

A Guide for Utilization Focused Valuing



Tomorrow's
Workplace

BUSINESS PEOPLE COMMUNITY DIVERSITY

FUNDED BY

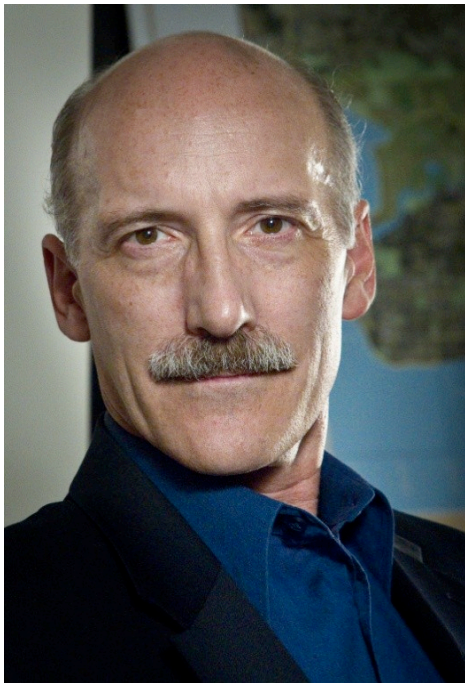


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INTRODUCTION

This document should be read as a companion piece to the Tomorrow's Workplace *Guide for Business Leaders*. The "Project Value" section from the *Guide for Business Leaders* is an introduction to the more detailed story found in this document. We outline how we developed and tested a working model for community-based, practical, and small business-oriented value exercises. This *Guide* is intended for use by organizations such as Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade that are considering implementing a project like Tomorrow's Workplace. By understanding what we did and the environment in which we did it, we want to add context to conversations we have with you.



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INTENT

The Tomorrow's Workplace project is multidimensional: it addresses issues in our social, community, and business systems. In our reporting, we used a Results Based Primary User System, which allowed us to gain a better understanding of formative and developmental processes during the project. This, in turn, helped us monitor project activities and correct "mission drift" as it occurred. A strong commitment to project evaluation was embedded in the project, ensuring that clearly defined project activities and outcomes were the focus of our valuation activities.

During our 18 months of work on the Tomorrow's Workplace project, we found that having an understanding of what was valuable to business participants was critically important for the project team. The evaluation process and our conversion to valuing, rather than evaluation, were guided by two needs:

1. A commitment to our project funders to track and measure deliverables (as outlined in project agreements)
2. Ensuring Tomorrow's Workplace would provide value for those facilitating a partnership between the business community and employment service provider organizations (ESPs). Our funders generously supported the research elements of this project. Coast Capital Savings Credit Union had the vision to realize the importance of this and provided the evaluation team with significant financial support.

EVALUATION AND BUSINESS VALUE

Focus is very important given the critical shortage of time resources for small and medium businesses. Focus must come from the business owner, and creating it must not be time consuming or it becomes impractical.

By using the methods described below, business owners can achieve the focus needed to meet their goals.

UTILIZATION FOCUSED EVALUATION AND VALUE

Our approach to evaluation was based on the Utilization Focused Evaluation (U-FE) methodology popularized by Michael Quinn Patton (2008). The premise of U-FE is that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use. Since it is estimated that only 10% of evaluation information is actually used for performance improvement¹, we decided to adapt the U-FE process. This led to the creation of Utilization Focused Valuing (U-FV) (discussed in more detail on page 10). We did, however, use the core elements of U-FE:

1. Evaluators should facilitate and design the evaluation process, from *beginning to end*, with careful consideration of the ways that people apply findings and experience the process.
2. The focus of the evaluation is determined by how the recipients will use the findings.
3. U-FE answers the question of whose values will frame the evaluation by working with clearly identified, primary recipients who are responsible for applying evaluation findings and implementing recommendations.

U-FE and U-FV do not advocate any particular evaluation content, model, method, theory, or use, but help recipients select the most appropriate elements for their specific situations. U-FE can include any evaluative purpose (formative, summative, developmental), any kind of data (quantitative, qualitative, mixed), any kind of design (e.g., naturalistic, experimental), and any kind of focus (processes, outcomes, impacts, costs, and cost-benefit, among many possibilities). U-FE is a process for making decisions about these issues in collaboration with primary recipients focusing on their intended uses of evaluation (adapted from Patton, 2002).

Team comments about work done using the U-FE/U-FV framework include:

“This approach is not threatening.”

“It works very well for capacity building.”

“U-FV works to enhance and refine team performance, rather than just provide a critique.”

¹ Hurteau, Houle & Mongiale, 2009.

EVALUATION ROLES

The Tomorrow's Workplace evaluation/value exercise was team-based. Two team members were responsible for evaluation design and activities. The full project team provided feedback, points of reflection, and helped to shape evaluative findings.

At the beginning of the project, roles were undefined. Tomorrow's Workplace was primarily a research project, which required a focus on emergent priorities. The two team members charged with evaluation worked to clarify priorities and based their activities on needs that became clear during project implementation. The results were startling. Two clear needs, one for project focus and one for establishing value, were identified and met during the first months of operation.

One valuation role served an important project **oversight and guidance** function. This role helped to maintain overall project focus and served as a point of continuity (and project memory). This oversight position also proved critical for effective communication during the project. Like a business, the project was complex, but had to produce straightforward results. This role became known as Project Champion.

The second valuation role served a more targeted and specific purpose: **assessor** of project outcomes. The assessor role was employed at specific points in the project (mid-term and near project completion) to provide an external perspective on how well the project was fulfilling its mandate and what outcomes/impacts were associated with project activities.

DETERMINING VALUE

The project team drove project achievements and facilitated participation of project beneficiaries: participating small and medium businesses, employment service provider organizations (ESPs) with small business clients, and business organizations (especially the Surrey Board of Trade).

In addition to the Evaluation/Value team members, the Tomorrow's Workplace team included five core members:

- 1 Project Manager
- 2 Business Analysts
- 1 Human Resources Specialist
- 1 Internet/Communications Specialist

Other team members included:

- 6 Surrey Board of Trade Staff
- 2 Film/Documentary Specialists

Team comments regarding the utility of evaluation and valuing exercises include:

"We received important team performance feedback."

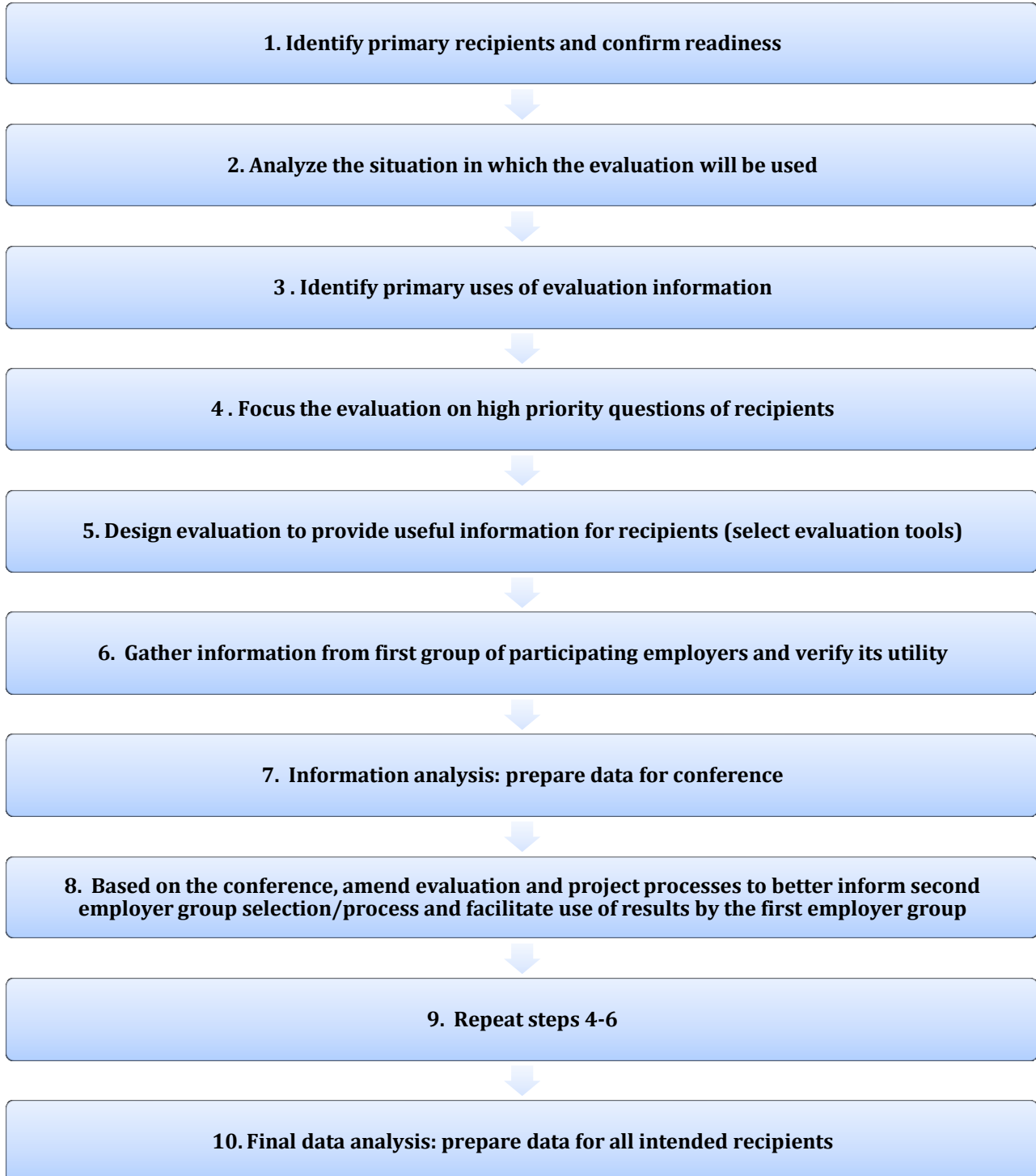
"Feedback for management of our work was really useful."

"It was important that someone constantly reinforced the project mandate and our focus."

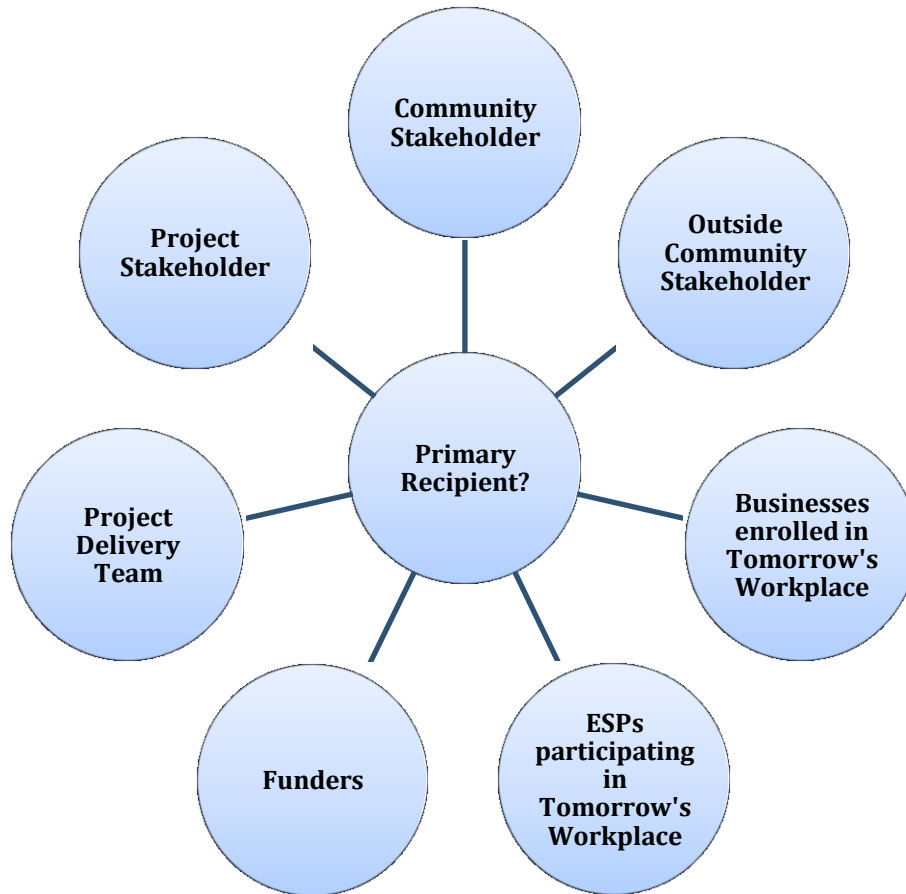


ORIGINAL EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

When the evaluation project started, a classic U-FE framework was developed:



The initial focusing work around the primary recipients looked like this:



Due to the high number of potential recipients, our model showed signs of strain during implementation. This led the Evaluation/Value team to rethink the model, redefining the methods of implementation, reducing the number of recipients, and revisiting some founding concepts.

REALITY AND COMPLEXITY

The following factors had an impact on the process of determining value:

- **Team Dynamics:** As ability, expertise, and personality factors developed within the team, issues of team performance and development became a focus. As a result, the Evaluation/Value team became more closely linked to project performance and issues of team leadership.
- **Business Tolerance for Process:** As mentioned in the *Guide for Business Leaders*, time is a precious commodity for small business owners, and is often production focused. The time required of business participants for project activities required that the process of determining value be embedded in project activities and consume relatively little time.
- **Project Complexity:** Monitoring of project activities was complex and difficult to sustain when using separate reporting systems for different project elements. As a result, the most effective methods emerged as the project progressed, and the Evaluation/Value team's role shifted from asking recipients about stories to interpreting them.
- **Complexity of Environment:** The City of Surrey has a rich history. Even when community oriented project activities were limited to relationships with ESPs, complex issues still needed to be addressed. ESPs with small business clients had dramatically different levels of capacity and connectedness to each other and client businesses. Ultimately, the focus for our ESP work was developmental rather than an immediate link to businesses participating in the Tomorrow's Workplace project.

One of the most important changes made by the Evaluation/Value team was working with the Tomorrow's Workplace team to identify and focus on barriers to high performance and diversity that the primary recipients were facing. As a result, the project was able to adapt to individual business needs.



EVALUATION RESPONSE: CHANGE IN METHODOLOGY

The evaluation element of Utilization Focused Evaluation (U-FE) was becoming less relevant to project work, so we changed the process to Utilization Focused Valuing (U-FV). There are three reasons we did this:

1. Evaluation implies that the evaluator is separated from the project activities and performs a strictly “tree top” evaluative function. The Evaluation/Value team developed roles that were directly linked to project performance, occasionally giving direction to the Project Delivery team. We focused on the value created by project activities.
2. Most often, evaluation focuses on data, and then establishes context for that data. Conversely, our work started with context and focused on statements of value from primary recipients. We then examined these statements and extracted supporting quantitative information. Our primary focus was in generating rich, informative stories that clearly demonstrated the immediate and ongoing value of being a part of Tomorrow’s Workplace.
3. Evaluation often requires a distinct process. In looking at value added, our work focused on understanding issues that emerged as the project unfolded. As a result, primary recipients’ definitions of value evolved, and so we changed the meaning of value to reflect these new opinions. This is why the story telling environment is so important.
4. Our work must be replicable by businesses and business organizations. This means that it must be simple to work with and understand. Evaluative methods tend to be more time consuming and expensive than the Valuing methods described below.

Please turn to page 11 for a detailed diagram of our new Valuing Process.

The new Valuing Process we developed looked like this:

1. Design. Project Value Lead enters the project: using collaborative community processes, design project around partners, including local small business, service providers, and Boards of Trade. Identify the primary intended use of value information by funder(s).

2. Embed Valuing Process. With team, discuss and gain consensus on embedding the “Utilization Focused Value” process in project work.

3. Establish Indicators. With team, review key indicators for identifying emergent project value to partners. Project work begins.

4. Primary Recipient Focus. Project Assessor enters the project: through Project Team, work with project partners to confirm value of process, commitment to interview participation.

5. Project Team Activity Focus. Focus valuing activities on high priority needs of project partners, with Project Value Lead beginning implementation of reflective questioning: What did I do? Why did I do it? and What was the value for the partner?

6. Primary Recipient Information Gathering. Project Assessor begins information gathering through guided interviews and Most Significant Change discussions with Primary Recipients.

7. Project Value Assessment. Valuing Lead and Assessor compare team process with Primary Recipients value received. **Primary question:** Is the Project's operational focus and activities generating the best possible value for Primary Recipients, including Funders? **Secondary question:** What are the emerging issues that indicate a change in activities will increase value for Primary Recipients?

8. Valuing and Project Team Review and Adjustment: Consensus on actions required, adjusting to emergent issues and providing maximum value for primary recipients.

9. Tell the Story. With Primary Recipients, create a format and medium for documenting what happened, communicating both quantitative and qualitative information. Format and medium are appropriate to Primary Recipients' needs and are informed by the project.

METHODS

Tomorrow's Workplace is a pragmatic project: we need to do what works with as little time expense as possible. To achieve this, we refined easy-to-use methods that targeted project value.

For the first time, evaluation methods normally used in the community and ESP context were used with small businesses. While there are dozens of methods available, the Evaluation/Value team selected the easiest to use. For a full description of the methods available, please review the Project Literature Review available at www.tomorrowsworkplace.net.

Methods we used to establish U-FV include:

1. Individual Interviews

Evaluation interviews are essentially guided conversations aimed at identifying core benefits and their context. These conversations generate involvement by information recipients and staff teams, giving comments visibility and promoting guided change.

A typical comment about this method is:

"The interviews provide good information about how well our available time and capacity match."

2. 'Most Significant Change' (MSC)

There are three essential phases to MSC:

1. Decide what changes need to be monitored to ensure the focus is on benefit.
2. Collect stories, and then review, select, and feedback information to verify benefit.
3. Compile selected stories, analyze information provided, verify, and continue to monitor the process.

Team comments include:

"This is a very effective tool."

"The method is easily understood by participants."

"It provided good direction for the team."

For more information on this technique, see http://keenhosting.net/unicef/communication_tools/pdf/Tool3.pdf

3. Team Check-Ins

On a weekly basis, all team members participated in a conference call led by the Project Manager. Wherever appropriate, the Project Value Lead would do an activity focus check, reviewing the three basic questions (What did I do? Why did I do it? What value did it create?). This information was used immediately to assess emergent issues and discuss responses.

FRAMING VALUE

The Tomorrow's Workplace project had to deal with a number of dimensions that affected how we worked and the response to Tomorrow's Workplace. These dimensions and the factors that had an impact on project work include:

a) The Community of Surrey

- **Demographics:** Surrey, one of our nation's most diverse communities, is a complex, rapidly growing city on the verge of displacing Vancouver as our province's largest. It is home to thousands of small and medium businesses.
- **Business Focus:** Due to the nature of Surrey, the economic development focus has been primarily oriented towards worker recruitment, and less on worker retention and development. This led to a disconnect between business performance and resilience, and staffing.
- **Business Organization Readiness:** The Surrey Board of Trade (SBOT) stands out as an organization willing and capable of participating in a project of this nature. Although the Tomorrow's Workplace project is not without risk, the active support of SBOT helped it move beyond the conceptual stage.



b) Economy

- **Recession:** Over the 18 months it took to get the project designed, funding in place, and organize the project team, the economy changed fundamentally: from a strong demand for workers to recessionary trends in which efficiency and cost effectiveness were priorities.
- **Staff Lay-Offs and Uncertainty:** With business streamlining (e.g. minimal operational staff), pressure on small business owners was intense; time constraints were given as the greatest barrier to employer participation.
- **Project Response:** The emphasis on business performance proved to be the project's greatest appeal, with owners searching for ways to improve their competitiveness. Concepts such as "Good to Great" and the link to workforce diversity issues made sense in this environment.



c) Focus on Small and Medium Business

- Tomorrow's Workplace is not about big business. Our focus was specifically on the issues smaller businesses must deal with – such as limited resources, limited human resources experience, and a need for one individual to address a wide range of issues during the work day. This required a very targeted and efficient approach. We knew that satisfying this employer profile would be difficult, but given that a majority of our economic growth comes from small and medium business, understanding how to increase their level of effectiveness should be a top priority.



TOMORROW'S WORKPLACE: VALUE ADDED

The primary areas of value generated by the project include:

- **Literature Review as a Resource:** The literature review was particularly valuable in revealing the depth and detail of the diversity literature available. It also confirmed that there is not a shortage of “toolbox” approaches to workforce development issues. The focus of Tomorrow’s Workplace, developing practices that work, is at the core of current performance (and ultimately workforce diversity) issues.
- **Workbooks and Workshops:** Tomorrow’s Workplace generated business-specific material designed for, and demonstrated to be successful in, applied business development, and in preparing local ESPs for effective partnerships with small and medium business.
- **Multiple Orientations:** Tomorrow’s Workplace demonstrated the importance of a balanced approach to business development, focusing on each business’ hierarchy of needs. For example, to have an impact on human resource issues (e.g. immigration, racism, integration, equity, etc), the businesses basic needs must be met first.
- **Importance of Context:** Overall business performance is directly related to their performance in the context of community, markets, etc. Context can most readily be demonstrated by telling the story of each business, which is why we focused on storytelling skills.
- **Importance of Integration with Senior Management Structure and Decision-Making:** To address issues of workforce diversity, workshops, websites and brochures are not enough. Unless outside information is demonstrably relevant to the goals of small business owners, it tends not to be used. This is why recruitment websites and services for client hiring are generally underutilized.

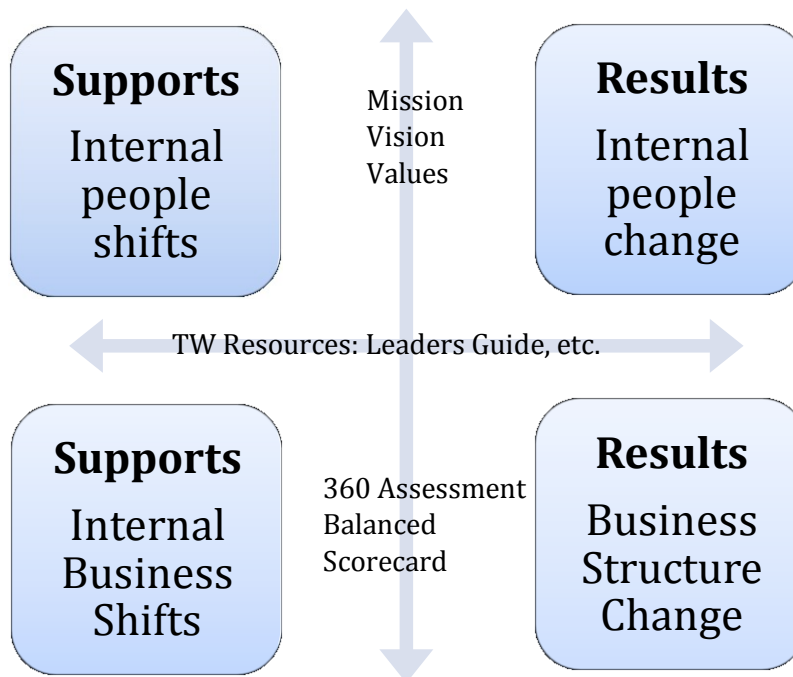
THE PROJECT VALUE TEAM

- **Focus and Quality:** Evaluation/Valuation resources allocated to the Tomorrow’s Workplace project helped maintain consistent team focus on the project’s value added. The value of learning from available material was recognized and adapted to the current needs of the Surrey context.
- **Working with Complexity:** The valuing process around each element of Tomorrow’s Workplace (project design; team orientation; mid-point review; phase two design; completion/write-up) helped the team and participants recognize the benefits and value added by each element.

KEY ELEMENTS

- **Creation of an Integrated Approach to Business Performance:** Creating a context that demonstrates the importance of Mission, Vision, and Values, and the 360 Assessment, which incorporated a Balanced Scorecard Approach, was important when working with workforce diversity issues.

The results-based visual below illustrates the business dimensions we worked with:



- **Diversity of Diversity:** During the Tomorrow's Workplace project, we learned that context matters. Diversity in this context means a richness of experience and backgrounds that enhance operations and the lives of the business team. One-dimensional workplaces lack an integral ingredient for success: intercultural competence.
- **Community Engagement:** The Tomorrow's Workplace emphasis on community engagement, while maintaining business support, has already changed the environment for ESPs, and will enhance the business linkages with community expertise and resources.

PROJECT SUCCESS

Tomorrow's Workplace has already succeeded because we delivered on what we set out to do. However, this project is also about enduring impact. As described in the *Guide for Business Leaders*, the project legacy includes knowledge of:

- a) **The Value of a Supporting Team: Tomorrow's Workplace Professionalism:** To adapt the small business development processes of Tomorrow's Workplace for use in other communities, a knowledgeable team is an invaluable resource. This team will continue to be a source of information for businesses across Canada.

- b) **Business Knowledge and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Small business owners generally lack the resources to acquire business operations skills needed to move to high performing, sustainable businesses. Tomorrow's Workplace provides an alternative.

- c) **Diversity of Diversity:** A significant number of small and medium businesses already employ individuals from more than one culture. What is often lacking, however, is the linkage to business performance. This work is highly individualized and must be presented in terms of individual business-specific needs.

LEADERSHIP FOR EFFECTIVENESS IN BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY

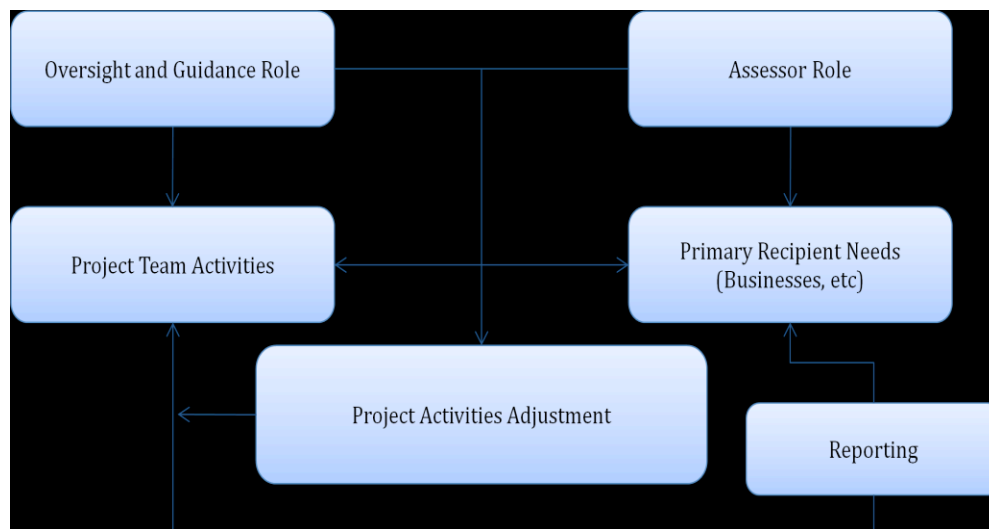
The *Guide for Business Leaders* does not espouse a particular leadership approach, but looks at which model most consistently fits small business needs for higher performance and effectiveness. Servant Leadership offers guides to effective behaviour, but again, this is not a "one size fits all". Leadership style must fit the particular business and personalities, and achieving performance at the desired level should be a top priority. Diversity comes to the fore through community-based interaction and building a supportive team around small and medium business.

REAL VALUE ADDED

VALUING METHOD AND RESULTS

The Tomorrow's Workplace Team's organization around value is unique, and produced learning that will continue in the future.

The methodology and results for primary recipients can be summarized as follows:



Results reporting has taken the form of storytelling through video and written records. This is frequently the only reliable method available. A great deal of quantitative information generated during the project is not publicly reported at the request of participating businesses. This is not unusual, but places increasing levels of emphasis on qualitative results reporting.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY

As noted in the “Primary Learnings” section of the *Guide for Business Leaders*, the value of specific ESPs was noted. The Surrey Board of Trade remains the primary source for information and connection with community. Their own limitations on staff time and resources have been recognized. The issue is currently under discussion with the project partners.

In particular, the role for ESPs and “marginalized” small business in a business membership context is being discussed.



THE ULTIMATE VALUE OF USING THE PROCESS

The axiom “you get out of it what you put into it” certainly applies to determining the value of Tomorrow’s Workplace to other communities.

Based on the value generated for others, we suggest you consider the following activities to generate value for yourself:

- 1. Read:** Read the *Business Guide for Leaders*. It is a summary of almost 18 months of intense work by a team of skilled professionals.
- 2. Do:** If the Guide interests you, and you want to do more, do the 360 Assessment in “Appendix 1” of the Guide. This will give you some knowledge of a primary tool used in Tomorrow’s Workplace.
- 3. Communicate:** Contact the Tomorrow’s Workplace team to discuss your organization and plans. Even with clearly targeted process and results/goals, this type of work takes time and expertise to produce the results you need for high performance.

We hope that readers will gain insight from this experience about the importance of investing in effective and efficient ways to demonstrate the value and impact of their work.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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