



GLOBAL SURVEY REPORT

Informally Learning From Others to Improve Work Practices

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Contents

1. Purpose of Study	4
1.1 Definition of “Informally learning from others to improve work practices”	4
2. Demographics of Respondents	4
2.1 Size of Organization	4
2.2 Industry of Organization.....	5
2.3 Position in Organization.....	6
3. Most Effective Tools/Activities	8
4. Results of All 62 Tools/Activities in 8 categories (Q5-12).....	10
5. Maturity level of Organizations	16
5.1 Importance	16
5.2 Culture.....	16
5.3 Support from Management.....	17
5.4 Impact on own Organization	18
6. Importance of Benchmarking	18
7. Learning and implementation of Best Practices.....	20
8. Usefulness of Study	21
9. Conclusion	21

Figures and Tables

Figure 1 - Size of organization	5
Figure 2 - Industry of organization.....	6
Figure 3 - Position in organization.....	7
Figure 4 - Response based on whole or part of organization.....	7
Table 1 - Most effective tools/activities in social dimension	8
Table 2 - Most effective tools in the non-social dimension.....	9
Figure 5 - Social dimension (internal/deliberate)	10
Figure 6 - Social dimension (external/deliberate)	11
Figure 7 - Social dimension (internal/incidental).....	12
Figure 8 - Social dimension (external/incidental).....	12
Figure 9 - Non-social dimension (Internal/deliberate)	13
Figure 10 - Non-social dimension (external/deliberate)	14
Figure 11 - Non-social dimension (internal/incidental).....	15
Figure 12 - Non-social dimension (external/incidental).....	15
Figure 13 - Maturity level (Importance).....	16
Figure 14 - Maturity level (Culture).....	17
Figure 15 - Maturity level (Support from Management)	17

Figure 16 - Maturity level (Impact).....	18
Figure 17 - Importance of comparing performance.....	19
Figure 18 - Importance of a structured process in implementing best practices	19
Figure 19 - Learning of best practices	20
Figure 20 - Implementation of best practices.....	20

1. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how organizations informally learn (apart from formal training or courses) better practices and adapt them to increase the effectiveness of their own organization. This project is being undertaken as part of a PHD research in the Centre for Organizational Excellence Research (COER), Massey University, New Zealand. The project is also supported by the Global Benchmarking Network (GBN).

1.1 Definition of “Informally learning from others to improve work practices”

(Also known as Informal Benchmarking)

A familiar and flexible way of comparing and learning from better or best practices of other organizations for the purpose of improving work practices in your organization. It is content focused without following a structured methodology. The learning is either intentional or incidental and is sometimes spontaneous, speedier and unconventional. It will ultimately bring about improved practices upon the implementation of its learning.

2. Demographics of Respondents

The survey data was collected from Jun to Oct 2014 with a total of 81 responses from 14 countries. The countries include Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, Chile, Malaysia, Philippines, India, Australia, United Kingdom, Ghana, Ireland, Fiji, Germany and The USA.

The demographics of the respondents are according to the size of the organization, the industry the organization is in, his/her position in the organization, and whether the response is based on the whole or part of the organization.

2.1 Size of Organization

The majority (33%) of respondents are from organizations with over 1000 employees. The 2nd largest respondent group are in the 11-49 employee category (16%), and the 3rd largest respondent group are in the 100-249 employee category. Respondents with 10 or less employees in their organization accounted for only 13.5% of all responses. The overall spread of organization size suggest the responses are well diversified.

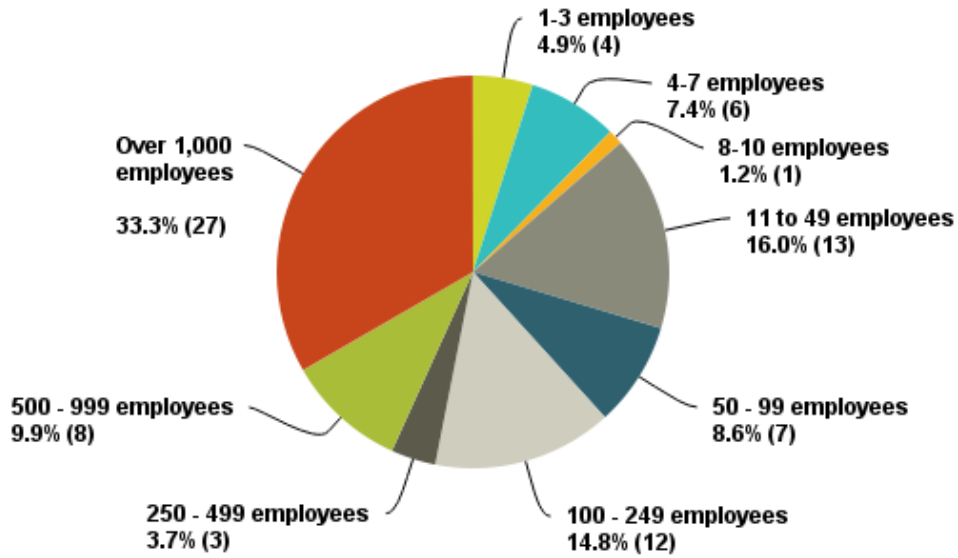
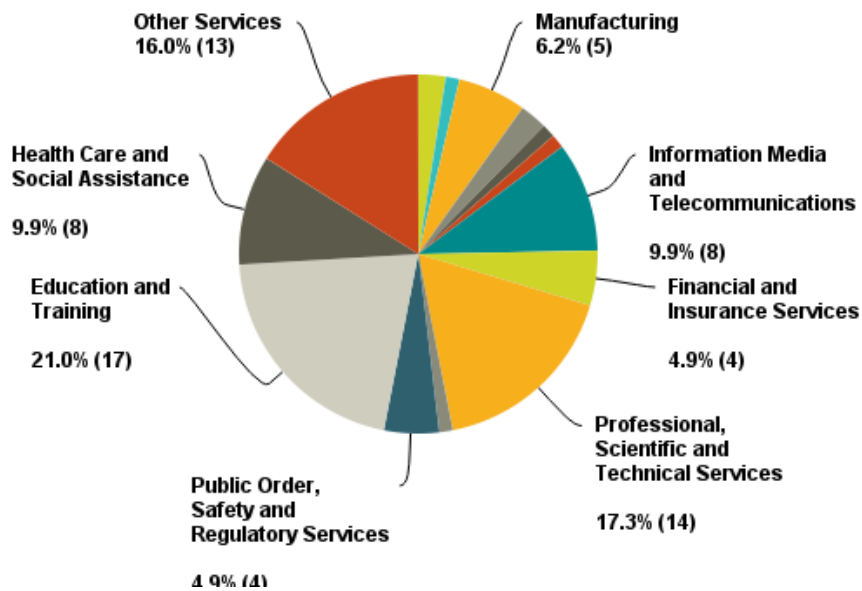


Figure 1 - Size of organization

2.2 Industry of Organization

The majority (54%) of respondents are from the education/training (21%) or professional, scientific/ technical services (17%) sector and other services (16%).



Answer Choices	Responses	
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	2.5%	2.00
Mining	1.2%	1.00
Manufacturing	6.2%	5.00
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	2.5%	2.00
Construction	0.0%	0.00
Wholesale Trade	0.0%	0.00
Retail Trade	1.2%	1.00
Accommodation and Food Services	0.0%	0.00
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	1.2%	1.00
Information Media and Telecommunications	9.9%	8.00
Financial and Insurance Services	4.9%	4.00
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	0.0%	0.00
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	17.3%	14.00
Administrative and Support Services	1.2%	1.00
Public Order, Safety and Regulatory Services	4.9%	4.00
Education and Training	21.0%	17.00
Health Care and Social Assistance	9.9%	8.00
Arts and Recreation Services	0.0%	0.00
Other Services	16.0%	13.00
Total		81

Figure 2 - Industry of organization

2.3 Position in Organization

The majority (63%) of respondents were at management levels - directors and above (21%), senior manager (17%), and managers (19%). Only 1 respondent was an entry-level employee.

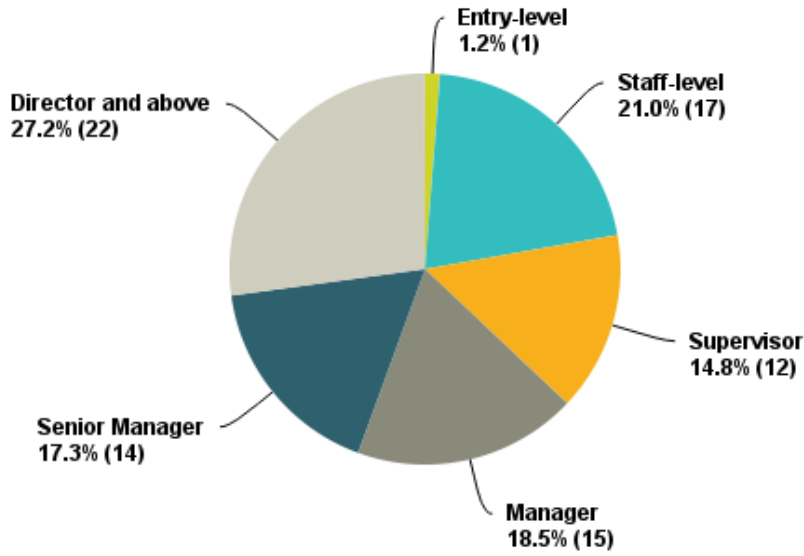


Figure 3 - Position in organization

In response to Q4: “Are your survey answers based on the whole organization, or in some functional areas only? You may select one or more functional areas”, most (57%) were able to respond on behalf of the whole organization.

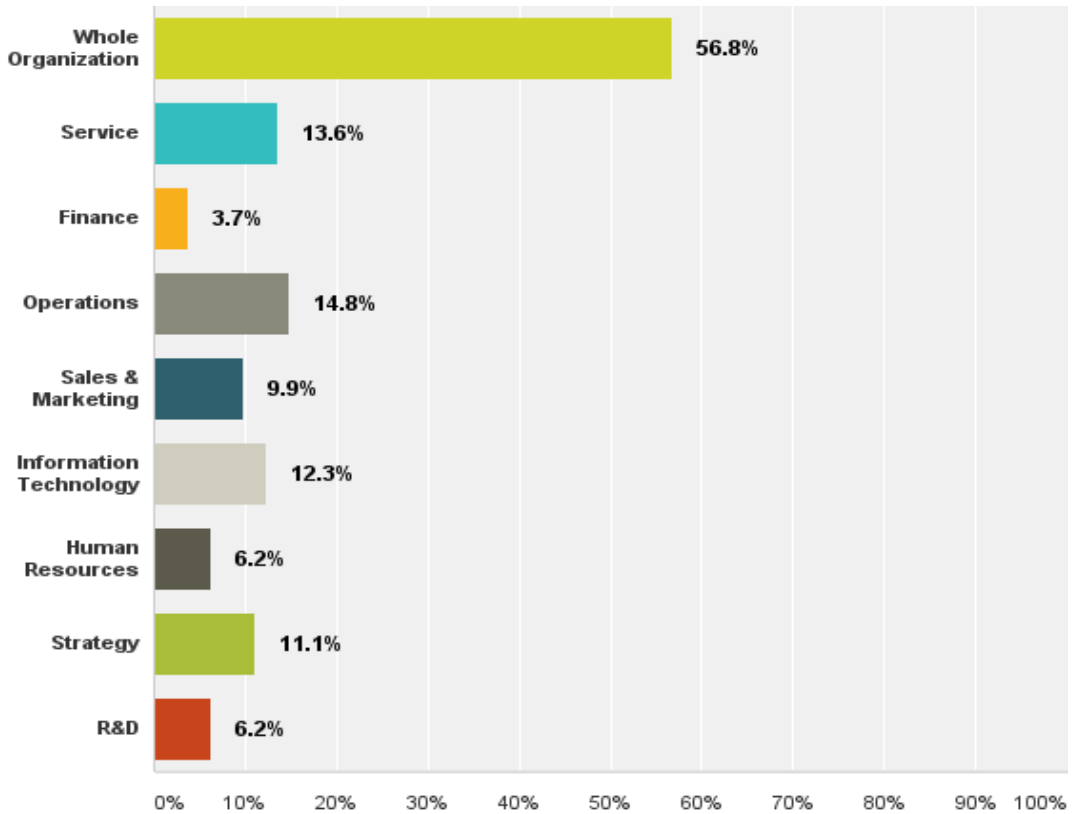


Figure 4 - Response based on whole or part of organization

3. Most Effective Tools/Activities

There are 8 categories of 62 tools/activities listed in the 8 questions (Q5-Q12) of the survey. The **top 10 most effective** tool/activities are interestingly all from the social dimension (deliberate, both internally and externally) categories. The **top 5 most effective** tools/activities are highlighted in **yellow**. See table 1 below.

Tools/activities with a weighted average score => 3.5 out of a maximum of 5 points are listed. A score of 3.5 imply these tools/activities have a relative high level of effectiveness compared to the other tools/activities. A total of 19 of all 62 tools/activities met the criteria of a minimum of 3.5 points. 13 of these 19 tools/activities are from the social dimension, the other 6 are from the non-social dimension. See table 1 and 2 below.

Social Dimension

INTERNAL (within own organization)		SCORE Max=5	EXTERNAL (outside own organization)	SCORE Max=5
Deliberate Learning of Work Practices from These Activities				
1	Organized site visits to other units/departments to learn from their work practices	4.39	Met face-to-face with an external supplier and learnt of their work practices	4.20
2	Attachment to other units/departments to learn from their work practices	4.00	Taking part in external best-practice sharing event/activity and learning from the best practices of other organizations i.e. global, national, industry level	3.93
3	Met face-to-face with an internal customer and learnt from their work practices	3.96	Participated in business excellence assessments or audits and incidentally learnt from the work practices of other organizations e.g. excellence certifications, ISO standards, Malcolm Baldrige quality awards or equivalent	3.82
4	Met face-to-face with an internal supplier and learnt of their work practices	3.92	Regular face-to-face discussions with associates of other organizations to learn from their work practices	3.78
5	Consulted with a mentor/expert inside your organization to learn from the work practices of other units/departments e.g. mentorship program, assigned peer-to-peer mentoring	3.82	Consulted with a specialist outside your organization to learn from the work practices of other organizations	3.78
Incidental Learning of Work Practices from These Activities				
1	Attended informal functions or social activities of other units/departments and incidentally learnt of their work practices e.g. festivity, celebrations, golf game, walk/run	3.72	Attended informal functions or social activities with suppliers and incidentally learnt of their work practices	3.55
2	Ad-hoc face-to-face conversation with colleagues from other units/departments that incidentally helped you to learn from their work practices e.g. coffee corner, lunches, tea-breaks at or post meetings	3.65	-	

Table 1 - Most effective tools/activities in social dimension

Non-Social Dimension

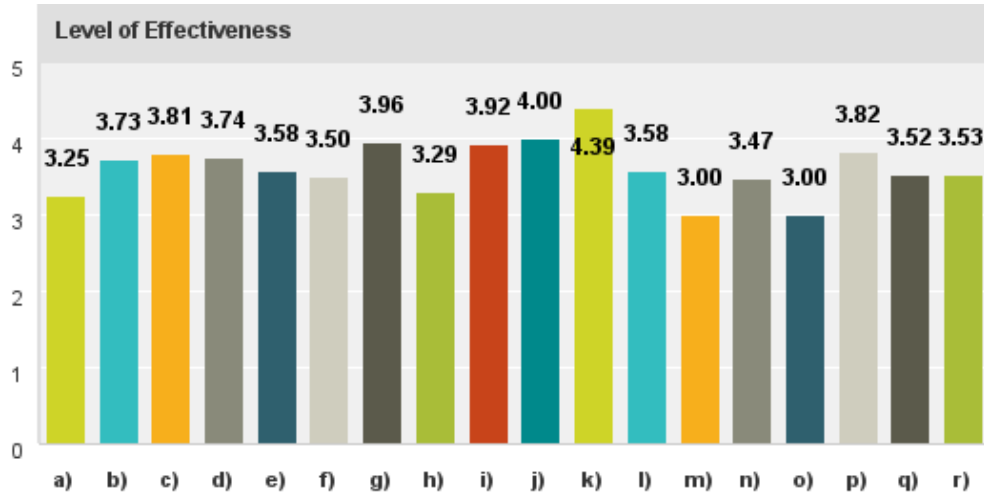
INTERNAL (within own organization)		SCORE Max=5	EXTERNAL (outside own organization)	SCORE Max=5
Deliberate Learning of Work Practices from These Activities				
1	-		Reviewed our organization's database/knowledge bank of best practices of other units/departments	3.75
2	-		Read internal books/magazines/circulars regularly to deliberately learn from the work practices of other organizations e.g. annual report, standard operating procedure	3.57
3	-		Accessed SharePoint or similar collaborative/learning applications to learn from the work practices of other units/departments	3.56
Incidental Learning of Work Practices from These Activities				
1	Read external books/magazine to deliberately learn from the work practices of other organizations	3.69	Observed a critical incident of other organizations that enabled you to learn from their work practices i.e. a situation or condition which made you question your own work practices	3.72
2	Accessed extranet or external websites of other organizations to learn from the work practices of other organizations	3.58	-	

Table 2 - Most effective tools in the non-social dimension

Scores from the social dimension generally have a higher weighted-score as compared with the non-social dimension, though the difference is not significant.

4. Results of All 62 Tools/Activities in 8 categories (Q5-12)

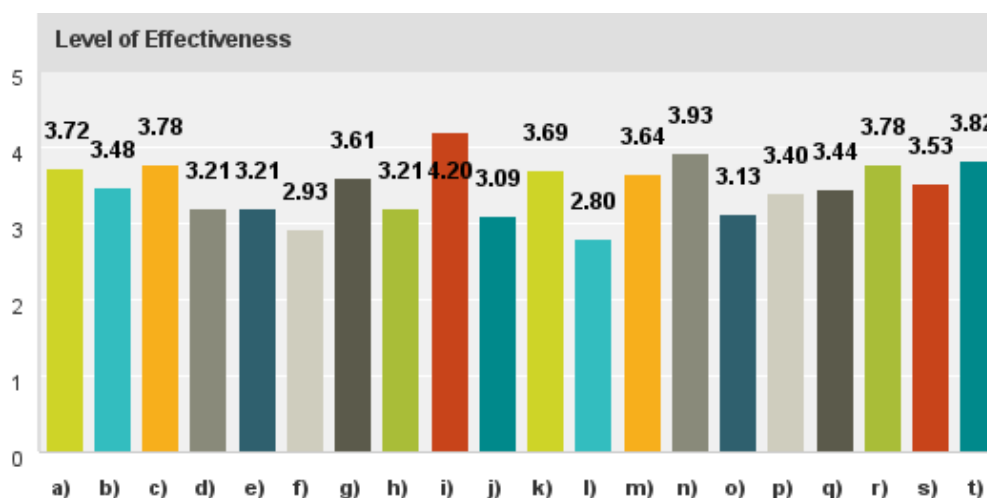
Q5: Social-Based Activities (Internal & Deliberate): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization's work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a) Participated in internal conferences to learn from the work practices of other units/departments	b) Regular face-to-face discussions with members of a best practice group/network within your organization to learn from their work practices e.g. community of practice, innovation team, cross-functional work group, focused group
c) Regular face-to-face discussions with colleagues of other units/departments to learn from their work practices	d) Emailed colleagues from other units/departments and learnt from their work practices
e) Made a phone/Skype call to colleagues from other units/departments and learnt from their work practices	f) Emailed an internal customer and learnt from their work practices
g) Met face-to-face with an internal customer and learnt from their work practices	h) Emailed an internal supplier and learnt of their work practices
i) Met face-to-face with an internal supplier and learnt of their work practices	j) Attachment to other units/departments to learn from their work practices
k) Organized site visits to other units/departments to learn from their work practices	l) Taking part in internal best-practice sharing event/activity and learning from the best practices of other units/departments
m) Accessed our organization's intranet and asked others inside my organization if they had information concerning the work practices of other units/departments	n) Participated in internal formal organization events or activities to learn from the work practices of other units/departments e.g. planning retreats, official launches or inaugural openings
o) Actively participated in a discussion in an internal electronic forum or social network and learnt from the work practices of other units/departments	p) Consulted with a mentor/expert inside your organization to learn from the work practices of other units/departments e.g. mentorship program, assigned peer-to-peer mentoring
q) Attended presentations/seminar by other units/departments on a regular basis to learn from their work practices	r) Participated in business excellence assessments or audits and incidentally learnt from the work practices of other units/departments e.g. annual cross-functional audits of units/departments

Figure 5 - Social dimension (internal/deliberate)

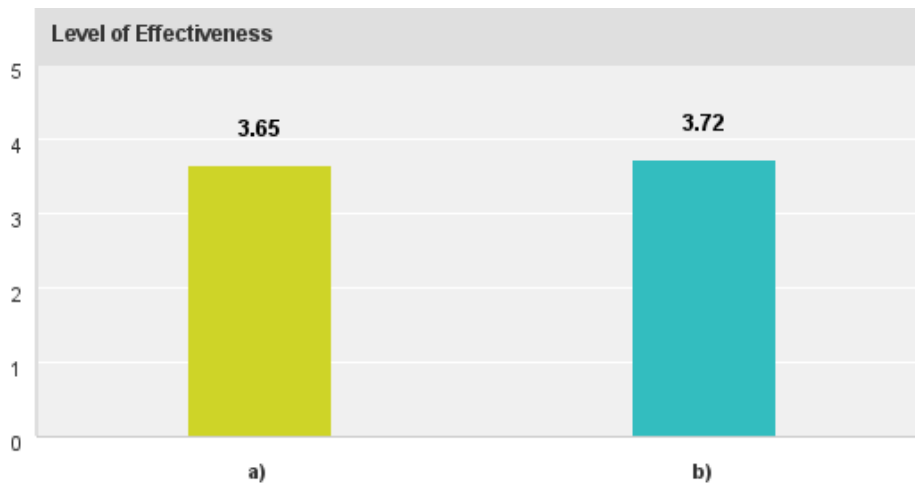
Q6: Social-based Activities (External & Deliberate): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization's work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a) Participated in external conferences to learn from the work practices of other organizations	b) Regular face-to-face discussions with members of a best practice group/network or association/club outside your organization to learn from their work practices
c) Regular face-to-face discussions with associates of other organizations to learn from their work practices	d) Emailed associates from another organization and learnt from their work practices
e) Made a phone/Skype call associates from another organization and learnt from their work practices	f) Emailed an external customer and learnt from their work practices
g) Met face-to-face with an external customer and learnt from their work practices	h) Emailed an external supplier and learnt of their work practices
i) Met face-to-face with an external supplier and learnt of their work practices	j) Emailed other stakeholders (partners/shareholders) and learnt of their work practices
k) Met face to face with other stakeholders (partners/shareholders) and learnt of their work practices	l) Attachment to other organizations to learn from their work practices
m) Organized site visits to other organizations to learn from their work practices	n) Taking part in external best-practice sharing event/activity and learning from the best practices of other organizations i.e. global, national, industry level,
o) Accessed our organization's intranet and asked other people inside my organization if they had information concerning the work practices of other	p) Participated in external formal organization events or activities to learn from the work practices of other organizations e.g. official launches or inaugural openings, ceremonies
q) Actively participated in a discussion in an external electronic forum or social network and learnt from the work practices of other organizations	r) Consulted with a specialist outside your organization to learn from the work practices of other organizations
s) Attended presentations/seminar by other organizations on a regular basis to learn from their work practices	t) Participated in business excellence assessments or audits and incidentally learnt from the work practices of other organizations e.g. excellence certifications, ISO standards, Malcolm Baldrige quality awards or equivalent

Figure 6 - Social dimension (external/deliberate)

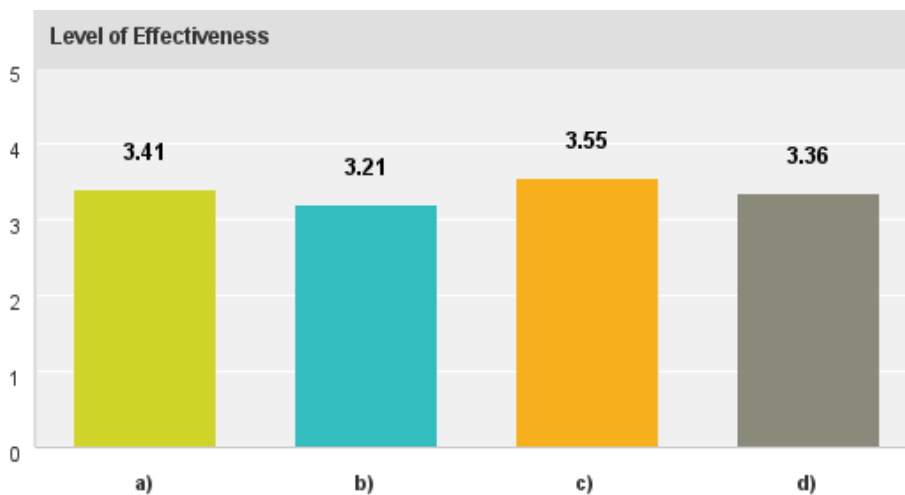
Q7: Social-based Activities (Internal & Incidental): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a)	Ad-hoc face-to-face conversation with colleagues from other units/departments that incidentally helped you to learn from their work practices e.g. coffee corner, lunches, tea-breaks at or post meetings
b)	Attended informal functions or social activities of other units/departments and incidentally learnt of their work practices e.g. festivity, celebrations, golf game, walk/run

Figure 7 - Social dimension (internal/incidental)

Q8: Social-based Activities (External & Incidental): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



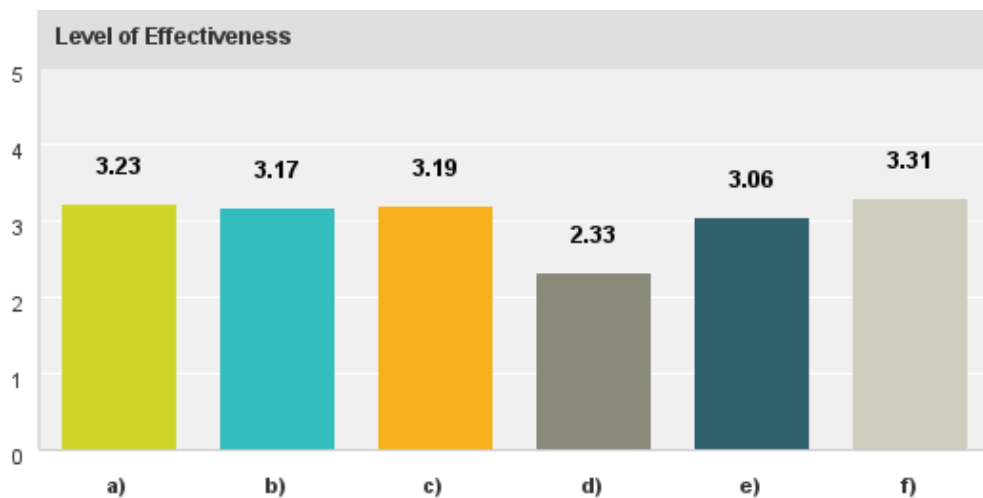
a)	Ad-hoc face-to-face conversation with associates from other organizations that incidentally helped you to learn from their work practices e.g. coffee, lunches
b)	Attended external informal functions or social activities with customers and incidentally learnt of their work practices e.g. festivity, celebrations, golf game
c)	Attended informal functions or social activities with suppliers and incidentally learnt of their work practices
d)	Attended informal functions or social activities with other stakeholders (partners/shareholders) and incidentally learnt of their work practices

Figure 8 - Social dimension (external/incidental)

Within the non-social dimension (internal) categories comparing incidental and deliberate learning of work practices, it is surprising to note that organizations appear to **learn more by accident** than by intention. The difference is not significant but it is noticeable.

The **least effective** tools/activities are from the non-social dimension (Internal/Deliberate) with no scores =>3.5.

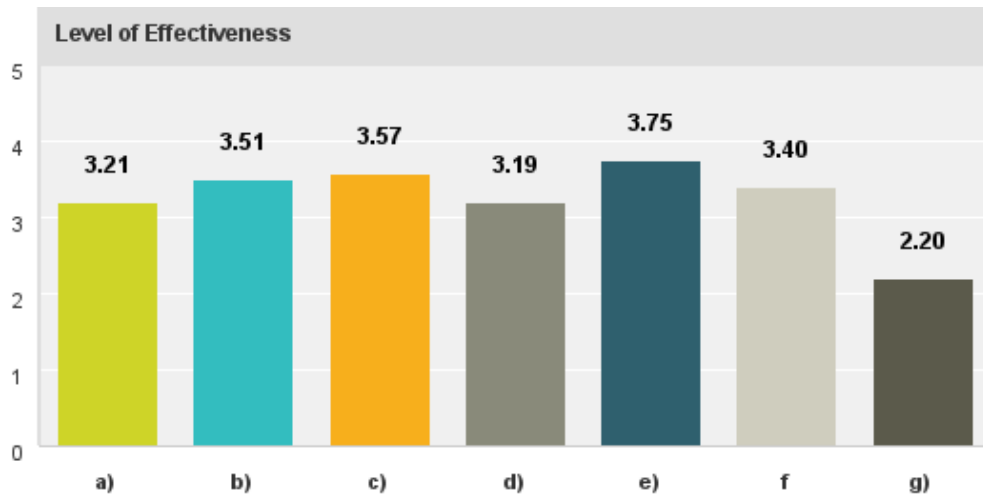
Q9: Non-Social Activities (Internal & Deliberate): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a)	Read regular newsletters of other units/departments to learn from their work practices
b)	Read internal books/magazines/circulars regularly to deliberately learn from the work practices of other organizations e.g. annual report, standard operating procedure
c)	Accessed SharePoint or similar collaborative/learning applications to learn from the work practices of other units/departments
d)	Participated in a benchmarking comparison survey inside your organization to deliberately learn from their work practices e.g. sales performance, studying good or smart practices
e)	Reviewed our organization’s database/knowledge bank of best practices of other units/departments
f)	Reviewed previous benchmarking projects our organization has undertaken to learn from the work practices of other units/departments

Figure 9 - Non-social dimension (Internal/deliberate)

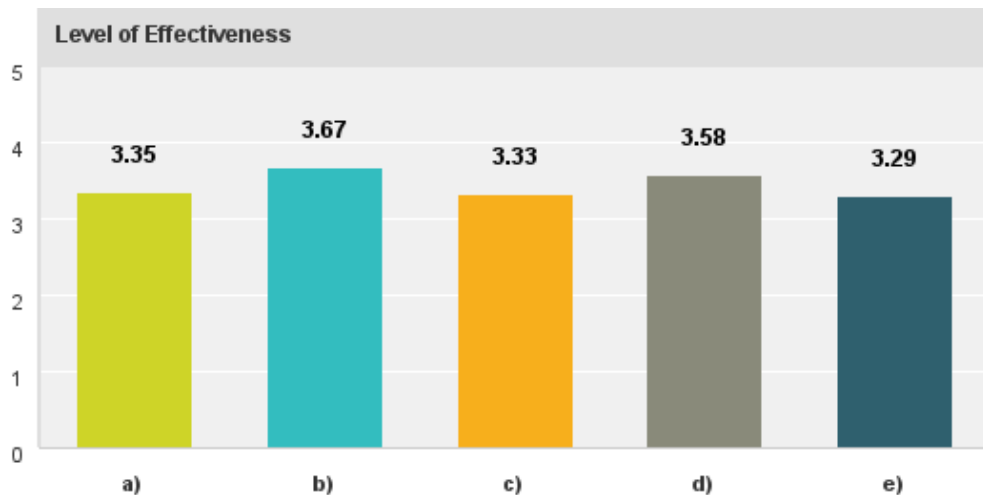
Q10: Non-Social Activities (External & Deliberate): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a)	Read regular newsletters of other organizations to learn from their work practices
b)	Read external books/magazine to deliberately learn from the work practices of other organizations
c)	Deliberately researched a topic on the internet to learn from the work practices of other organizations
d)	Accessed extranet or external websites of other organizations to learn from the work practices of other organizations
e)	Participated in a benchmarking comparison survey to deliberately learn from the work practices of other organizations e.g. competitors’ performance, studying good or smart practices
f)	Reviewed a database/knowledge bank of best practices of other organizations
g)	Reviewed previous benchmarking projects our organization has undertaken to learn from the work practices of other organizations

Figure 10 - Non-social dimension (external/deliberate)

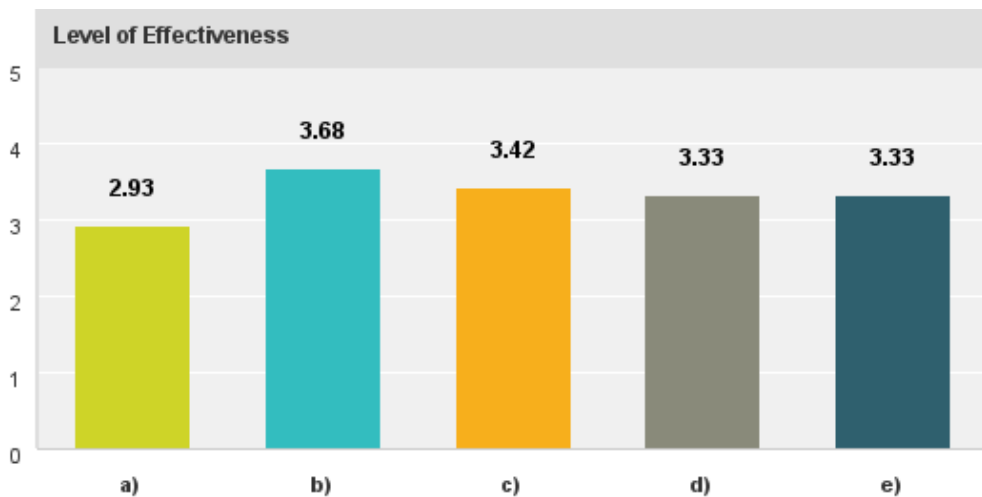
Q11: Non-Social Activities (Internal & Incidental): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a)	Read responses in an external electronic forum or social network and incidentally learnt from the work practices of other organizations
b)	Observed a critical incident of other units/departments that enabled you to learn from their work practices i.e. a situation or condition which made you question your own work practices
c)	Found information on SharePoint or other intranet applications which incidentally helped you to learn from the work practices of other units/departments
d)	Read internal books/magazines which incidentally helped you to learn from the work practices of other units/departments
e)	Read a random internal newsletter which incidentally helped you to learn from the work practices of other units/departments

Figure 11 - Non-social dimension (internal/incidental)

Q12: Non-Social Activities (External & Incidental): Considering the past 4 weeks only, have you been involved in any of the following activities that have enabled you to learn and/or improve your organization’s work practices? If "Yes", indicate its effectiveness



a)	Read responses in an external electronic forum or social network and incidentally learnt from the work practices of other organizations
b)	Observed a critical incident of other organizations that enabled you to learn from their work practices i.e. a situation or condition which made you question your own work practices
c)	Found information on extranet or external websites of other organizations which incidentally helped you to learn from their work practices
d)	Read external books/magazines which incidentally helped you to learn from the work practices of other organizations
e)	Read a random external newsletter which incidentally helped you to learn from the work practices of other organizations

Figure 12 - Non-social dimension (external/incidental)

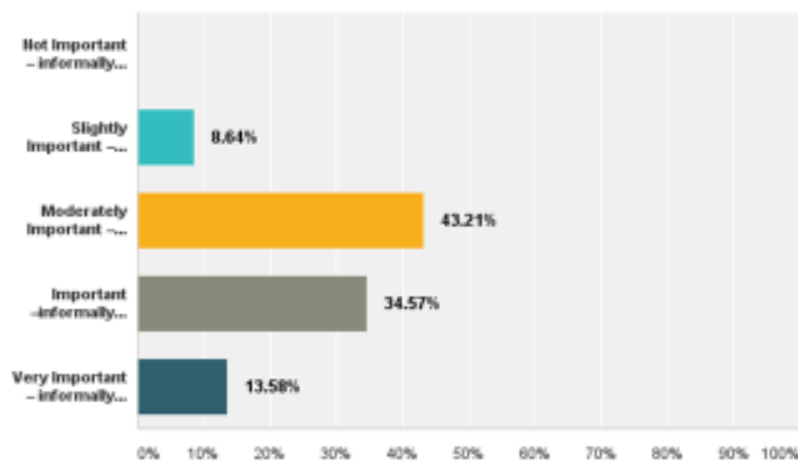
5. Maturity level of Organizations

The maturity level of organizations in learning informally from others to improve work practices is measured by 4 aspects - its level of importance, the culture within, management support and the level of impact it has on the organization. 39% of respondents have a high maturity level (rating of 4 or 5 out of a maximum of 5 points). 18% have a low maturity level (rating of 1 or 2 out of a maximum of 5 points). The majority or 43% of organizations have a moderate level of maturity (3 out of 5 points). The breakdown by the four aspects of maturity:

5.1 Importance

49% of respondents consider it important (35%) or very important (14%) to learn informally from others to improve own work practices. 9% consider it slightly important and none thinks it is unimportant at all. The majority (43%) consider this moderately important.

**Q18: What is the level of importance for informally learning work practices from other organizations in order to improve work practices in your organization?
Choose one of the following:**



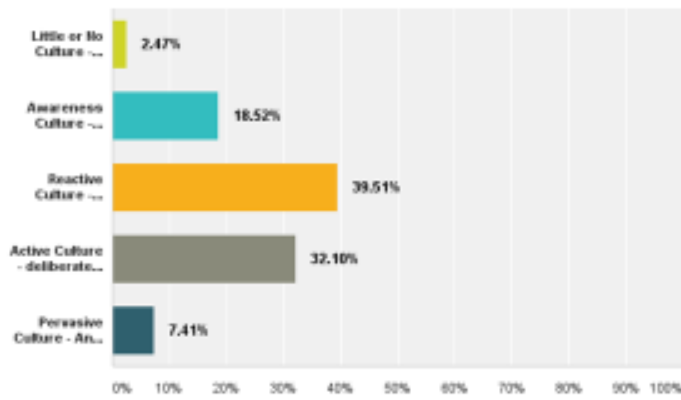
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Figure 13 - Maturity level (Importance)

5.2 Culture

39% of respondents have an active (32%) or pervasive (7%) culture in learning informally from others to improve work practices in their organization. 21% have an awareness (19%) or no (2%) culture at all. The rest are reactive (40%) in this respect.

Q19: What is the culture of informally learning from others to improve work practices in your organization? Choose one of the following:



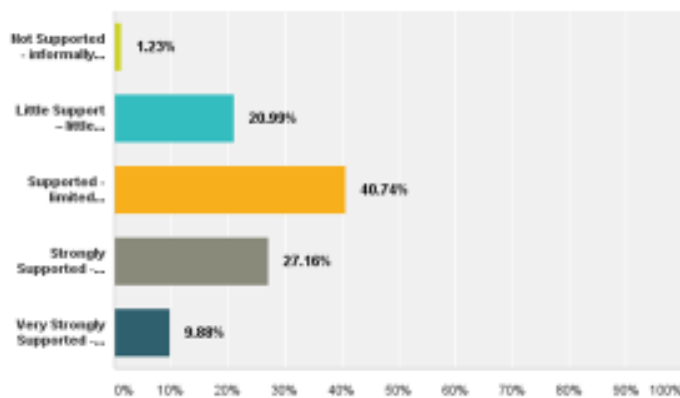
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Figure 14 - Maturity level (Culture)

5.3 Support from Management

37% of respondents have strong (27%) or very strong (10%) support from management for informally learning from others to improve their own work practice. 22% have little (21%) or no support (1%) from management. The rest (41%) have moderate support from management in this respect.

Q20: What is the level of support from management for informally learning from others to improve work practices in your organization? Choose one of the following:



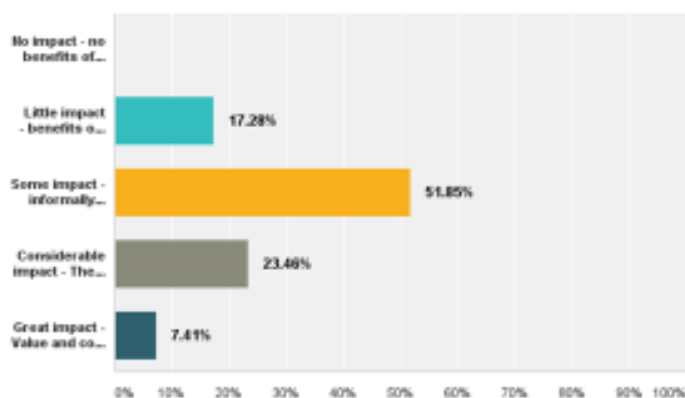
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Figure 15 - Maturity level (Support from Management)

5.4 Impact on own Organization

30% of respondents think that informally learning from others to improve own work practices have considerable (23%) or great (7%) impact in the organization. 17% think there is little impact and none think there was no impact. The majority (52%) think there is moderate impact on the organization.

Q21: What is the impact of informally learning from others to improve work practices in your organization? Choose one of the following:



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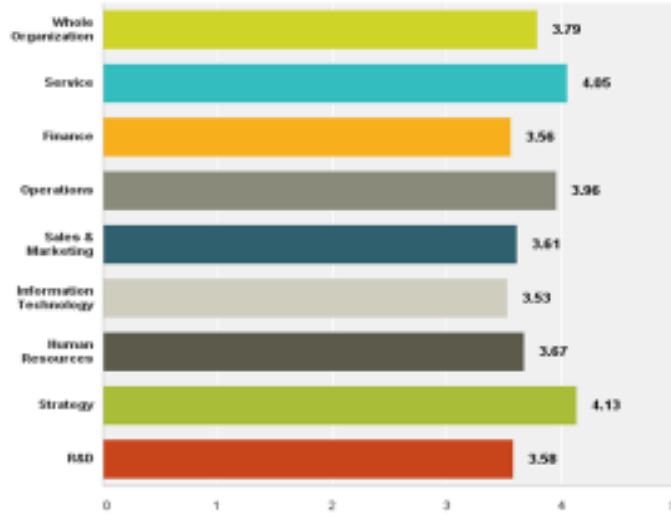
Figure 16 - Maturity level (Impact)

6. Importance of Benchmarking

Benchmarking is an important activity in organizations as a whole with a score of 3.8 out of a maximum for 5 points. The most benchmarked functions are strategy, services and operations, scoring an average of 4.1 points.

In terms of formal benchmarking i.e. following a structured process, organizations scored 3.5 out of a maximum of 5 points, indicating the importance of a formal process. However, the slightly lower score suggests the formal process itself is relatively less important than the rationale for starting a benchmarking project. The most important functions to follow a formal process of benchmarking are also strategy, services and operations, scoring an average of 3.7 points. This suggests a strong correlation between the rationale and process (formal) of benchmarking.

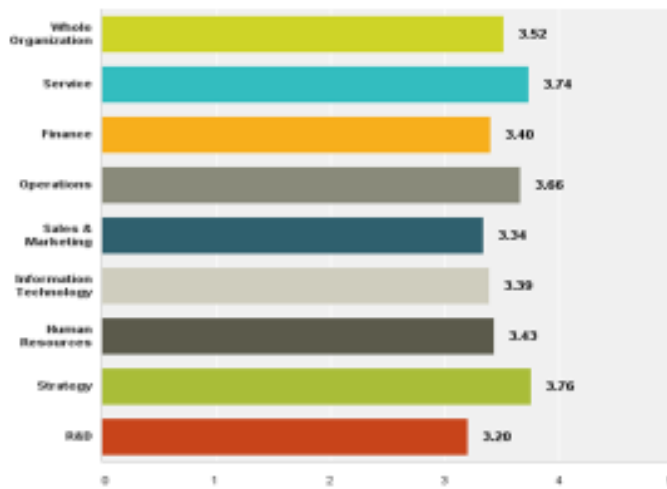
Q13: How important is it for your organization to compare the performance levels of a process/activity with other organizations ? Indicate the level of importance for the functional areas you are familiar with.



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Figure 17 - Importance of comparing performance

Q14: How important is it for your organization to follow a structured process for comparing performance levels with other organizations and adapt/implement those better practices? Indicate the level of importance for the functional areas you are familiar with.



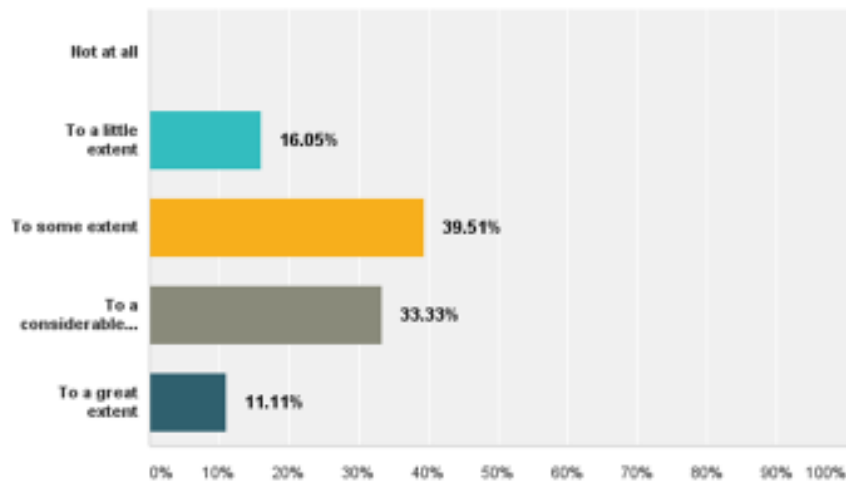
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Figure 18 - Importance of a structured process in implementing best practices

7. Learning and implementation of Best Practices

44% of respondents think their organizations readily learn best practices to a considerable (33%) or great (11%) extent. 16% think there is little extent to such learning. None thinks there is no learning. The majority (40%) think such learning take place to some extent.

Q15: To what extent are better practices or processes readily learnt in your organization?

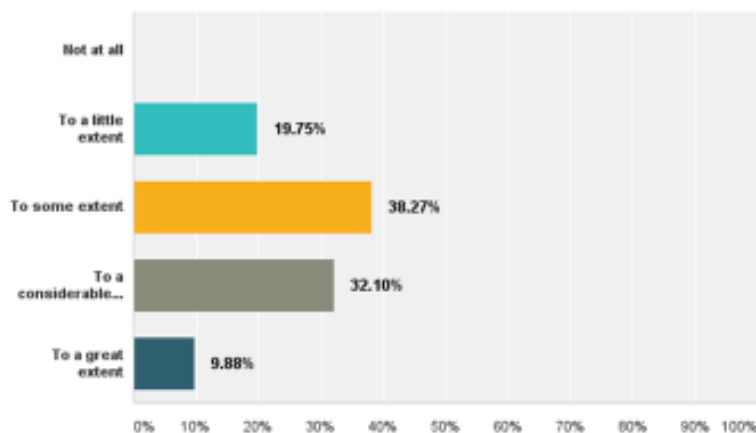


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Figure 19 - Learning of best practices

In terms of implementation, 42% of respondents think their organizations readily implement best practices to a considerable (32%) or great (10%) extent. 20% think there is little extent of implementation. None thinks there is no implementation. The majority (38%) think the learning of best practices take place to only some extent. The results suggest there is a strong correlation between the learning and implementation of best practices.

Q16: To what extent are better practices or processes readily implemented in your organization?



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Figure 20 - Implementation of best practices

8. Usefulness of Study

38% of respondents think that this research is useful to a considerable (29%) or great (9%) extent. 18% think the study is useful to a little extent (14%) or not at all (4%). The majority (44%) think the study is useful to some extent.

9. Conclusion

The most effective informal benchmarking tools are from the social dimension where learning of work practices are taking place by interacting with others within or outside the organization.

The top 5 of 62 tools/activities are organized site visits, meeting face-to-face with an external supplier, attachment to other units/departments, taking part in external best-practice sharing event/activity, and meeting face-to-face with an internal customer. Organizations generally have a moderate to high level of maturity in **informal benchmarking**. Organizations also do consider **formal benchmarking** a highly important activity. Notwithstanding, the process of formal benchmarking i.e. its approach, is not as important as the rationale or purpose for benchmarking itself. This suggests organizations are open to other avenues of benchmarking i.e. informal benchmarking or otherwise.