

Engaging Executives with Ideas and Innovation: *ITSMA 2018 Thought Leadership Study*

This abbreviated summary highlights some of the most significant findings of ITSMA's 2018 Thought Leadership Survey. A more in-depth analysis can be found in the full report:
<https://www.itsma.com/research/engaging-executives-ideas-innovation-itsma-2018-thought-leadership-study/>

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Most of us see thought leadership as important, if not critical, for building executive relationships

85%

Critical or important

Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=of no importance and 5=critical. (N=42)

Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

Introduction

B2B companies have long invested in thought leadership programs to build eminence in their markets, infuse marketing campaigns with issue-based content, and equip sales to have higher-level conversations.

With few exceptions, though, most B2B marketing organizations continue to struggle with managing thought leadership programs that consistently provide differentiated points of view and effective platforms for engaging the senior executives within the clients that matter most.

ITSMA's *2018 Thought Leadership Study* documents the approaches that B2B marketers are taking to develop and use thought leadership to engage and strengthen relationships in the C-suite.

In particular, the report provides data on program strategy and governance, how companies develop points of view and produce thought leadership assets, how they disseminate their ideas in the market, and how they equip sales and subject matter experts (SMEs) to engage at the executive level.

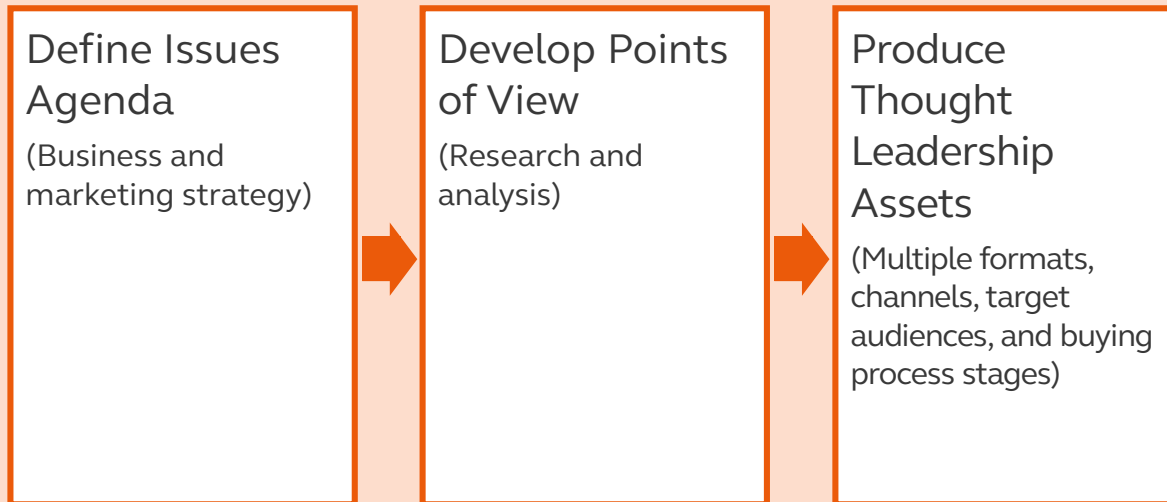
The report includes both aggregate data and crosstabs by overall performance (leaders and followers) and by company type (providers of primarily services or of both products and services).

Along with an essential new data set on how top firms are connecting thought leadership and executive engagement programs, the study highlights five specific ways in which the most effective programs stand apart from the rest.

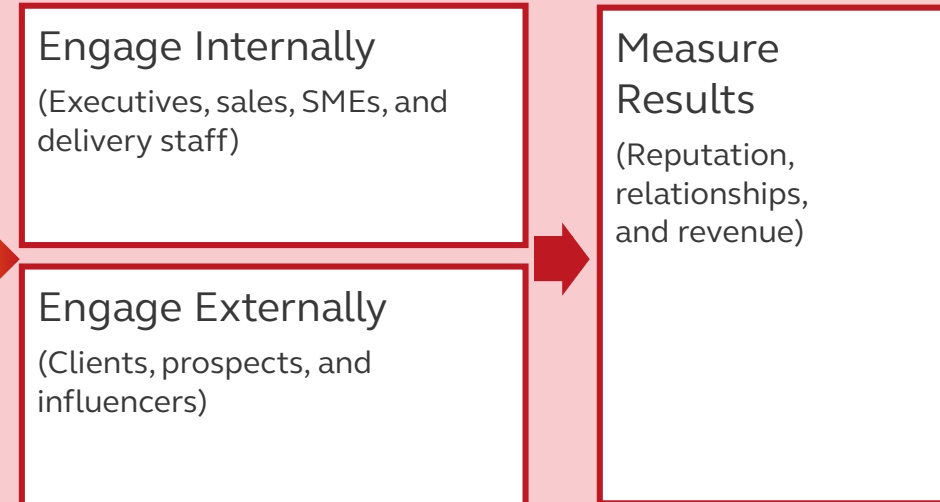
A comprehensive model for thought leadership program management

Thought Leadership Strategy, Planning, and Governance

Thought Leadership Development



Thought Leadership Engagement



Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

Methodology

- Survey invitations were emailed during March 2018 to ITSMA member companies and *Marketing Strategist* subscribers
- 44 companies completed the survey—Primarily marketers at B2B technology and business services companies
- 38 unique companies represented



List of participating companies (select)



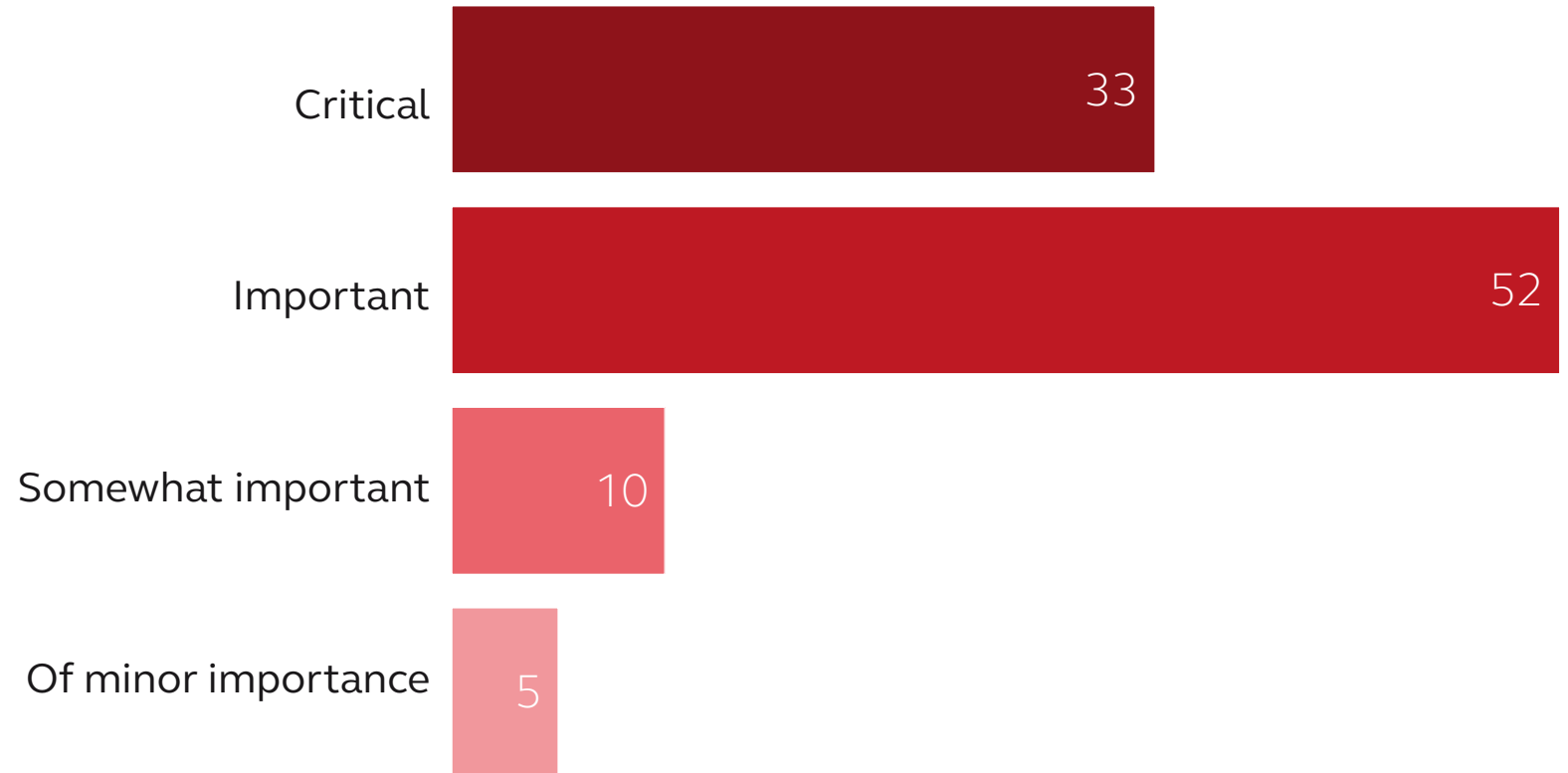
Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

Importance of thought leadership in building executive-level relationships

What is your company's view of the role thought leadership plays in building executive-level relationships at client and prospect companies?

% of respondents (N=42)

Mean rating=4.1



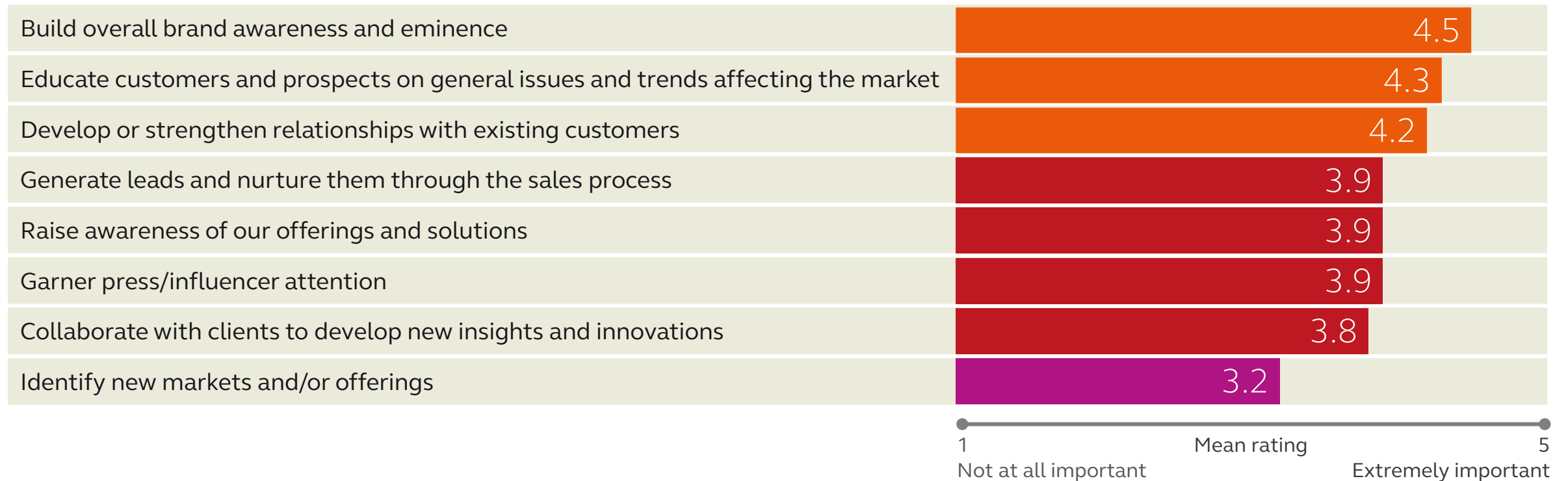
Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=of minor importance and 5=critical.

Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

B2B marketers lean heavily on thought leadership to drive reputation, relationships, and revenue

How important are each of the following potential objectives for your organization's thought leadership program?

Mean rating (N=44)

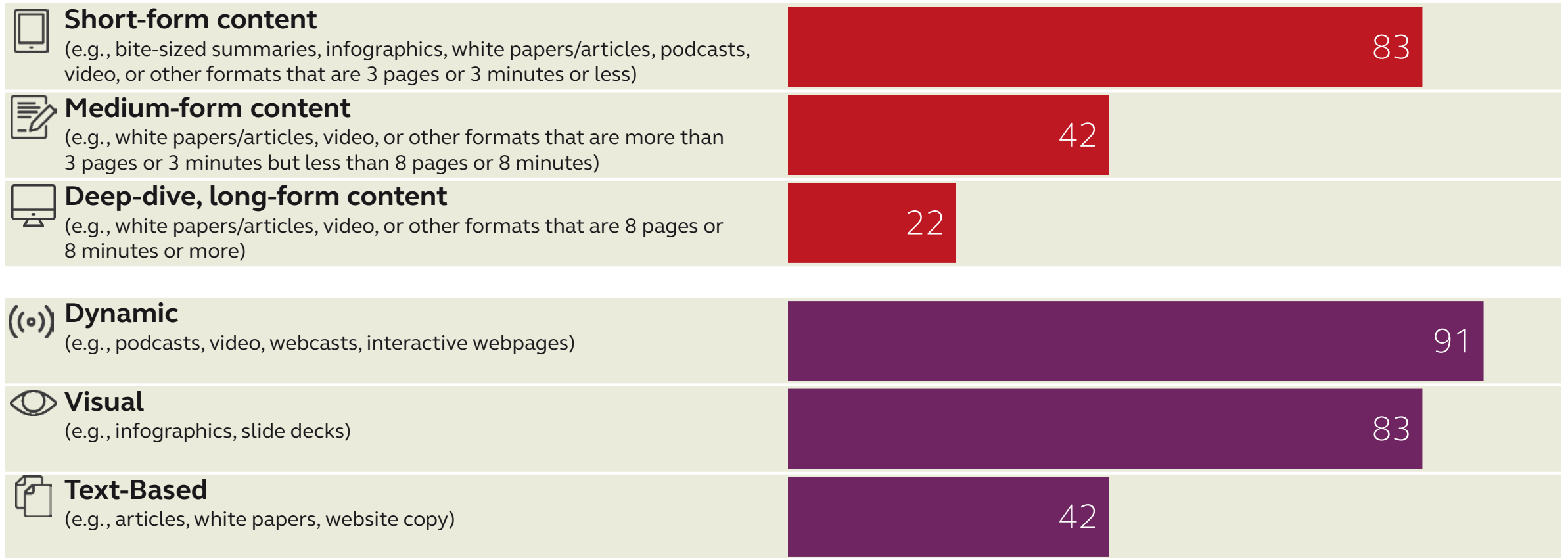


Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=not at all important and 5=extremely important.

Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

To strengthen engagement, we're moving to shorter and more dynamic content formats

% of respondents increasing investments (N~42)

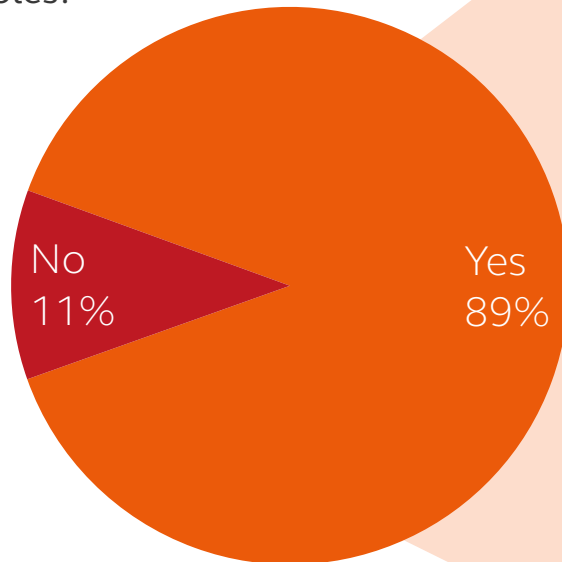


Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

And we're customizing content for different sectors, geos, and roles

Do you customize thought leadership for different segments, such as industry sectors, geographies, personas, or job functions/roles?

% of respondents (N=44)



% of respondents (N=34)



Note: Multiple responses allowed.

Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

Despite the move to digital, offline channels are still far more effective at the executive level

Top five channels for engaging executives with thought leadership

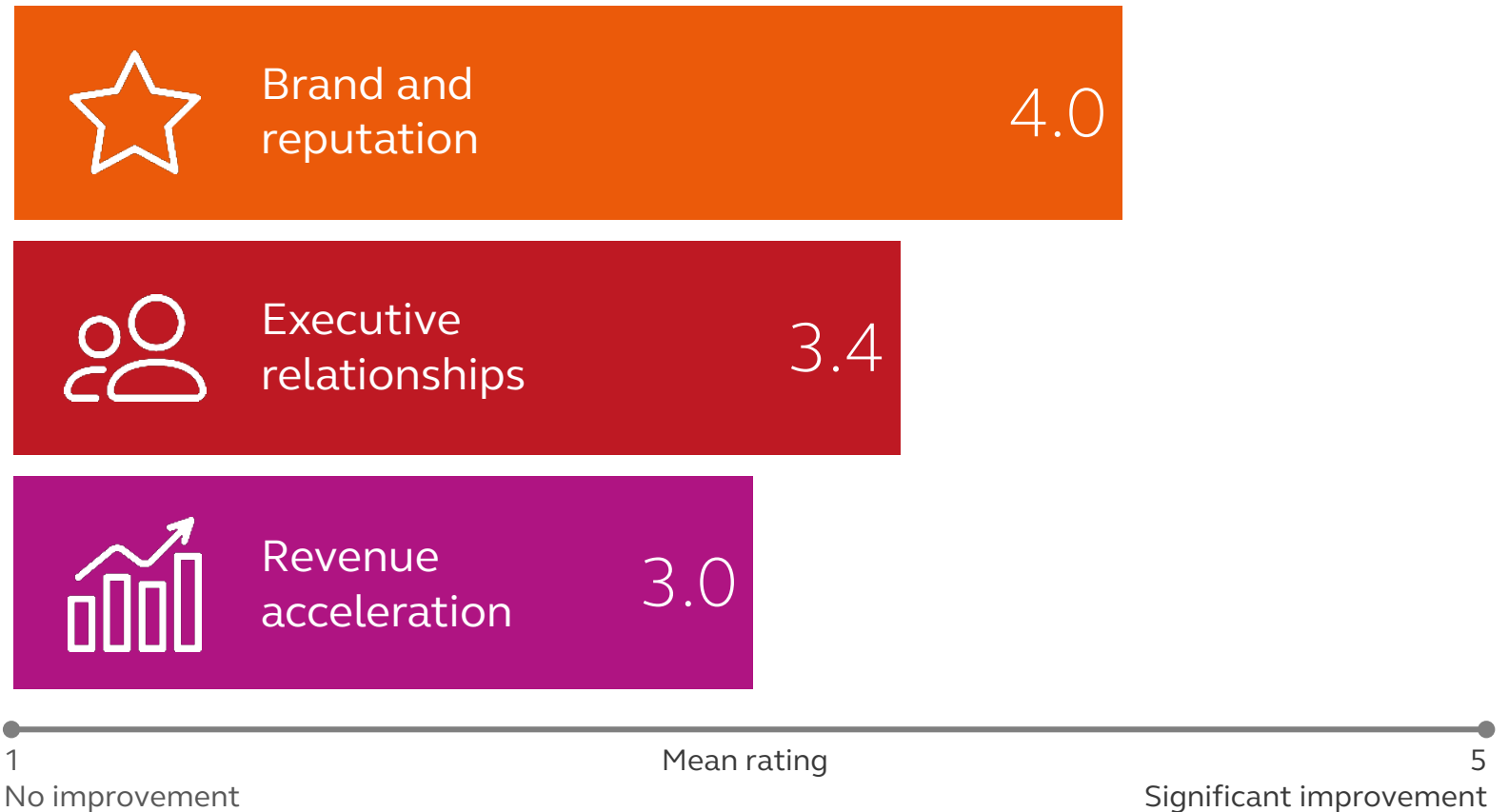
- 1 In-person events and meetings
- 2 Executive briefings and innovation centers
- 3 Executive-level innovation programs
- 4 Client executive sponsorship and relationship programs
- 5 Online academic journals (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *Knowledge@Wharton*)

Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018, (N=44)

Overall, we're pretty good on reputation but still struggling to strengthen relationships and revenue

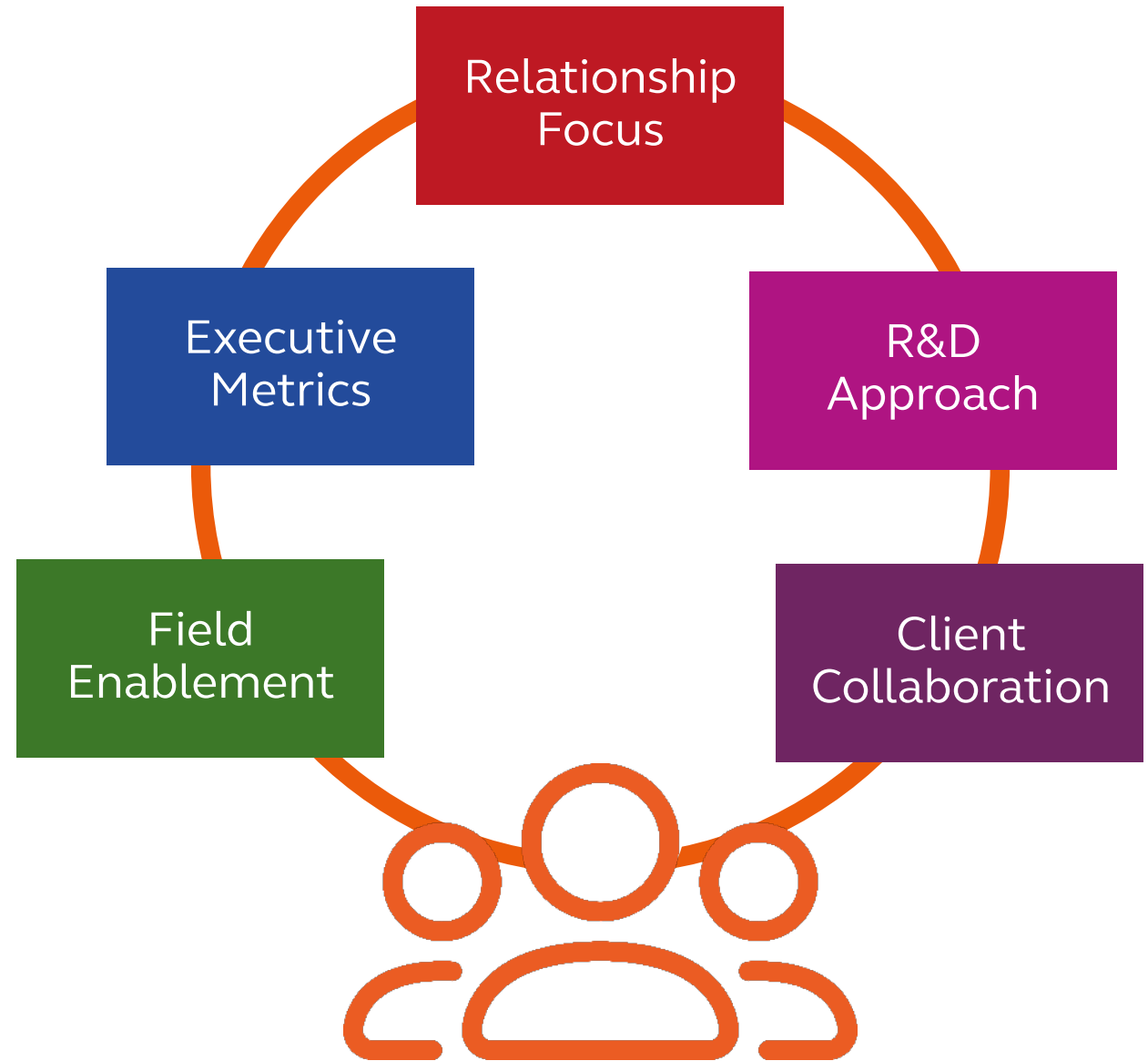
To what extent has your thought leadership contributed to improvement in each of these business outcomes over the last two years?

Mean rating
(N~35)



Note: Mean rating based on a 5-point scale where 1=no improvement and 5=significant improvement.
Source: ITSMA Thought Leadership Survey, March 2018

The most effective thought leadership programs for executive engagement stand apart in five key areas



Want to learn more?

Here's what is included in the full study:

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Buy the study

Member: \$295*

Non-member: \$695

*The report is available for no additional fee to current ITSMA members that responded to this survey and for sale at member and non-member prices to all others. <https://www.itsma.com/research/engaging-executives-ideas-innovation-itsma-2018-thought-leadership-study/>



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