reflect specific industries and regions included in the study, so caution should be used when applying findings to a broader population.

Short Timeline

While we attempted to provide participants with plenty of time to complete the survey, it was limited by the duration of a university semester. Additional leaders had expressed interest in participating but were unable to respond within the survey's open period.

Self-Reported Data

The study relied heavily on self-reported data from business leaders. While this provides valuable first-hand insights, it is important to recognize that results are influenced by personal or organizational factors, respondent bias, or lack of full disclosure about particular situations.

Changing Business Environment

We conducted the study during a period of economic and political uncertainty, which may have influenced participants' decision-making processes and mindset. Choices that leaders make during times of instability may not reflect their typical decision-making practices in a more stable economy.

Lack of Longitudinal Data

While our research provides valuable insights into the current state of decision-making practices, it does not provide longitudinal data that tracks changes over time. This study was unable to capture how decision-making processes may evolve as businesses grow or face new challenges over time.

Despite these limitations, our study offers a comprehensive snapshot of the decision-making challenges facing business leaders today and provides actionable recommendations to address barriers.

4. Findings and Trends

This study examines the challenges, success factors, and emerging trends shaping business decisions in dynamic, competitive environments. Our findings reveal common obstacles, effective strategies, and diverse approaches leaders use to navigate complex choices.

Leadership Structures

The leadership dynamics vary widely based on company size and industry. While some organizations embrace a collaborative approach, many business owners retain direct control over strategic and operational decisions.

Decision-Making Authority

We found that owners and founders retain primary control, even in companies with substantial revenue and staff. A hands-on leadership approach reflects a primarily strategic and operational focus.

Larger firms (250+ employees) tend to distribute their decisions across senior management, financial teams, and boards, fostering a more structured and collaborative approach.

Primary Challenges

Workforce issues—including turnover, hiring, and retention—are the most frequently cited concerns, especially in the manufacturing sector.

Businesses with annual revenues below \$30M struggle with cash flow and economic uncertainty, making them more vulnerable to financial pressures. Regulatory changes, particularly in manufacturing and energy, demand greater agility in compliance strategies.

Risk-Taking Behavior

Many businesses make bold investments in technology, ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) systems, or facilities to improve efficiency and expand capabilities, despite financial risks.

Smaller firms (1-10 employees) take more calculated risks, often relying on intuition rather than extensive analytical tools.

Tools and Resources

Larger companies (\$10M+ revenue) rely on structured decision-making tools, such as financial forecasting software and [SWOT analysis](#).

These findings underscore the varied approaches leaders take in decision-making, balancing data-driven strategies with instinct and experience.

Leadership and Decision Styles

The study revealed 6 distinct styles of making decisions, which reflect the variety of ways in which survey respondents approach the world.

1. Intuitive Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- Gut Feeling/Intuition (34 respondents, 64%)

Description: This approach leverages personal experience, instincts, and immediate judgment. While quick and particularly effective in fast-paced or uncertain environments, this style can be more subjective and introduce potential bias.

2. Data-Driven Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- Business Analytics Tools (27 respondents, 51%)
- [SWOT Analysis](#) (19 respondents, 36%)
- Risk Assessment Tools (14 respondents, 26%)
- Financial Forecasting Software (12 respondents, 23%)

Description: This style relies heavily on quantitative data and structured methodologies to inform decisions. It is more objective and can minimize personal biases by focusing on measurable outcomes and predictive analytics.

3. Consultative Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- Industry Reports (20 respondents, 38%)
- Consultants including EOS and Scalerator (19 respondents, 36%)

Description: This method involves seeking advice and insights from external experts and industry analyses. It provides fresh perspectives and specialized knowledge, helping to validate decisions and understand complex issues.

“We follow the EOS model and regularly review our long-term goals to stay aligned.”

Manufacturing

4. Combo Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- A blend of Business Analytics Tools, Intuition, Industry Reports, SWOT Analysis, Risk Assessment Tools, and Consultants (47 respondents, 89%)

Description: This approach uses multiple resources to ensure well-rounded decisions. It balances data-driven insights with personal experience and expert opinions, creating a robust decision-making process.

5. Ad Hoc Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- None of the listed tools (4 respondents, 8%)

Description: This style likely relies on informal or situational analysis, which are often based on direct personal experience or immediate judgment. It is less structured and may lack the rigor of other approaches, depending more on flexibility and adaptability.

6. Experience-Based Decision-Making

Tools Used:

- Historical Data (1 respondent, 2%)
- Experience of Senior Management (1 respondent, 2%)

Description: This method is dependent on past experiences and the accumulated knowledge of senior managers. It highly values historical insights and wisdom gained from previous decisions, focusing on tried-and-tested strategies.

“We need to create structured systems rather than just ‘figuring it out as we go.’”

Automotive Business Owner

These six styles reflect a spectrum of approaches, from highly structured and analytical to flexible and experiential. This variety of decision-making methods highlights the adaptability and resourcefulness of respondents to our survey.



Decision-Making Challenges and Risk Behavior

Business leaders are faced with a range of pressing challenges, and certain issues are particularly impactful in shaping their decision-making processes. The following findings reflect major obstacles that can hinder businesses in their decision-making efforts.

1. Economic Uncertainty

Insight: Over half of respondents (57%) identified economic uncertainty as one of the biggest challenges in their decision-making process.

Impact: Fluctuating market conditions, unpredictable economic shifts, and global disruptions have made it harder for leaders to predict outcomes and commit to long-term decisions.

Opportunity: Develop flexible strategies, build financial reserves, and diversify revenue streams to cushion against future volatility.

“We took on a new program involving unfamiliar material, equipment we didn’t yet own, and a process we had never tried before.”

Manufacturing Owner

2. Workforce Issues, Including Staffing

Insight: More than half (55%) of participants highlighted workforce challenges, including staffing shortages and rising labor costs, as a major concern.

Impact: A shortage of qualified workers, combined with higher wages and staffing difficulties, create complicated business operations, and make it difficult to execute business initiatives.

Opportunity: Focus on employee retention, cross-train staff, optimize labor efficiency, and explore automation or alternative staffing solutions to reduce reliance on a tight labor market.

3. Managing Cash Flow

Insight: 40% of respondents cited cash flow management as a critical challenge.

Impact: Fluctuations in cash flow can disrupt day-to-day operations, delay investments, and hinder growth, especially in a time of economic uncertainty.

Opportunity: Improve financial planning, tighter control over expenses, and diversifying revenue sources can help companies better manage cash flow and create more stability for decision-making.

“We’ve raised prices multiple times to keep up with inflation and maintain profitability.”

Retail Shop Owner

4. Market Competition

Insight: 36% of respondents reported competitive market conditions as a significant decision-making challenge.

Impact: Increased competition from both established players and new entrants makes it difficult for businesses to differentiate themselves and maintain market share.

Opportunity: By focusing on innovation, customer loyalty, and [niche markets](#), businesses can better position themselves to overcome competitive pressures and sustain long-term growth.

“We diversified our client base to avoid reliance on just one or two major clients.”

Manufacturing Owner

5. Lack of Time and Resources

Insight: 32% of survey participants cited a lack of time and resources as a barrier to making effective business decisions.

Impact: Time constraints and resource limitations often force leaders to make quick, reactive decisions rather than thoroughly evaluate options. This can lead to missed opportunities and inefficient allocation of resources.

Opportunity: Streamline decision-making processes, improve delegation, and invest in tools that enhance efficiency. These strategies are especially valuable when facing limited resources, supply chain challenges, or restricted access to critical information for effective planning.

“We doubled our physical locations in just 18 months. It stretched our resources, but the opportunity to expand our market share was worth the effort.”

Automotive Owner

6. Regulatory Changes

Insight: 17% of respondents noted regulatory changes as a significant concern when making business decisions.

Impact: Constantly shifting regulations, especially in areas such as labor, taxes, and environmental policy, can create confusion and increase the complexity of decision-making.

Opportunity: Keep a close watch on regulatory trends to ensure compliance, and proactively adjust strategies to minimize a negative impact on operations.

Gender-Based Leadership Patterns

Our study explored leadership styles, decision-making approaches, and difficulties faced by business leaders in different industries. Although we did not specifically ask participants to disclose their gender, we were able to categorize most respondents as male or female. Below is an analysis of gender differences in leadership strategies, risk tolerance, and growth opportunities.

Leadership Trends by Gender

Male Leaders: 66% of respondents

The majority of respondents were male (66% of those identified). Their leadership styles reflected several common traits:

- **Decisive and Action-Oriented**
Male leaders tend to prioritize speed and efficiency in decision-making. They generally favor quick, clear choices based on data and past experiences, especially in high-pressure situations.
- **Hierarchical Structures**
Decision-making is often centralized, with top-down leadership styles that emphasize authority and control over collaborative input.
- **Higher Risk Tolerance**
Male leaders are more willing to take bold, competitive risks that drive growth. They tend to respond more quickly to market shifts and believe that decisive action provides an advantage.
- **Delegation Challenges**
Some male leaders struggle to delegate authority, particularly in complex or high-stakes situations, which can lead to potential bottlenecks.

Female Leaders: 34% of respondents

Though fewer in number (34% of identified participants), female leaders demonstrate several distinct leadership and decision-making approaches:

- **Collaborative Leadership**
Females are more likely to involve their employees, advisors, and external stakeholders in decision-making, emphasizing shared responsibility.
- **Emotional Intelligence and Empathy**
They frequently leverage emotional intelligence to navigate employee relations, client interactions, and conflict resolution.
- **Strategic Patience and Risk Mitigation**
Female leaders tend to take a more cautious, long-term approach when making decisions. They are likely to carefully evaluate potential risks before making significant changes.
- **Overcoming Barriers**
Many women highlight challenges such as under-representation in executive roles, limited mentorship opportunities, and gender biases. They also emphasize the importance of a resilient attitude and strong professional networks for their success.

Comparison of Male and Female Respondents

Category	Male Respondents	Female Respondents
Industries	Primarily manufacturing, with some in construction, real estate, and energy.	Predominantly in construction, real estate, and luxury retail; fewer in manufacturing.
Company Size	Businesses ranged from \$1M to over \$30M in revenue, with 11–250+ employees.	Typically smaller businesses; under \$1M to \$10M in revenue, with 1–50 employees.
Decision-Making	Relied on structured tools (e.g., financial forecasting, SWOT analysis, business analytics) along with gut instinct.	Relied heavily on intuition, local networks, or consultants; structured tools were used less frequently.
Risk Appetite	Higher tolerance for risk. Invest in technology, expansion, and innovation.	More risk-averse. Focus on incremental improvements and operational continuity.
Challenges	Workforce shortages, cash flow management, regulatory changes, and market competition.	Workforce shortages, cash flow management, and limited access to resources.
Success Metrics	Prioritize profitability, revenue growth, market share, and customer satisfaction.	Focus on customer satisfaction and employee retention. Profitability was mentioned less frequently.

Insights

- **Reliance on Decision-Making Resources** – Female leaders are less likely to use data-driven tools, indicating a potential gap in access or awareness of structured decision-making resources.
- **Risk-Taking Disparity** – Male leaders take bolder risks, often betting on long-term growth, while female leaders prioritize stability and cautious investments.
- **Gender Gap in Manufacturing Leadership** – Despite a strong potential for revenue and innovation, female representation in manufacturing leadership remains low, shaped by longstanding industry norms and limited access to mentorship.
- **Underutilizing External Expertise** – Both male and female leaders could gain valuable insights from external consultants and advanced analytics tools as they navigate complex challenges.

Strategic Implications

1. **Access to Tools** – Leaders can strategically overcome barriers by adopting data-driven tools.
2. **Workforce Issues** – Talent acquisition and retention can be tackled with stronger engagement.
3. **Industry Diversity** – Mentorship and leadership opportunities can drive innovation.
4. **Balanced Risk-Taking** – Educating leaders on managing risks can enable informed decisions.

Conclusion

Male leaders typically run larger firms and take bold risks, while female leaders [tend to manage smaller businesses](#) with a relationship-focused approach. Both face **workflow and cash flow challenges** and can benefit from mentorship, training, and objective input.

Industry and Regional Comparisons

Business leaders navigate unique challenges and opportunities based on their sector and local market conditions. While priorities and risks differ, our study uncovered common trends across urban, midsized, and rural businesses within Northeast Ohio. This section explores significant differences in decision-making, risk management, and growth priorities within these areas.

Industry Sector Comparisons

Each industry faces its own set of challenges shaped by market demands, regulatory compliance, and technological changes. Success depends on how leaders manage risks, foster innovation, and plan for the long term. While core pressures are similar across all sectors, we found that different industries focus on improving efficiency, embracing new technologies, and staying adaptable.

1. Manufacturing and Industrial

34% of Companies, 18 Surveyed

Includes: Manufacturing, Industrial Distribution, Metal Recycling, Automotive, Field Services, Energy, Trade Compliance, Environmental Services.

Our survey revealed that manufacturing and industrial leaders tend to prioritize **operational efficiency, cost control, and long-term capital investments**. Decisions are often centered around **supply chain management, automation, and mitigating operational risks** such as labor shortages and fluctuating raw material prices. However, many leaders are increasingly adopting **data analytics and Industry 4.0 technologies** to improve decision-making speed and accuracy.

“We’re constructing a new, state-of-the-art manufacturing facility with advanced automation and new technologies.”
Manufacturing Leader

2. Construction, Real Estate, and Related Services

8% of Companies, 4 Surveyed

Includes: Construction, Real Estate, Landscaping, Security.

We found that this sector faces unique decision-making challenges related to **project management, regulatory compliance, and workforce constraints**. Most leaders report that **fluctuating material costs, permitting delays, and subcontractor reliability** significantly impact their ability to make timely decisions. As a result, decision-making often revolves around **risk management and contract negotiation** to mitigate financial uncertainty.

“Investing in hard assets like new equipment was critical. It has improved our throughput and quality, but labor shortages and turnover remain challenging.”
Construction Business Owner

3. Consumer Goods, Food & Beverage, and Hospitality

17% of Companies, 9 Surveyed

Includes: Retail, Luxury Retail, Food and Beverage, Hospitality, Jewelry Retail/Service, Fitness.

Leaders in this sector are **highly responsive to consumer behavior, digital transformation, and supply chain optimization**. Data-driven decision-making is crucial for managing **inventory, pricing strategies, and customer experience**. However, these leaders frequently report **decision bottlenecks** when trying to react to rapid market shifts, especially during peak seasons or economic downturns.

“Our crisis management plan allowed us to quickly pivot to virtual offerings when we were forced to close during the pandemic.”

Retail/Hospitality Owner

“We currently don’t have a backup plan if key team members are unable to perform their roles simultaneously.”

Retail/Services Owner

4. Financial, Professional, and Technology Services

24% of Companies, 13 Surveyed

Includes: Financial Services, Insurance, Consulting, IT and Software, Marketing, Graphic Design, Marketing and Display Production.

Decision-making in financial services, technology, and other professional services is driven by **risk management, regulatory compliance, and technology adoption**, although each sector applies these principles slightly differently.

Financial services rely on **sophisticated forecasting models and AI-driven analytics** to assess market risks and optimize portfolios. In contrast, technology and consulting firms **prioritize agility and innovation** and seek to make fast-paced decisions to pivot strategies, adopt emerging technologies, and scale operations.

Technology leaders, in particular, emphasize **speed** by identifying opportunities for rapid growth or disruptive innovation. Unlike manufacturing, where risk is managed through gradual adjustments, tech leaders often take **strategic risks to stay ahead of market trends**.

“Better financial planning is crucial for our clients, which is why we’re hiring an additional trained expert.”

Financial Services

5. Healthcare, Arts, and Personal Services

17% of Companies, 9 Surveyed

Includes: Healthcare, Arts & Entertainment, Entertainment and Media, Beauty & Personal Services.

Healthcare leaders navigate **highly regulated and rapidly evolving environments**, where decisions must balance **compliance, patient care, and operational efficiency**. The complexity of regulatory landscapes has led to **more decentralized** decision-making structures in larger organizations, particularly in response to crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.

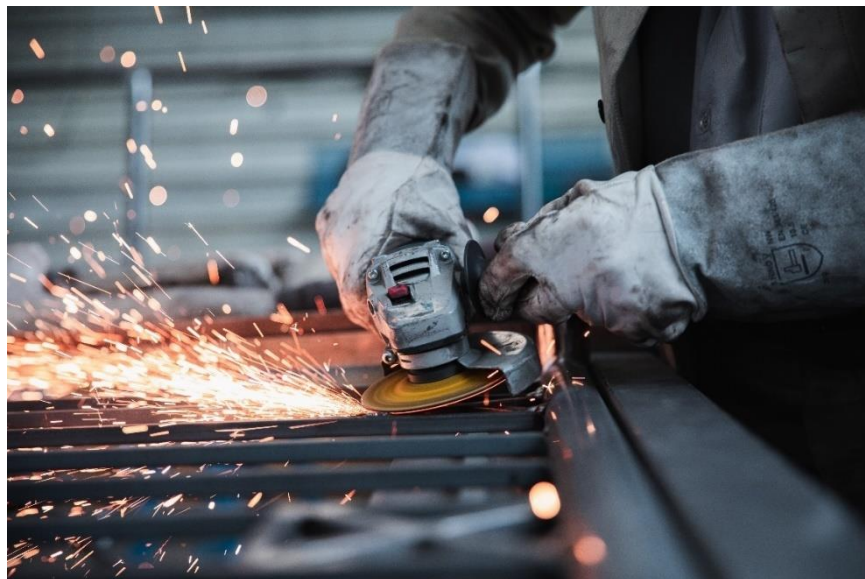
In contrast, arts and personal services business leaders often make decisions based on **creative trends, consumer demand, and individual expertise**. They rely more on **intuition and market observation** rather than structured analytical tools.

“We brought on a new provider without a guaranteed patient base. It was a calculated risk to meet growing demand, and it’s starting to pay off as our capacity increases.”

Healthcare Clinic Owner

“Our crisis management plan is a team effort. Everyone is involved so feedback from every department is valued and critical in successful execution.”

Fitness Service Owner



Regional Comparisons: Urban, Mid-Sized Cities, and Rural

The study revealed distinct differences in the way business leaders approach decisions across urban, mid-sized, and rural areas. These variations stem from factors such as resource availability, market dynamics, competition levels, and workforce access.

- **Large Cities (Urban):** 24 responses (45%) including Akron, Cleveland, Youngstown-Warren-Boardman.
- **Mid-Sized Cities:** 22 responses (42%) including Avon, Avon Lake, Brunswick, Canton-Massillon, Lorain-Elyria, Mansfield, Medina, Mentor, North Olmsted, Shaker Heights, Solon, Strongsville.
- **Rural Communities/Small Towns:** 7 responses (13%) including Columbiana, Cuyahoga Falls, Garrettsville, Kent, Middlefield, Norton.

Urban Leaders: 45% of respondents

Business leaders in large cities benefit from greater access to capital, technology, and a deep talent pool. These advantages enable them to leverage sophisticated decision-making tools, such as predictive analytics and AI-driven insights, to refine strategies. Additionally, urban leaders often manage diverse teams with varied expertise. This promotes innovation and strategic agility.

However, companies in large metro regions face unique challenges such as intense competition, rising operational costs, and rapid market shifts. As a result, decision-making processes can be more complex, requiring leaders to balance long-term investments with short-term market pressures.

Mid-Sized City Leaders: 42% of respondents

Operating between urban and rural markets, these leaders navigate a unique balance of opportunity and caution. They benefit from strong regional business networks, moderate competition, and a relatively stable workforce. Many leaders in mid-sized cities blend data-driven strategies with relationship-based decisions, utilizing their industry networks and technology to build connections.

Leaders in smaller cities may lack the resources available to firms in large metro areas, but they benefit from lower costs and a more manageable competitive landscape. Decisions in these environments can focus on steady growth, market positioning, and balancing innovation with financial prudence.

Rural Leaders: 13% of respondents

Business leaders based in rural communities said they face challenges with limited workforce availability, infrastructure constraints, and smaller market sizes. These factors often lead to a more cautious approach to decision-making, with an emphasis on sustainability, minimizing risk, and leveraging local networks for support and business continuity.

Despite such limitations, rural businesses can excel if they prioritize deep community ties, personalized customer service, and innovative resource management. Companies in small-town areas may be slower to adopt new technologies than their urban counterparts, but they can leverage practical innovations and find creative solutions to maximize efficiency with limited resources.

Surprising and Unexpected Findings

Decision-making trends don't always align with conventional wisdom. Some of our findings revealed unexpected gaps in how businesses approach strategy, while others highlight uncomfortable truths that may be holding companies back. These insights can shed light on overlooked opportunities, contradictions in leadership behavior, and challenges that may persist despite available solutions.

Underutilization of Resources

A surprising number of companies, particularly smaller ones, reported **not using decision-making tools beyond intuition or local networking**. This suggests an opportunity for consultants, strategists, or software providers to introduce accessible and affordable resources to these businesses.

Confidence in Decision-Making

Smaller company leaders rated a low level of decision-making confidence (at 1 to 2 out of 5). This contrasts with bold risks they might take, such as adopting untested systems or making significant risky investments. This paradox between **low decision confidence with a high risk appetite** could be of concern for business stability and long-term valuation.

Over-Reliance on Founders

Many businesses heavily **rely on the founder or owner to make decisions**, even in larger firms. While this tendency does ensure consistency, it also creates significant bottlenecks and can limit scalability. Leaders could focus on delegation and broader decision-making frameworks to reduce over-dependency on founders.

Resistance to Consultants

Smaller business leaders often **hesitate to engage external consultants**, preferring internal or localized resources. However, many of the significant problems identified through the survey can be mitigated with the help of trained experts. Leaders can discuss potential ROI (return on investment) with potential experts and review case studies relevant to their company's size, industry, and unique challenges.

New Product Development Risks

Several respondents shared that decisions could potentially cannibalize their existing revenue streams, such as launching new products. This trend reflects a fear of falling behind competitors, but it may also suggest a **reactive rather than proactive approach to innovation**.

Insufficient Planning for ERP Transitions

ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) implementation failures were also mentioned as a challenge in many companies, revealing that many leaders **may not adequately test systems before rollout**. This is a common but avoidable issue that can lead to significant downtime or financial loss.

5. Leadership Insights from Interviews

Experienced leaders from a range of industries shared valuable perspectives on resilience, decision-making, and long-term success. Their insights can offer practical guidance for business owners and executives who are looking to strengthen their leadership approach.

Meet the Leaders

- **Leader 1: Utility Services | Twinsburg, OH** – Specializes in developing complex, innovative products, while facing challenges in finding qualified and reliable staff.
- **Leader 2: Metal Fabrication | Mansfield, OH** – Prioritizes quality over volume and emphasizes steady, sustainable growth without relying on personal funds.
- **Leader 3: Financial Services | Strongsville, OH** – Helps high-net-worth clients minimize tax liabilities and plan for financial success during business transitions.
- **Leader 4: Workforce Development Consulting | Cleveland, OH** – Provides cost-effective support to companies that lack internal resources to address challenges.
- **Leader 5: Engineering & Manufacturing | Cleveland, OH** – Focus on securing financial stability and equity maximization. Wants to balance business growth with family time.
- **Leader 6: Hydraulics & Pneumatics | Lorrain, OH** – Specializes in machine sales and deal-making. Contemplating retirement plans and future business effectiveness.
- **Leader 7: Automotive Repair | Mentor, OH** – Combines profitability analysis with strategic planning to ensure smooth business transitions and long-term sustainability.

Perspectives and Leadership Insights

Below are quotes from these leaders on how they tackle challenges and drive growth. Their diverse experiences offer valuable insights to refine leadership practices and inform decision-making.

Growth, Strategy, and Market Positioning

Owners weigh strategic decisions on growth, market position, and competition, balancing expansion with stability while prioritizing quality and specialization.

*“One mistake was that we failed to push too much... But looking back, it turned out better because we decided to **specialize and focus on quality**, which is setting us apart.”*

*“We’re a local shop, and most of our customers are within driving distance... We also **guarantee a turnaround** for orders that our competitors aren’t always able to meet.”*

*“We’re trying to grow at a decent pace but **without contributing personal funds** or adding any debt.”*

*“We don’t put ourselves in a situation where we start to go backwards, because if we **grow too fast and can’t keep up** with demand, the risk is losing customers.”*

*“Some companies focus on quantity and output, and they just churn out things to make the sale. We really focus on quality and making sure our **customers get what they need** in the easiest way possible.”*

*“We are always looking at ways to get continuous improvement. Our team has **pushed decision-making down into all levels** of the company.”*

Workforce Development and Education

Many leaders invest in education and workforce development, emphasizing the value of skilled employees. These quotes demonstrate their commitment to building a strong talent pipeline.

*“Education is important. We spend over \$200,000 a year **educating our staff.**”*

*“I think more **high schools** should introduce manufacturing tools and design... They could get trained in a few months and start making great money in a manufacturing company.”*

*“We have worked hard to **clarify our company culture**. Sometimes that means that we make tough decisions about who should and shouldn’t be part of the team.”*

*“We’ve hired a **highly capable leadership** team, making a significant investment in our company’s future.”*

Financial Health and Risk Management

Several leaders said they are facing difficulties with profitability and maintaining financial health. These quotes highlight concerns about managing cash flow, staying competitive without accumulating debt, and managing investments for sustainable growth.

*“**Making a profit** is where we struggle... It’s so hard to stay ahead of them [competitors] when they can buy truckloads of bulk materials and just sit on it.”*

*“I think it’s important to **be responsible** for what you’re borrowing and not get in too much debt. Make sure your growth is incremental so you don’t get in over your head.”*

*“**Expansion requires cash**, which is often limited. We had to be really careful where we spent our development and investment dollars.”*

*“We’ve had to be careful with new product development, because sometimes it can **hurt our existing products**, cost a lot in lost revenue on one side, and lose investment on the other.”*

*“Estate planning is brutal. Financial planning is the new accounting. I recommend everyone **get their financial affairs in order** before you think you need to.”*

Work-Life Balance and Personal Reflections

Many business owners reflected on the impact their businesses have had on their personal lives. These insights demonstrate challenges of balancing work, health, family, and the emotional toll of entrepreneurship.

*“Once I made some changes and pulled back from working 24/7, I realized that the money was great but the stress was going to kill me. The **illusion of success came at a price to my health and family**; and now it’s like night and day.”*

*“Being an **entrepreneur** is something that started early in my life, with paper routes and summer jobs.”*

*“The next step for me is retirement. I’ve had multiple **health issues**, and I’m ready to give up the 60-hour weeks and move on to something else that keeps me busy and where I can be needed.”*

*“My business has been very good to me. I have **achieved all the goals** I set out to do, even though we’ve faced health issues and problems.”*

Leadership and Team Development

Effective leadership and nurturing a strong team are important factors for business success. These quotes emphasize the importance of training, trust, and developing the right company culture to retain talented employees and foster a [thriving work environment](#).

*“My goal is to set every worker up for a **success trajectory**. I make sure they get the training and help they need to be happy while they’re working with our company.”*

*“We’re focused on **developing the next generation** of employees and preparing for the transition to a new CEO.”*

*“A great part of being a business owner is watching people grow. We’ve had years where we weren’t as profitable because we invested in specialized training and new equipment, and that has really **paid off**.”*

*“My guys stay because I’ve earned their trust. That’s the most important thing you can do as a leader: **be worthy of trust**, and take good care of your people.”*

Generational Transition and Legacy

The future of a business often involves succession planning, passing on the legacy, or stepping away for retirement. These quotes highlight the challenges and considerations of handing over a business to the next generation, as well as the emotional aspects of preparing for this transition.

*“Passing on a business to the next generation isn’t always possible... Some owners’ kids are **not ready or capable of doing that.**”*

*“I decided to sell my business so I could **spend more time** with my kids before I missed any more special events.”*

*“When someone shows promise and does good things for my company, but **doesn’t listen**, they won’t last very long.”*

*“People ask me, ‘Why don’t you **retire?**’ and I answer, ‘What am I going to do? Watch TV all day?’”*

Innovation, Technology, and Industry Challenges

Keeping up with technological and industry changes is important to these owners. Here, they reflect on how technology and shifting market conditions play a role in their strategies and decision-making.

“So much new technology is available, trying to keep up with the competition is a challenge.”

*“The next revolution in manufacturing is **technology**; it’s the way the world is headed. The question is, what are you going to do to prepare for it?”*

*“We’re trying to rely less on imported products. Our goal is to **reshore** and invest in assets where **we can control the process.**”*

*“We believe that we are **making a significant difference** with the work we’re doing here.”*

6. Practical Recommendations

Successful business leaders don't just react to challenges—they anticipate them. By leveraging strategic tools, refining decision-making processes, and planning ahead, resilient leaders are able to transform uncertainty into opportunity. This study demonstrates the many ways leaders can apply structured planning, risk management, and emerging technologies to navigate complexities and achieve their goals.

Hypothesis Results and Strategic Insights

A comparison between the study's findings and our initial hypotheses can offer practical strategies to strengthen decision-making and improve outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: Advanced Tools Drive Success

Originally, we believed that business leaders who integrate analytics, forecasting, and automation would achieve stronger growth, profitability, and decision-making confidence.

Results

- **Findings:** Companies that already use advanced tools did report higher profitability, revenue growth, confidence in making decisions, and adaptability to market shifts.
- **Impact:** Decision-making tools enhance leaders' ability to make rapid, data-driven choices. However, technology alone is not enough; it must be paired with strategic insight as well.
- **Hypothesis Alignment:** *Strongly supported*. The study showed that businesses using technology can effectively outperform those that rely solely on intuition.
- **Insight:** Success depends not just on having tools, but on integrating them into a strategic framework that enables agility and informed leadership.

Hypothesis 2: Long-Term Planning Fuels Growth

We believed that organizations which regularly refine and update their long-term plans and invest in future-oriented strategies could achieve operational efficiency and sustained success.

Results

- **Findings:** Businesses whose leaders prioritize and maintain a strategic planning process are able to align daily operations with long-term objectives. This allows them to better leverage technology, innovation, and strategic partnerships to anticipate changes and stay ahead of industry shifts.
- **Challenges:** Companies that neglect plan updates risk falling behind and misaligning strategic goals, resulting in inefficiency and missed opportunities.
- **Hypothesis Alignment:** *Largely supported*. Long-term planning is a key driver of operational efficiency and sustained growth.
- **Insight:** The most successful businesses maintain long-term planning while staying flexible enough to pivot in response to market changes.

Hypothesis 3: Crisis Management Enhances Resilience

We believed that companies with proactive crisis plans would be more resilient, have financial stability, and recover faster during business disruptions.

Results

- **Findings:** Companies with robust crisis management plans are able to navigate disruptions more effectively. Clear communication and continuity protocols will minimize financial impact and provide stability during times of uncertainty.
- **Challenges:** Many leaders fail to update or implement a crisis plan effectively, [leaving them vulnerable](#) to external shocks.
- **Hypothesis Alignment:** ***Strongly supported***. Businesses with structured crisis management plans are significantly more resilient and capable of speeding up recovery after disruptions.
- **Insight:** proactively investing in crisis preparedness with clear communication, risk assessments, frameworks, and scenario planning across the organization. This will build a strong foundation for long-term stability.

“Once a plan is set, the most crucial step is effective communication to all employees.”

Management Service Owner

Conclusion

The study confirms that businesses which achieve sustained success are investing in advanced decision-making tools, structured long-term planning, and proactive crisis management. The survey results confirm that all 3 initial hypotheses are ***supported***.

Integrating these factors gives businesses a competitive edge, enabling them to anticipate change, adapt strategies, execute decisively. This will set high performers apart from those who struggle during a crisis.

Strategies that Drive Business Success

1. Advanced Tools Enable Smarter Decisions & Faster Growth

Leverage data-driven tools to enhance profitability and agility.

2. Long-Term Planning Fuels Sustainable Success

Regular strategy updates and clear goals can improve efficiency.

3. Crisis Management Builds Resilience & Recovery

Proactive planning provides stability and rapid recovery from disruptions.

Industry-Focused Strategies

Every business sector faces distinct challenges, and a one-size-fits-all approach rarely leads to success. To remain competitive, companies must adopt strategies that align with their specific industry demands, market conditions, and customer expectations. Below are insights and tailored recommendations for the industry groups identified in the survey.

1. Manufacturing and Industrial

Efficiency, automation, and supply chain resilience are critical for long-term success. Businesses in this sector benefit from adopting lean manufacturing practices, predictive maintenance, and workforce development strategies to remain competitive.

- **Use Lean Principles:** Implement techniques like value stream mapping to eliminate waste and improve efficiency.
- **Adopt Predictive Maintenance:** Use IoT and AI to monitor equipment and predict maintenance needs, reducing downtime.
- **Employee Empowerment:** Involve frontline workers in continuous improvement initiatives to tap into their operational knowledge.

“We invested in cutting-edge manufacturing technology that we had never used before. It was a bold move—new material, new process, new equipment—but it’s opening doors to markets we didn’t think we could reach.”
Manufacturing Owner



2. Construction, Real Estate, and Related Services

Fluctuating material costs, labor shortages, and regulatory challenges require firms to prioritize risk management, contract optimization, and digital project management tools for greater efficiency.

- **Sustainable Practices:** Integrate eco-friendly materials and processes to meet regulatory standards and appeal to environmentally conscious clients.
- **Project Management Software:** Use advanced project management tools to improve scheduling, budgeting, and resource allocation.
- **Client Communication:** Maintain transparent and consistent communication with clients to manage expectations and enhance satisfaction.

3. Consumer Goods, Food & Beverage, and Hospitality

Changing consumer preferences and supply chain volatility demand a focus on product innovation, inventory management, and enhanced customer experience strategies to sustain business growth and improve brand loyalty.

- **Inventory Management:** Use advanced analytics to optimize inventory levels, reduce carrying costs, and ensure the availability of high-demand products.
- **Personalized Customer Engagement:** Invest in CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems and data analytics to create personalized shopping and dining experiences.
- **Quality Control:** Implement strict quality control measures to maintain high standards and enhance customer satisfaction.

“Keeping our restaurant fully staffed is a constant struggle. It’s an area that requires ongoing attention to maintain quality and service standards.”

Food Retailer

4. Financial, Professional, and Technology Services

Trust, compliance, and digital transformation drive success in this sector. Implementing cybersecurity measures, AI-driven analytics, and personalized client engagement strategies can strengthen market positioning and efficiency.

- **Client-Centered Innovation:** Engage with clients regularly to identify emerging needs and tailor services accordingly.
- **Scalable Processes:** Standardize workflows to handle increasing demand without compromising on quality.
- **Cybersecurity Investments:** Strengthen data protection measures to build trust with clients and mitigate or reduce digital threats.
- **Agile Methodologies:** Adopt an agile framework for faster and more flexible response to market changes.

“We operate on a 5-year roadmap linked to annual goals. This structure ensures that every daily action contributes to achieving our long-term objectives.”

Business Services Owner



5. Healthcare, Arts, and Personal Services

Evolving regulations, customer expectations, and technological advancements in these sectors make it necessary for businesses to become more flexible operationally, invest in digital solutions, and prioritize workforce training.

- **Patient-Centered Care:** Focus on improving patient outcomes through personalized care plans and regular follow-ups.
- **Technological Integration:** Use health IT systems to streamline patient records, appointments, and billing processes.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve local communities in arts and personal services through events and programs to build strong relationships and support.
- **Professional Development:** Invest in ongoing training and development for staff to maintain high standards of care and service.

“Our biggest risk is bringing on an additional provider without the existing patient base to support a full-time schedule. We have increasing growth and needed room to accommodate.”
Healthcare Practice Owner



By applying industry-specific strategies, business leaders can enhance operational efficiency, foster innovation, and improve customer satisfaction. Understanding these tailored approaches enables organizations to adapt to challenges and seize new opportunities with confidence.

7. Themes and Future Outlook

In this final section, we'll share final thoughts about our findings, emphasizing unexpected insights and actionable strategies you can use to improve business outcomes and sustained success.

Insights from Kent State University Students

The student team who participated in this project provided the following analysis:

“Working with LaConte Consulting has been a key part of our successful expansion into the northern Ohio market. By using data insights, building strong local connections, and putting effective strategies in place, we’ve set ourselves up for ongoing growth and success in the region.”

This partnership shows how important strategic collaboration and data-driven decisions are in reaching business goals and ensuring long-term progress.”

Expert Data Analysis

Aliyu Muraina, a data analytics expert, provided this analysis of the survey data:

*“The dataset reveals clear business trends and challenges across industries like IT, Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Food & Beverage. Decision-making relies on tools such as business analytics and intuition, with owners and senior management playing central roles. Common challenges include **economic uncertainty and lack of time or resources.**”*

*“Financially, most small businesses report revenues under \$5 million and struggle with **clarity in financial planning**, with limited use of advanced tools. Crisis management practices show many companies have plans, but gaps like resource shortages and unclear delegation persist. Leadership teams commonly handle crises, with successful practices including agile responses during events like COVID-19.*”

*“Long-term strategies focus on **measurable goals and technology investments**, though resource constraints hinder smaller companies. Long-term objectives strongly shape daily decisions. Survey data highlights strong interest in **tailored reports and follow-ups**, especially among larger, more complex businesses.*”

*“These insights suggest opportunities for providing businesses with **advanced tools, crisis management resources, and industry-specific guidance** to enhance decision-making, financial planning, and strategic growth.”*

7 Takeaways from Leader Interviews

Along with the in-depth survey, we also conducted interviews with business leaders to better understand the thinking process behind answers on the survey. Contrary to popular beliefs about business success, the following ideas represent beliefs that emerged from our study participants and offers a realistic view of the challenges, strategies, and opportunities that influence decision-making. These can serve as a guide to adapt decisions and develop a more resilient business in today's dynamic environment.

1. Innovation Isn't Optional—It's Survival

In an era of rapid technological advancement, old methods can rapidly lead to irrelevance. But while some leaders embrace technology, others struggle to keep up or decide which advancements are worth the investment. The issue isn't about if they need to innovate—it's whether they can afford *not* to.

“We're developing a new product that will likely cannibalize our existing line. Moving forward before competitors do is essential to staying ahead in the market.”

Manufacturing Owner

2. Growth Doesn't Always Mean Bigger

Despite pressure to achieve “10X growth,” some owners choose to avoid rapid expansion. Instead of pursuing growth for its own sake, they're focused on [mastering their niche](#) and perfecting quality—proving that sometimes smaller, deliberate growth can result in a stronger competitive advantage. By prioritizing and refining what they do best, these owners prove that success doesn't need to come at the cost of quality or financial gain. In fact, doing fewer things better often results in sustainable outcomes.

“We're investing in manpower, even during economic slowdowns, to position ourselves for future growth.”

Manufacturing/Service Owner

3. Debt is Not a Badge of Honor

While many businesses chase funding and take on debt to fuel growth, some owners argue that financial caution is the real secret to success. A slow and sustainable approach without the burden of debt allows for a healthier business, both financially and mentally. Financial strength provides a refreshing alternative to the usual “growth-at-all-costs” mentality.

4. Leadership Isn't About Control—It's About Trust

Old-school managers might preach “do as I say,” but today’s leaders recognize that building trust with their team is the real route to long-term success. Owners who can rely on their people to make decisions are far more likely to recognize the importance of innovation, loyalty, and growth. Collaboration is an excellent route to creating an effective [work environment](#).

5. Invest in People, Not Just Profits

Businesses that develop and invest in their workforce often find themselves in a better position for stable growth. Staff development isn't just in training, it's also reshaping the [company culture](#). The goal is to equip workers so they can help you weather any storm. Owners who prioritize resilience and skills will see a return on investment of more than just dollars. Investing in your workforce builds a foundation that goes far beyond financial success alone.

6. Legacy is Messier Than You Think

The idea that a family business will automatically transition smoothly to the next generation is often an illusion. Succession planning is filled with emotional landmines and painful decisions—especially if the next generation is not ready or able to take over. Selling or stepping away may require owners to decide when and how to let go—so their business can survive beyond the owner’s involvement. This is the best way to preserve a positive legacy.

7. The Price of Success Can Be Too High

Entrepreneurs often burn the candle at both ends and get trapped in the allure of success. The personal cost can be too high and results in poor health, strained relationships, burnout, and guilt. All of these are frequent consequences of “chasing the dream” as a business owner. Lasting success is not just about numbers—it's about knowing when to step back and prioritize a healthy balance between work and life.

7 Takeaways from Leader Interviews

1. *Innovation Isn't Optional—It's Survival*
2. *Growth Doesn't Always Mean Bigger*
3. *Debt is Not a Badge of Honor*
4. *Leadership is Not About Control—It's About Trust*
5. *Invest in People, Not Just Profits*
6. *Legacy is Messier Than You Think*
7. *The Price of Success Can Be Too High*

8. Appendices and Resources

1. Introduction

This section provides additional tools, insights, and visualizations to support the strategies we discussed in the study. You can use these resources to deepen your understanding, apply the concepts effectively, and gain practical value for your organization.

2. Table of Contents for the Appendices

Click on a section below:

- [Business Resilience Checklist](#)
- [Business Resilience Scorecard](#)
- [Survey Questions](#)
- [Word Cloud Visualizations](#)
- [Resources for Further Reading](#)

3. How to Use These Resources

Start with the Business Resilience Checklist and Scorecard for actionable steps to enhance resilience. Refer to the Survey Questions for insights into the data collection process, and explore Word Cloud Visualizations for main themes and takeaways from the findings. If you want to read further, check out the Resources for Further Reading to check out additional articles.

Business Resilience Checklist

This list is designed to help leaders address challenges, unlock new opportunities, and develop a more adaptable, future-ready organization.

How to Use This Checklist

Building resilience and sustainable growth requires focused action. Use this guide to:

1. **Identify Gaps:** Compare your current practices to each item on the checklist. Mark areas that need attention.
2. **Prioritize Actions:** Address your most pressing challenges or high-impact opportunities first.
3. **Implement Gradually:** Tackle one area at a time, integrating these strategies into your leadership and operations.
4. **Measure Progress:** Regularly evaluate improvements and track your progress .

Is your organization experiencing the following? Check all that apply.

Actionable Decision-Making

- Implement a structured [decision-making framework](#) to reduce reactive choices.
- Use [post-mortem reviews](#) after major decisions to refine future strategies.
- Ensure financial decisions factor in both short-term needs and long-term value creation.
- Consider evaluating progress with a business [Year In Review](#).

Enhance Long-Term Planning

- Implement a business continuity plan to maintain operations during unexpected events.
- Develop potential owner [exit strategies](#) to maximize business value and legacy.
- Build cash reserves and diversify revenue streams to mitigate financial risks.
- Conduct periodic risk assessments to identify operational, financial, and market vulnerabilities.
- Secure key-person insurance to protect the business from leadership disruptions.

Employee Engagement in Strategy

- Develop a leadership pipeline to prepare high-potential employees for key roles.
- Invite employees to [provide feedback](#) on cost-saving and process improvement opportunities.
- Conduct regular “stay interviews” to proactively address retention risks before they occur.

Align Culture with Strategy

- Establish clear decision-making authority at different levels to avoid bottlenecks.
- [Regularly review](#) how company values align with customer experience and reputation.
- Conduct culture audits to make sure values are consistently reflected in daily operations.
- Preserve institutional knowledge by encouraging documentation and collaboration between experienced staff and newer hires.

Streamline Operations

- Identify production or service delivery bottlenecks, and implement process improvements.
- Standardize repeatable processes to reduce inefficiencies and control consistent output.
- Regularly audit technology tools to ensure alignment with operational goals.
- Evaluate whether outsourcing or automation could improve profit margins.
- Provide team leads with authority to manage daily decisions and focus on strategy.

Enhance Customer-Centric Practices

- Identify your most [profitable customers](#) and develop retention strategies tailored to their needs.
- Provide [Foundational Staff](#) with decision-making authority to resolve customer issues quickly.
- Gather customer feedback regularly to adapt products and services to their evolving needs.
- Consider key [customer segments](#) to uncover untapped markets and new revenue streams.
- Analyze competitors to refine pricing, service offerings, and customer experience.

Explore Innovative Growth Opportunities

- Review under-utilized assets and intellectual property for monetization opportunities.
- Evaluate potential [niche opportunities](#) for new or improved business growth.
- Test new product or service ideas through small-scale pilots before full investment.
- Consider strategic acquisitions or partnerships to accelerate growth and market expansion.

Measure Success and Performance

- Define [key performance indicators \(KPIs\)](#) for each department to track progress and results.
- Set up early-warning signals of financial distress (declining margins, shrinking pipeline, etc.).
- Establish financial health checkpoints to track profit leaks and cost overruns.
- Hold quarterly strategy check-ins to adjust for shifts in the market or operational realities.
- Review alignment between leaders' core values and the [company's culture](#) and goals.
- Encourage "[Reverse Interviews](#)" where employees can clarify and openly discuss problems.

This checklist can serve as a roadmap to protecting your investment, preserving value, and preparing your business to weather any future challenges.

Business Resilience Scorecard

Instructions

Evaluate your organization's resilience across four critical areas by rating each statement on a scale from 1 to 5. Then, total your scores to identify strengths and areas that may need improvement.

- **1 = Strongly Disagree**
- **5 = Strongly Agree**

Circle the number that reflects your situation:

1. Data-Informed Decision-Making

- 1 2 3 4 5 We consistently use analytics tools and frameworks to guide critical business decisions.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Our leaders can effectively **balance intuition with data-driven insights**.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We regularly **evaluate past decisions** to refine and improve future strategies.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Key performance indicators are tracked through an **accessible reporting system**.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Stakeholders are **involved in decision-making** to achieve outcomes.

Score: _____ / 25

Suggested Action: Train leadership in data analysis; review decision alignment with your business goals.

2. Employee Engagement and Contribution

- 1 2 3 4 5 Our organization actively **recognizes and leverages employee strengths** for growth.
- 1 2 3 4 5 **Structured feedback channels** are in place to gather and act on employee input.
- 1 2 3 4 5 **Talent retention strategies** effectively align with our long-term business goals.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Employees are encouraged to take initiative and **contribute to innovation**.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Leadership fosters a **culture of accountability** and continuous improvement.

Score: _____ / 25

Suggested Action: Create systems to motivate employees and integrate them into strategic discussions.

3. Succession and Scenario Planning

- 1 2 3 4 5 Our **key staff are cross-trained** to ensure continuity in critical roles.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We have a formalized **succession plan** that supports a smooth leadership transition.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We regularly use **contingency and scenario plans** in our risk management strategy.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We have a **crisis management framework** that is well-defined and updated regularly.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Our approach to succession and crisis planning **evolves with the business landscape**.

Score: _____ / 25

Suggested Action: Invest in planning processes that anticipate risks and ensure operational continuity.

4. Growth and Profit Optimization

- 1 2 3 4 5 We regularly review under-utilized **assets and new customer segments**.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Strategic decisions prioritize both long-term revenue growth and operational efficiency.
- 1 2 3 4 5 Our **cash flow management** practices are robust & adaptable to economic uncertainty.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We consistently evaluate **pricing strategies and cost structures** to maximize profit.
- 1 2 3 4 5 We actively explore **partnerships and new revenue streams** for sustainable growth.

Score: _____ / 25

Suggested Action: Explore overlooked resources and align decisions with comprehensive profit strategies.

Total Score: _____ / 100

Interpreting Your Score

- **85–100:** Highly resilient—your organization demonstrates strong practices across critical areas.
- **65–84:** Moderately resilient—focus on improving weaker areas to boost overall resilience.
- **Below 65:** Vulnerable—address gaps immediately to reduce risks and enhance stability.

Next Step

Identify areas with the lowest scores and prioritize actions from the [Business Resilience Checklist](#) (above) to strengthen your organization's adaptability and growth potential.

Survey Questions

In the following pages, we provide the entire survey which was posted online from October to November 2024 and shared with selected participants. Questions with italics [*] were required; all others were optional.

You will also find pie charts, bar charts, and other visualizations based on the results of this survey.

Kent State University Survey on Business Decision Insights in Northeast Ohio

Thank you for participating in this survey conducted by Kent State University & LaConte Consulting. We are examining how Northeast Ohio business leaders tackle challenges, seize opportunities, and plan for the future. Your insights will help us uncover effective strategies and common obstacles, contributing to a valuable resource for the local business community.



Note: Your responses are completely confidential and will be used to gain insights aimed at better supporting and strengthening the local business community.

Sections 1 & 2: About You and Your Business

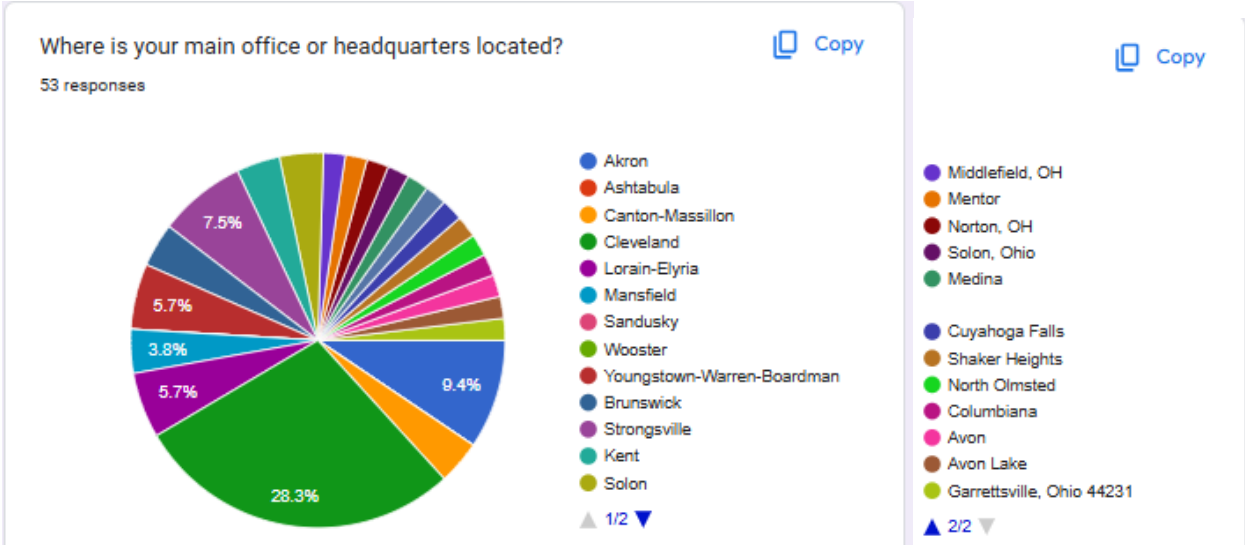
Basic information about you and your business will give us context to better understand your challenges.

1. What is the name of your company?*

2. Where is your main office or headquarters located? (multiple choice)

Select the nearest metro area

- Akron
- Ashtabula
- Canton-Massillon
- Cleveland
- Lorain-Elyria
- Mansfield
- Sandusky
- Wooster
- Youngstown-Warren-Boardman
- Other...

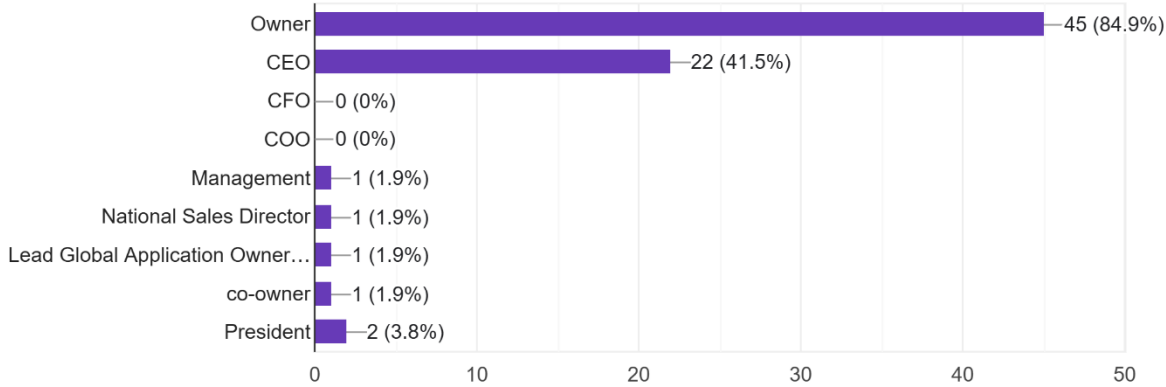


3. What is your role in the company?* (checkbox)

- Owner
- CEO
- CFO
- COO
- Other...

What is your role in the company?

53 responses

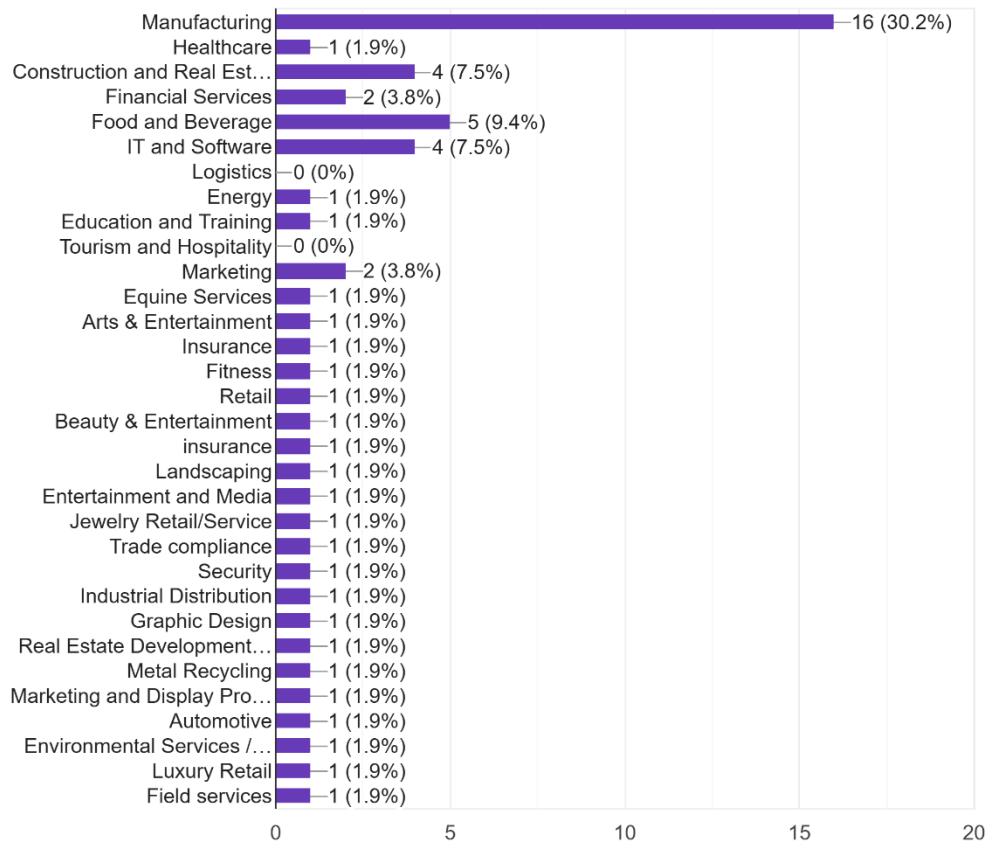


4. Which industry best describes your business?* (checkbox)

- Manufacturing
- Healthcare
- Construction and Real Estate
- Financial Services
- Food and Beverage
- IT and Software
- Logistics
- Energy
- Education and Training
- Tourism and Hospitality
- Other...

Which industry best describes your business?

53 responses

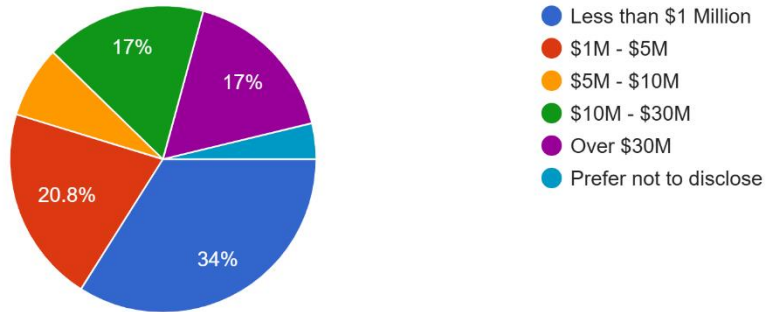


5. What is your company's annual revenue?* (multiple choice)

- Less than \$1 Million
- \$1M - \$5M
- \$5M - \$10M
- \$10M - \$30M
- Over \$30M
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your company's annual revenue?

53 responses

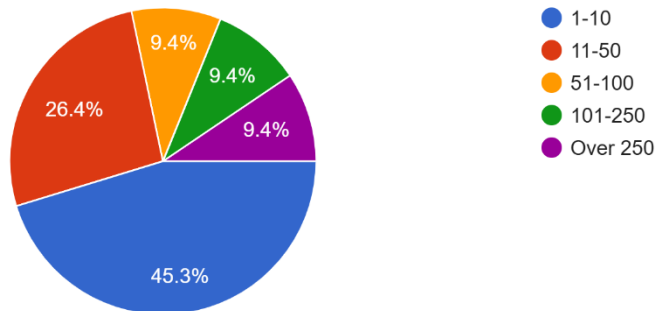


6. How many employees does your company have?* (multiple choice)

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-100
- 101-250
- Over 250

How many employees does your company have?

53 responses



Section 2: Your Decision-Making Process

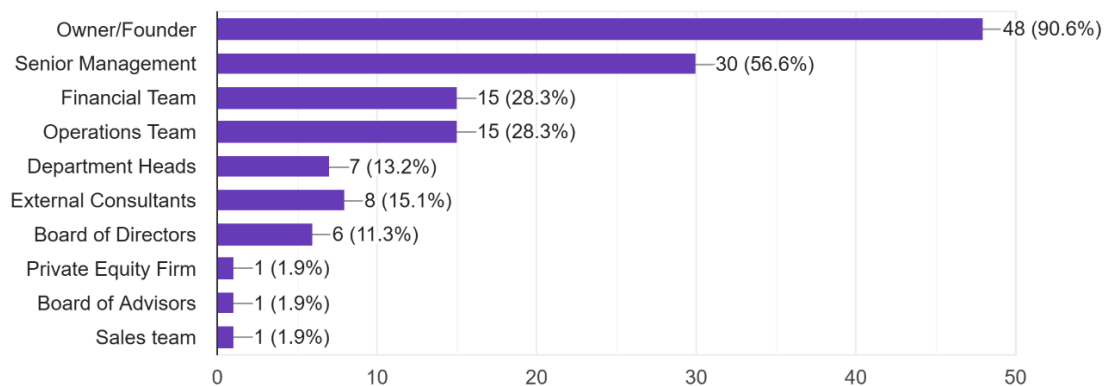
In this section, we'll dive into how key decisions are made in your business. We'll explore who is involved in the process, the strategies you depend on, and how you navigate complex challenges.

7. Who is involved in making key decisions in your business? * (multiple choice)

- Owner/Founder
- Senior Management
- Financial Team
- Operations Team
- Department Heads
- External Consultants
- Board of Directors
- Other...

Who is involved in making key decisions in your business?

53 responses

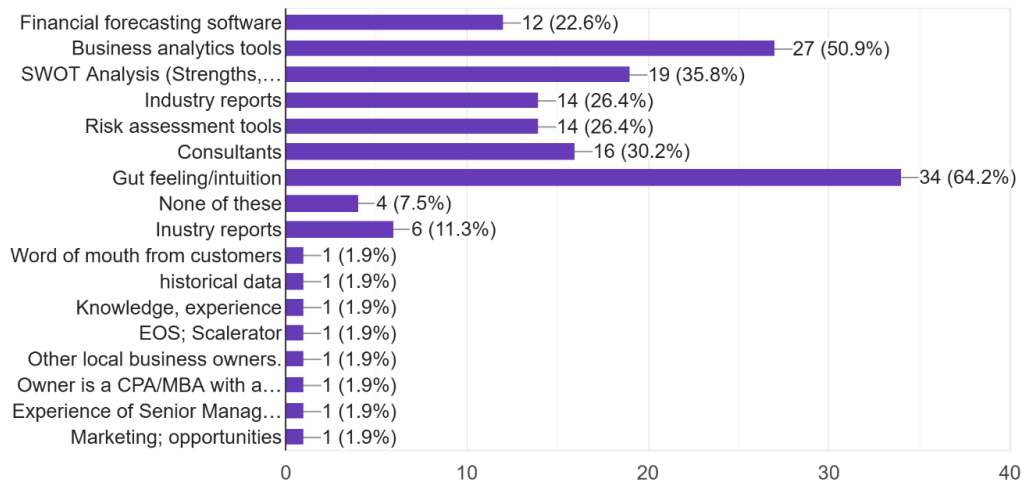


8. What tools or resources do you use to support your decision-making? * (checkbox)

- Financial forecasting software
- Business analytics tools
- SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Industry reports
- Risk assessment tools
- Consultants
- Gut feeling/intuition
- None of these
- Other...

What tools or resources do you use to support your decision-making?

53 responses

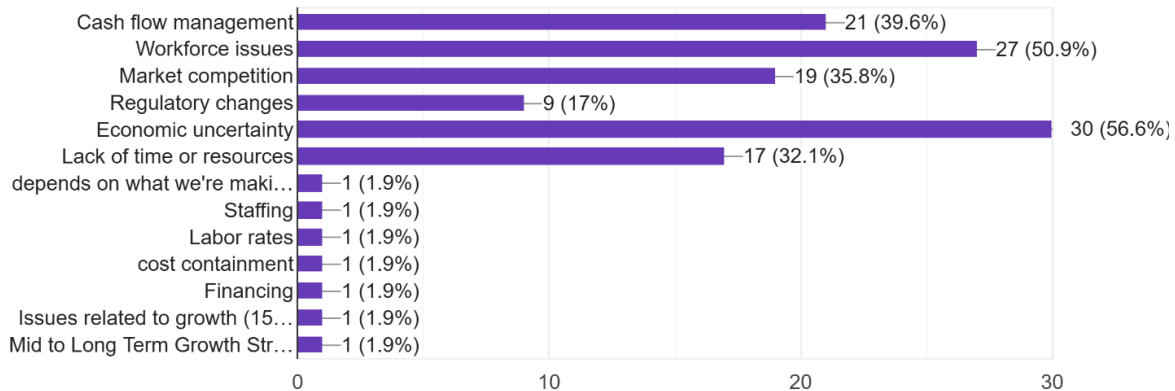


9. What are the biggest challenges your business currently faces when making decisions? * (checkbox)

- Cash flow management
- Workforce issues
- Market competition
- Regulatory changes
- Economic uncertainty
- Lack of time or resources
- Other...

What are the biggest challenges your business currently faces when making decisions?

53 responses

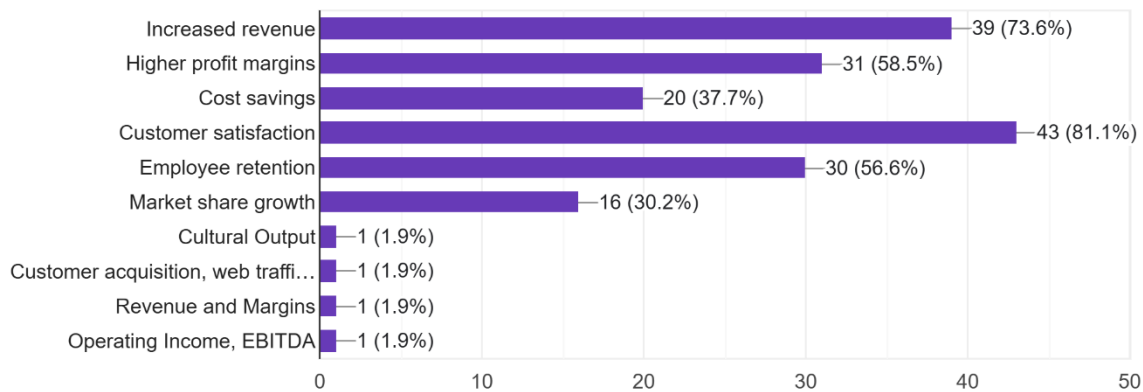


10. How do you measure your success?* (checkbox)

- Increased revenue
- Higher profit margins
- Cost savings
- Customer satisfaction
- Employee retention
- Market share growth
- Other...

How do you measure your success?

53 responses

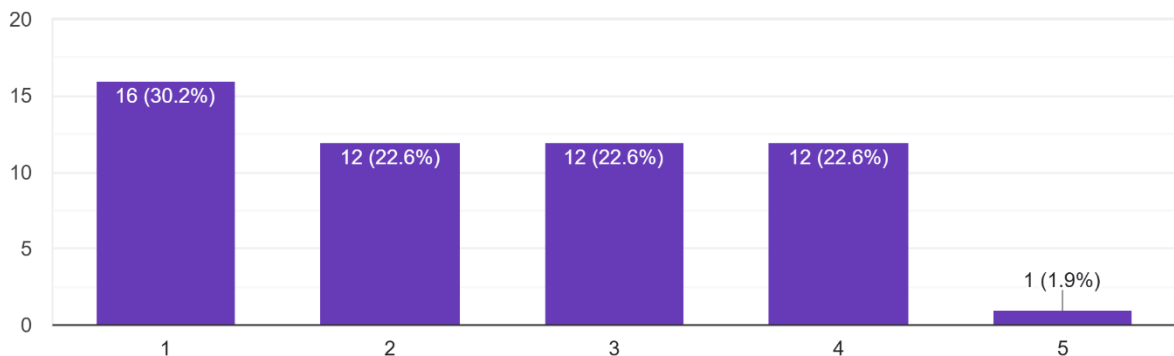


11. How confident are you in your current decision-making process? * (multiple choice)

Very confident 1 2 3 4 5 Not confident

How confident are you in your current decision-making process?

53 responses



12. What is the most significant risk your business has taken in the past year? (long answer)

Please briefly describe the risk and what factors influenced your decision to take it.

Section 3: Financial Strategies

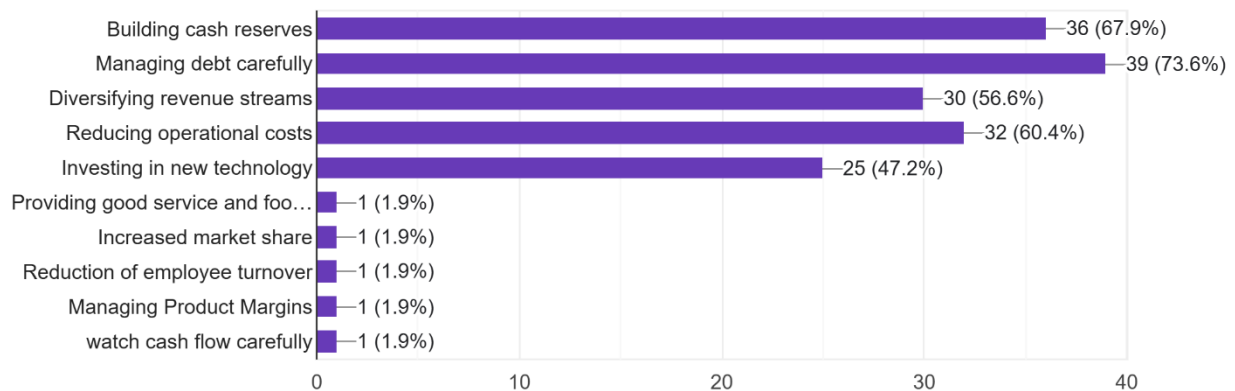
Now we'll dive into your financial management practices, focusing on how you maintain stability, optimize resources, and plan for growth.

13. Which financial strategies help your business stay stable and grow?* (checkbox)

- Building cash reserves
- Managing debt carefully
- Diversifying revenue streams
- Reducing operational costs
- Investing in new technology
- Other...

Which financial strategies help your business stay stable and grow?

53 responses

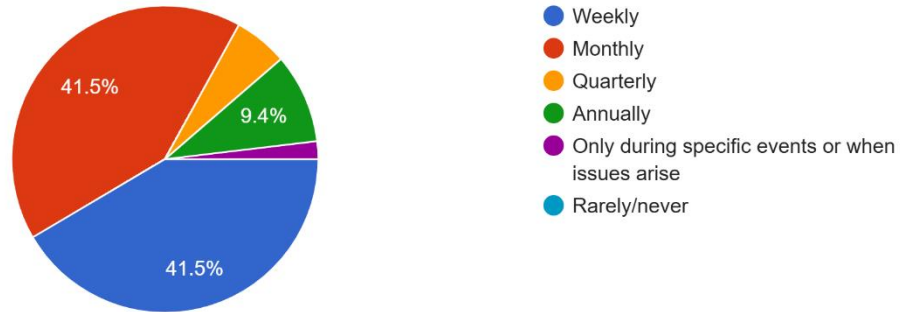


14. How often do you review your financial performance?* (multiple choice)

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Annually
- Only during specific events or when issues arise
- Rarely/never

How often do you review your financial performance?

53 responses

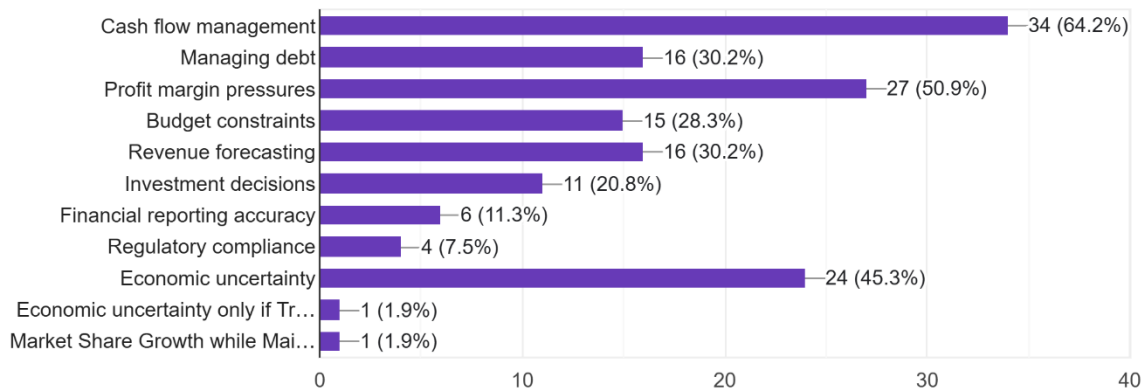


15. What are the top financial challenges that most affect your business decisions?* (checkbox)

- Cash flow management
- Managing debt
- Profit margin pressures
- Budget constraints
- Revenue forecasting
- Investment decisions
- Financial reporting accuracy
- Regulatory compliance
- Economic uncertainty
- Other...

What are the top financial challenges that most affect your business decisions?

53 responses

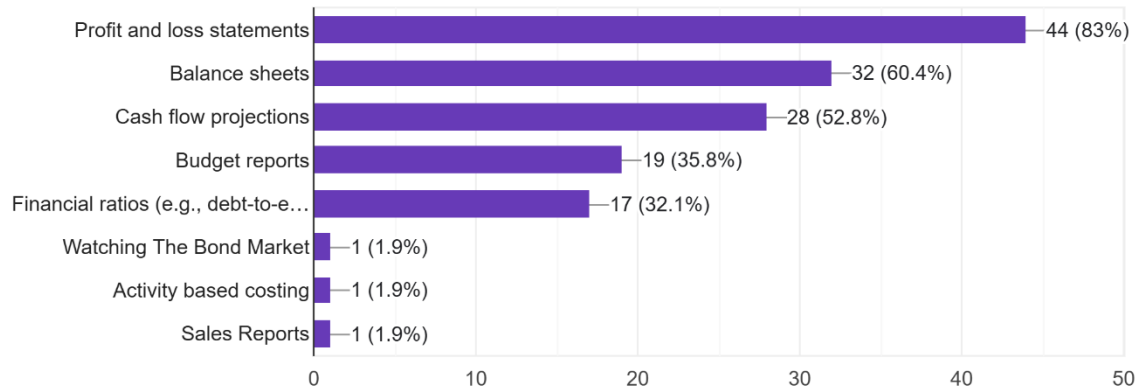


16. Which financial tools or reports do you find most helpful in making decisions?* (checkbox)

- Profit and loss statements
- Balance sheets
- Cash flow projections
- Budget reports
- Financial ratios (e.g., debt-to-equity, return on investment)
- Other...

Which financial tools or reports do you find most helpful in making decisions?

53 responses



Section 4: Crisis Management

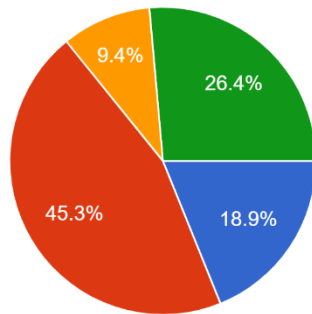
This section examines how your business responds to unexpected challenges, including the strategies used and lessons learned.

17. Does your company have a plan for handling crisis or unexpected events?* (multiple choice)

- Yes, we have a detailed and tested plan.
- Yes, but it's not fully developed or tested.
- No, but we're currently working on one.
- No, we don't have a plan yet.

Does your company have a plan for handling crisis or unexpected events?

53 responses



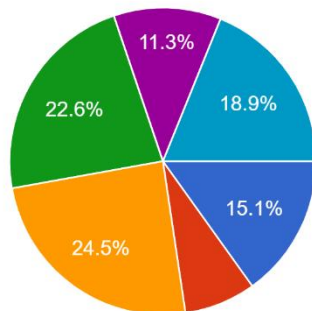
- Yes, we have a detailed and tested plan.
- Yes, but it's not fully developed or tested.
- No, but we're currently working on one.
- No, we don't have a plan yet.

18. How often do you update your crisis management plan?* (multiple choice)

- Quarterly
- Semi-Annually
- Annually
- Less frequently
- Never
- No crisis management plan

How often do you update your crisis management plan?

53 responses



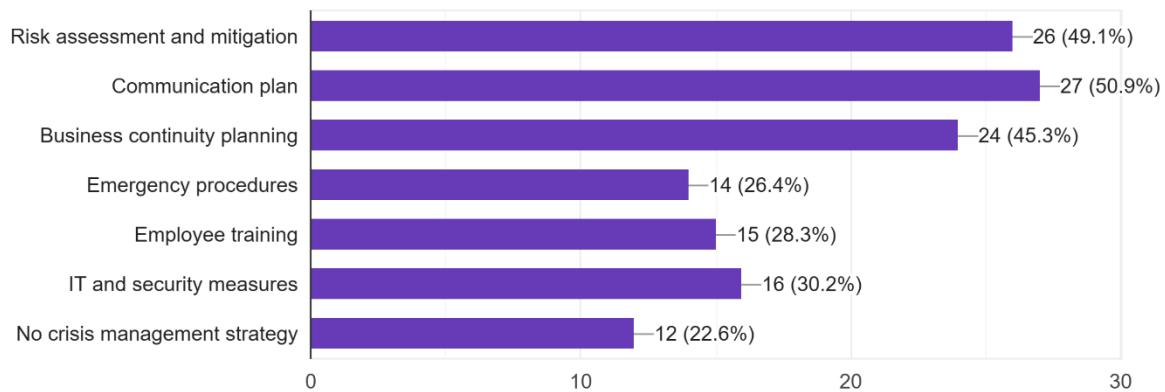
- Quarterly
- Semi-Annually
- Annually
- Less frequently
- Never
- No crisis management plan

19. Which are the most important parts of your crisis management strategy?* (checkbox)

- Risk assessment and mitigation
- Communication plan
- Business continuity planning
- Emergency procedures
- Employee training
- IT and security measures
- No crisis management strategy
- Other...

Which are the most important parts of your crisis management strategy?

53 responses



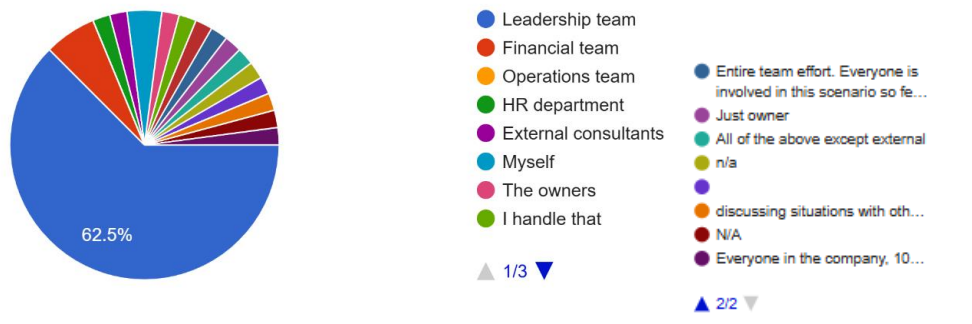
20. Can you share an example of how your crisis management plan helped you navigate a tough situation? (long answer)

21. Who is involved in creating and implementing your crisis management plan? (multiple choice)

- Leadership team
- Financial team
- Operations team
- HR department
- External consultants
- Other...

Who is involved in creating and implementing your crisis management plan?

48 responses



22. What aspects of your crisis management plan do you feel need improvement or are currently lacking? (long answer)

Section 5: Long-Term Planning

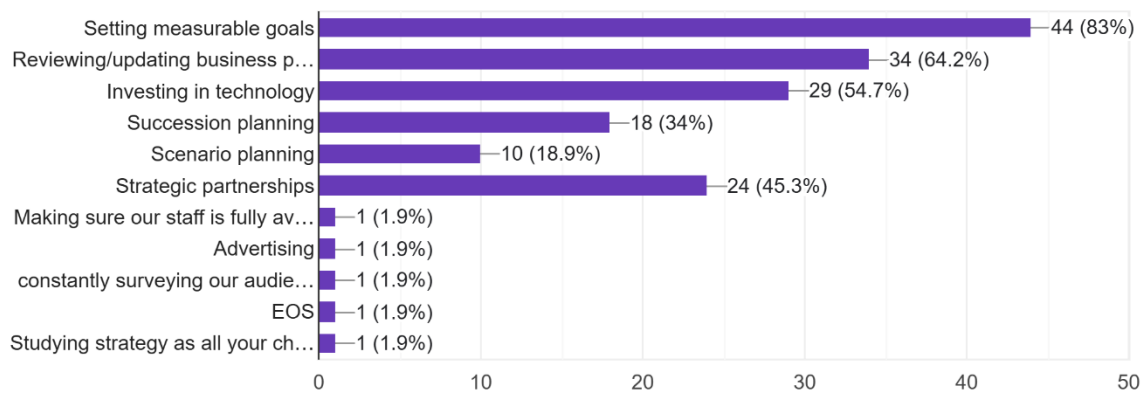
In this final section we'll explore how you approach long-term planning, including how you prepare for the future, set strategic goals, and adapt to industry changes.

23. What long-term planning strategies does your business use to ensure continued success?*
(checkbox)

- Setting measurable goals
- Reviewing/updating business plans
- Investing in technology
- Succession planning
- Scenario planning
- Strategic partnerships
- Other...

What long-term planning strategies does your business use to ensure continued success?

53 responses



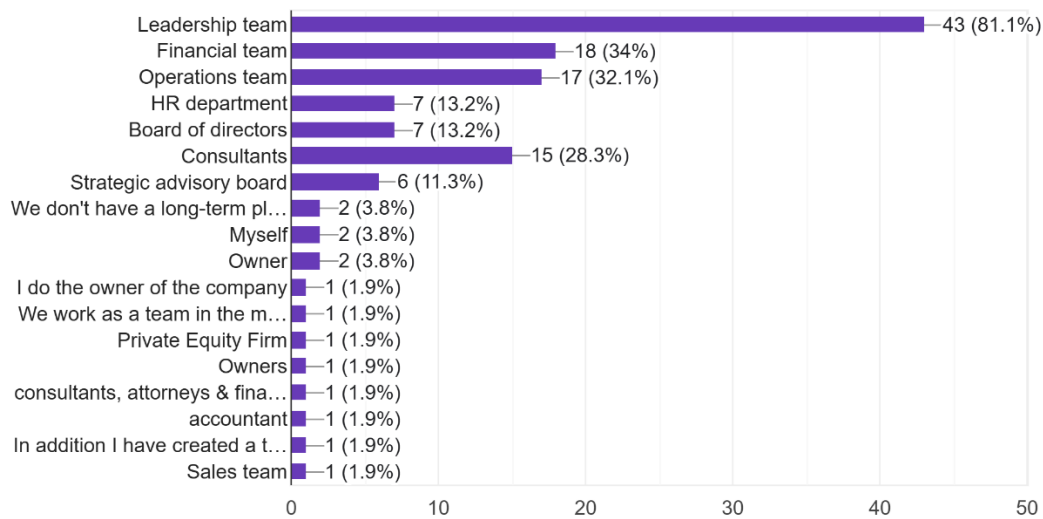
24. How do your long-term goals impact your day-to-day decisions and operational priorities? (long answer)

25. Who contributes to your long-term planning process? (checkbox)

- Leadership team
- Financial team
- Operations team
- HR department
- Board of directors
- Consultants
- Strategic advisory board
- We don't have a long-term planning process
- Other...

Who contributes to your long-term planning process?

53 responses



26. Are there any aspects of your long-term planning that you believe need improvement? (long answer)

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to share your valuable insights and experiences. Your feedback is crucial in helping us understanding the key strategies and challenges faced by businesses like yours. If you'd like to receive a summary of our findings or explore how we might support you further, please provide your contact information below.

27. Would you like to receive a detailed report of the survey results? (multiple choice)

- Yes, please send me the report.
- No, thanks.

28. Would you be interested in a brief follow-up conversation to discuss your results and how our findings might benefit your business? (multiple choice)

- Yes, contact me about a follow-up call.
- No, thanks.

If you answered "Yes" to either of these questions, please provide your contact details below so we can send the report and/or arrange a follow-up conversation:

Name (Optional)

Email Address (Optional)

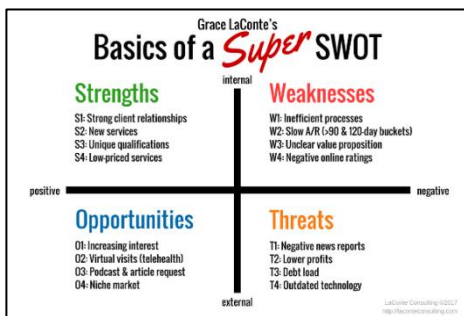
Resources for Further Reading

Explore these articles to deepen your understanding of resilience and growth strategies.

1. [Overview of the 5 Types of Strategic Risk](#)



2. [How Do I Make a Super SWOT Diagram? Using Real Examples](#)



3. [Analyzing Profit Margins FAQs Part 1: Perceptions](#)



4. [25 Surprising Challenges & Opportunities for Women-Owned Businesses](#)



5. [Analyzing Profit Margins FAQs Part 2: Profitability](#)



6. [What Happened When I Became an "Employee For a Day"](#)



7. [How to Create the Perfect Workplace Environment](#)



For more resources and insights, visit <https://laconteconsulting.com>

9. About the Authors

This report was possible because of the contributions of academic leaders, university students, consultants, and industry professionals who wanted to discover actionable insights that can assist business leaders in making risk intelligent decisions.

Contributors to the Study

Lead Author

Grace LaConte is a consultant specializing in profit optimization and resilience, with a focus on helping business owners to uncover hidden opportunities and drive long-term growth. A native of Ohio, Grace combines professional expertise with a grounded, no-nonsense approach. She works directly with owners to enhance financial performance, streamline operations, improve employee engagement, and align business strategies with core values. Using a hands-on methodology, Grace tackles immediate challenges while paving the way for sustained success and future growth. Find more at <https://laconteconsulting.com>.

Academic Advisor

James Ferguson, Adjunct Professor of Management & Information Systems at Kent State University's Ambassador Crawford College of Business and Entrepreneurship, was instrumental in launching this project. Professor Ferguson holds an MA in Organizational Leadership and is a project manager, author of [Worktopia](#), and thought leader. He played a pivotal role in making this study accessible to his class of senior business students and facilitating [a press release through Kent State](#). Professor Ferguson's leadership and guidance enabled students to translate their classroom theory into real-world experience. Find more at <https://www.kent.edu/business/james-ferguson>.

Student Researchers

A total of 10 undergraduate students from Kent State University in the Fall 2024 [Business Consulting and Practicum](#) class helped develop this study. They created the survey mechanism, invited community leaders to participate, and evaluated the results.

Kent State University students who participated include:

- Stella Boldizar – Team Leader
- Parker Brown – HR (Human Resources)
- Ethan Cozad – PM (Project Manager)
- Eva DeCamillo – PC (Project Coordinator)
- Olivia Fenneken – Team Leader
- Mitchell French – PM (Project Manager)
- Jacob Ina – HR (Human Resources)
- Basil Jones – BA (Business Analyst)
- Kylie Stilgenbauer – BA (Business Analyst)
- Dylan Wieder – PC (Project Coordinator)

Expert Perspective

Aliyu Muraina provided an analytical analysis of the data from our survey responses. Find more at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/aliyu10/>

Contact Information

Thank you for exploring our study! We appreciate your interest and feedback, as it helps us provide accurate and relevant research. If you have questions or see anything that needs clarification, please reach out.

Want to see how hidden profit leaks might be affecting your business? Take our [free Profit Leakage Assessment](#) and uncover opportunities to improve your bottom line.

[Free Profit Leakage Assessment](#)

Let's connect—I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Grace LaConte
LaConte Consulting

- **Email:** grace@laconteconsulting.com
- **Phone:** 936-380-1756
- **Website:** <https://laconteconsulting.com>

