

# Report showing the findings from a global survey on business improvement and benchmarking



**2008**

A Centre for Organisational Excellence Research report written on behalf of the Global Benchmarking Network



## INTRODUCTION

In today's world of fierce competition customers continually demand higher quality at lower prices and in a shorter time. To meet this demand organisations have adopted different tools, techniques and strategies in order to improve their operational performance and strategic position.

The Global Benchmarking Network (GBN), [www.globalbenchmarking.org](http://www.globalbenchmarking.org), a leading benchmarking network representing over 20 countries, instigated research to:

- identify the status of business improvement tool use worldwide
- find out how organizations were using benchmarking, and the benefits obtained.

This report shows in graphical format the responses received. *A more detailed report will follow in the coming months with a full analysis and commentary of the results.*

In total 454 responses were received from 44 countries. The data was collected from May to September 2008.

The report is structured into the following sections:

- **Key Findings and Implications**
- **What is Benchmarking**
- **Survey Responses**
  1. Organisation Profile
  2. Use of Improvement Tools
  3. General Questions on Benchmarking
  4. Best Practice Benchmarking Projects - Planning
  5. Best Practice Benchmarking Projects - Research and Analysis
  6. Best Practice Benchmarking Projects - Implementation
  7. Best Practice Benchmarking Projects – Evaluation
- **Appendix A – Definitions of Improvement Tools**
- **Appendix B - Global Benchmarking Network members**

Thank you to all participants for your valuable input.



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Chairman – Global Benchmarking Network  
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The Centre for Organisational Excellence Research, [www.coer.org.nz](http://www.coer.org.nz), undertook the research on behalf of the Global Benchmarking Network. Special thanks to Ahmed Abbas of COER for his research contribution.

## KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

- Mission and Vision Statements and Customer (Client) Surveys are the most used (by 77% of organizations) of 20 improvement tools, followed by Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (72%), and Informal Benchmarking (68%). Performance Benchmarking was used by (49%) and Best Practice Benchmarking by (39%).
- The tools that are likely to increase in popularity the most over the next three years are Performance Benchmarking, Informal Benchmarking, Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, and Best Practice Benchmarking. Over 60% of organizations that were not currently using these tools indicated they were likely to use them in the next three years.
- All 20 improvement tools were considered to be effective with between 59-80% of respondents indicating they had moderate to major beneficial effects. The tools with the highest rating were Quality Management System (80% indicating a moderate or high effect), followed by Improvement Teams and Customer (Client) Surveys (both 77%). Between 65-67% of respondents identified the different types of benchmarking as having a moderate to high effect.
- Benchmarking probably did not rate as highly for effectiveness as some other tools due to these reasons:
  - 25% of respondents that used benchmarking had not been trained in benchmarking and another 30% of respondents indicated that “only a few of the employees had received training or that training was rarely given”.
  - 30% of respondents that used benchmarking do not follow a particular benchmarking methodology when conducting benchmarking projects.
  - 25% of respondents do not follow (or rarely follow) a benchmarking code of conduct when undertaking a benchmarking project.
  - 30% of respondents “do not, rarely, or sometimes” develop a project brief for their benchmarking project specifying the aim, scope, sponsor, and members of the benchmarking team – thus indicating poor project planning.
  - Only 30% of respondents indicated that over 60% of their projects resulted in implementing best practices within their organisation. Therefore many organisations are either not identifying best practices through benchmarking or they are not implementing the best practices they find.
  - 35% of respondents do not (or rarely) undertake a cost and benefits analysis of the project once it is completed.
- Some respondents reported significant benefits from benchmarking. 20% reported an average financial return of over US\$250,000 per project.
- The main benefits of benchmarking, in order of importance, were reported as: improved performance of processes, learnt what other organizations are doing, and major strategic issues addressed.
- The factors that were reported as most important for benchmarking success were: support of top management, understanding of own processes, clear project objectives, and linking of project objectives to strategic objectives.
- The most popular methods for collecting benchmarking data and best practice information were: searching websites (used by 59% of respondents on most or all benchmarking projects), literature searches (used by 52%), and site visits/meetings with benchmarking partners (used by 51%).
- Of those organizations that do some type of benchmarking, approximately 20% regularly collect, review and act on benchmark data that covers the full spectrum of their activities (including employee, financial, process, product and service and customer data).

- The most popular areas to conduct benchmarking projects are in customer service (15% of projects were in this area in the last three years), administration, training and human resources (14%), and corporate strategy and planning (12%).
- Of those organisations that undertake benchmarking projects usually 2-5 projects per year were undertaken (53% of responses). Most benchmarking projects are conducted in less than 4 months (65% of responses) and a typical benchmarking team consists of 1-4 people (61% of responses)

### **Implications of these findings**

These findings were discussed with members of the Global Benchmarking Network. The GBN interprets the findings as follows:

*"The study shows that benchmarking is a popular improvement tool which is increasing in popularity. In particular, the use of the internet is facilitating a high use of Informal Benchmarking – therefore paving the way for organizations to quickly obtain good ideas, best practices or network with other organizations. Formal Benchmarking methods such as Performance Benchmarking and Best Practice Benchmarking require more effort and time to use but offer larger gains. Increasingly organizations are seeing the value of both Informal and Formal Benchmarking as a means to meet the rising demands of customers and other stakeholders, and to remain competitive in markets that are now open to global competition.*

*The prime benefit of benchmarking is improved process performance. Benefits can be substantial from both a financial and non-financial perspective. However, worryingly, there are a sizeable proportion of organizations (approximately 30%) that are using Best Practice Benchmarking and not obtaining the full benefits. This appears to be because many organizations have not been trained in benchmarking, do not follow a proven benchmarking methodology or use a benchmarking code of conduct, and are not using standard project management practices to manage their benchmarking projects. In these circumstances it is not surprising they are not obtaining the full benefits.*

*The GBN recognizes it needs to encourage more people to be trained in benchmarking and that this training is delivered to a high standard. For other improvement tools like Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard, Quality Management Systems (ISO9000), or Business Excellence there are, in most countries, many training providers and comprehensive training programmes. However, this is not the case for benchmarking. Whilst interest in benchmarking has continued to rise the number of training providers has remained small. This is partly due to organisations not recognising the need for formal training.*

*To conduct benchmarking effectively requires a wide variety of research and project management skills within a project team. Through training these skills can be developed. In addition, an experienced trainer will be able to provide advice, tools and resources to assist with benchmarking projects.*

*If your organisation, wants to know more about benchmarking and/or be trained in benchmarking we advise that you speak to your country's GBN representative. In addition, we encourage you to participate in the GBN's Annual Benchmarking Conference (27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> October 2009, Bahrain, [www.bestpracticeconference.com](http://www.bestpracticeconference.com)) which provides a broad understanding of benchmarking and our Benchmarking Roadshows (early November 2009, India) designed to help people understand and practice how to do benchmarking well.*

*For contact details of your GBN representative refer to Appendix B."*

## WHAT IS BENCHMARKING?

The survey used the following definitions of benchmarking.

Firstly, there is “**Informal Benchmarking**”. This is a type of benchmarking that most of us do unconsciously at work and in our home life. We constantly compare and learn from the behaviour and practices of others – whether it is how to use a software program, how to cook a better meal, or play our favourite sport. In the context of work, most learning from informal benchmarking comes from the following:

- Talking to work colleagues and learning from their experience (coffee breaks and team meetings are a great place to network and learn from others)
- Consulting with experts (for example, business consultants who have experience of implementing a particular process or activity in many business environments)
- Networking with other people from other organisations at conferences, seminars, and Internet forums.
- On-line databases/web sites and publications that share benchmarking information provide quick and easy ways to learn of best practices and benchmarks.

Secondly, there is “**Formal Benchmarking**” of which there are two types – Performance Benchmarking and Best Practice Benchmarking.

**Performance benchmarking describes the comparison of performance data obtained from studying similar processes or activities.** Comparisons of performance may be undertaken between companies – or internally within an organisation. It is useful for identifying strengths and opportunities for improvement. Performance benchmarking may involve the comparison of financial measures (such as expenditure, cost of labour, cost of buildings/equipment, cost of energy, adherence to budget, cash flow, revenue collected) or non-financial measures (such as absenteeism, staff turnover, the percentage of administrative staff to front-line staff, budget processing time, complaints, environmental impact or call centre performance).

Most people equate benchmarking to performance benchmarking. This is unfortunate, because performance benchmarking on its own is of limited use. Too often performance benchmarking data is collected (often at significant cost) and no further action is taken after the data has been obtained. Whilst performance benchmarking enables a performance gap to be identified, it does not provide the idea, best practice or solution as to how performance can be improved and the gap closed.

**Best Practice Benchmarking describes the comparison of performance data obtained from studying similar processes or activities and identifying, adapting, and implementing the practices that produced the best performance results.** Best practice benchmarking is the most powerful type of benchmarking. It is used for “learning from the experience of others” and achieving breakthrough improvements in performance. Best practice benchmarking focuses on “Action” – i.e. doing something with the comparison data and learning why other organisations are achieving higher levels of performance. Best practice benchmarking projects typically take from 2 to 4 months to identify best practices. The practices then need to be adapted and implemented. The time taken for the whole project varies dependent on the project’s scope, importance, and resources used. Projects are usually resource intensive (in terms of the project team’s time) and so care needs to be taken that they focus on issues of high strategic importance that will deliver major bottom-line benefits.

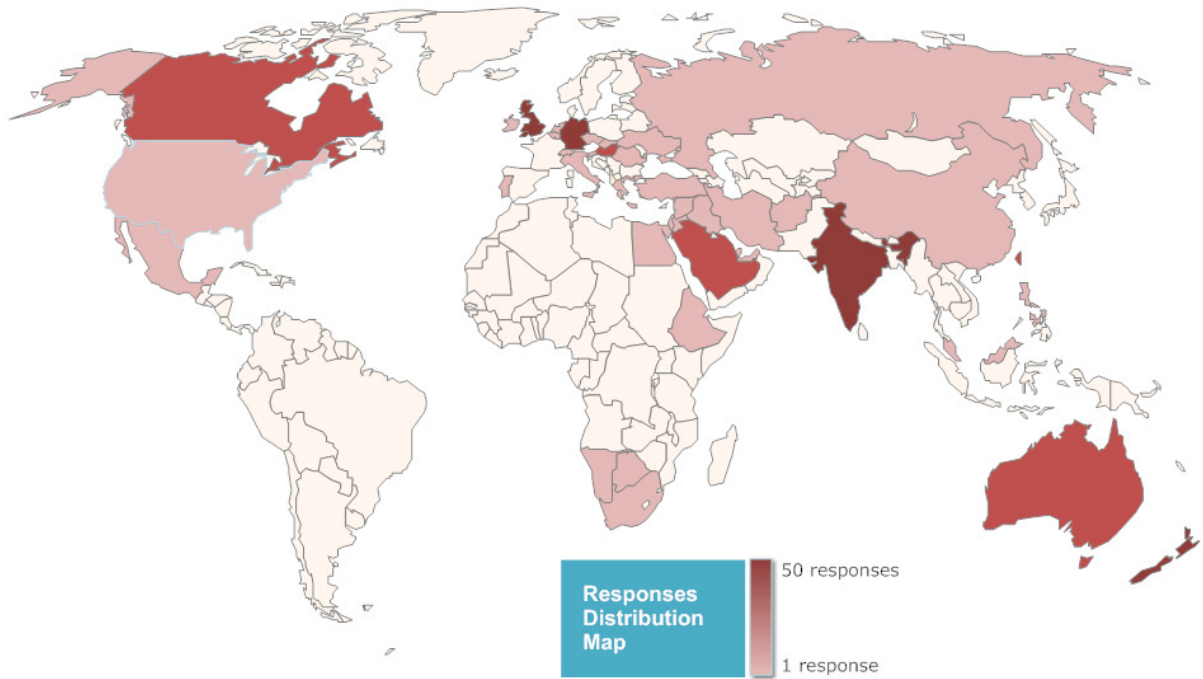
### Other types of benchmarking

There are many other types of benchmarking such as internal, external, competitive, strategic, and product benchmarking. However, all these types can be undertaken informally or formally and are therefore subsets of Informal and Formal Benchmarking.

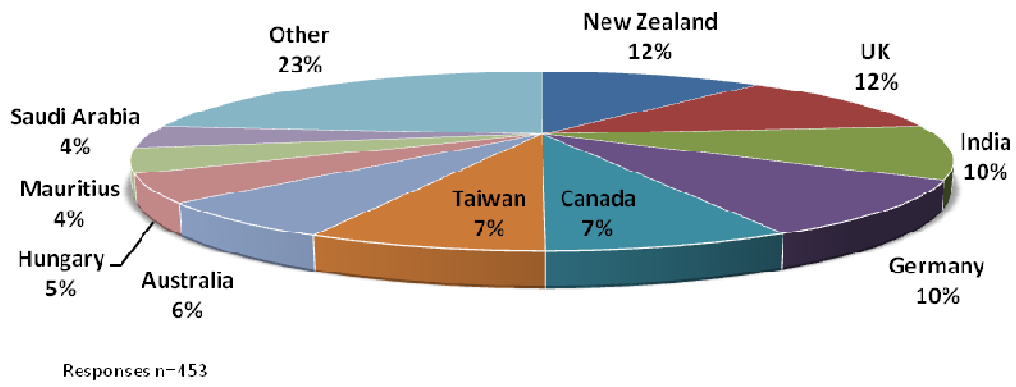
## SURVEY RESPONSES

### 1: ORGANISATION PROFILE

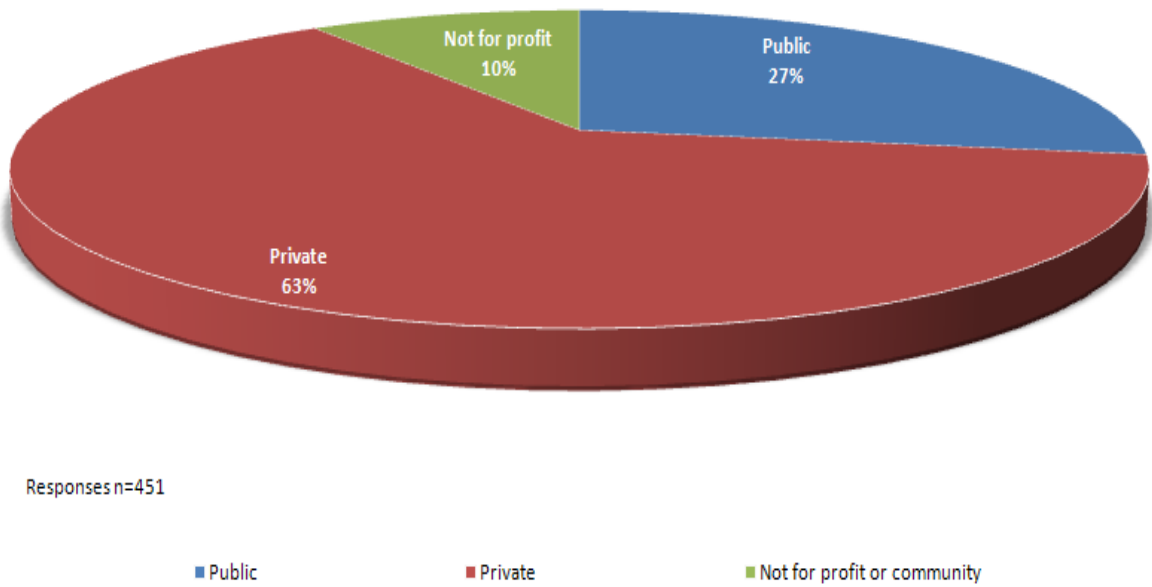
#### Q1.1: Response Distribution



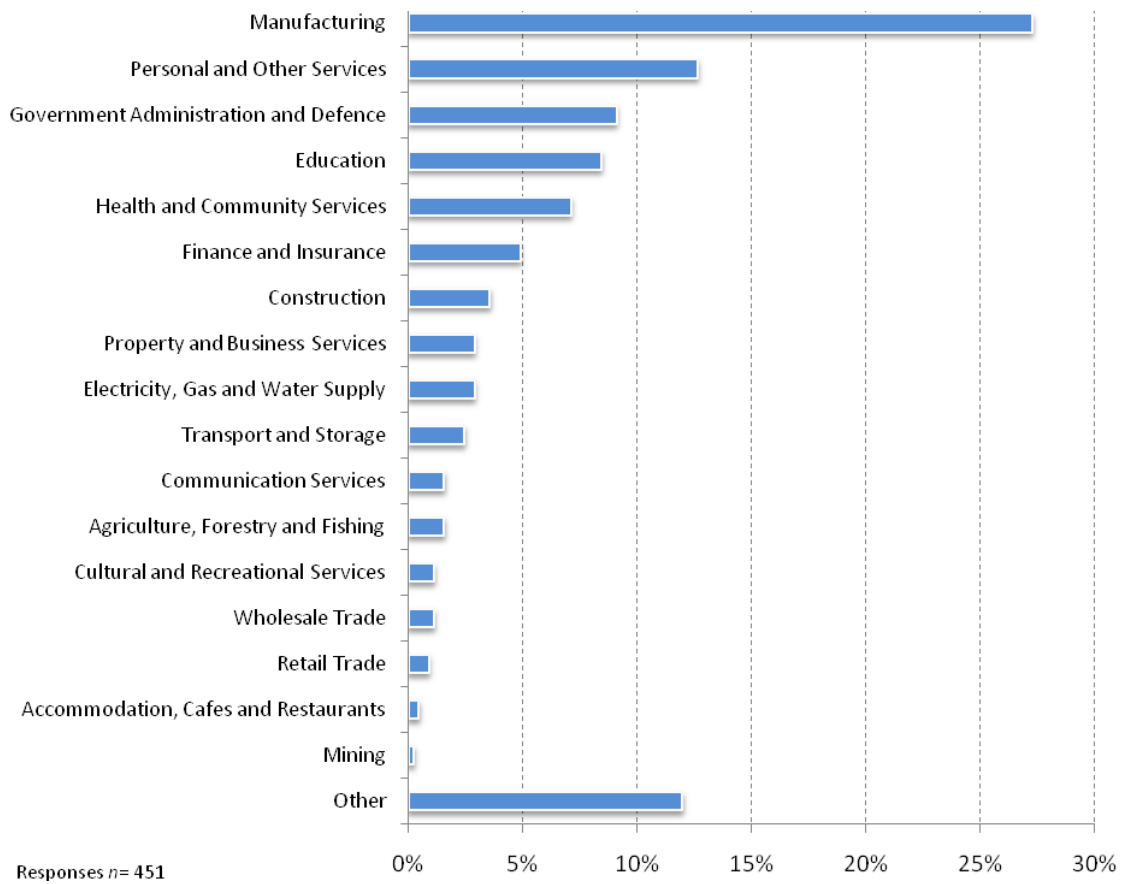
**Responses Distribution (Country)**



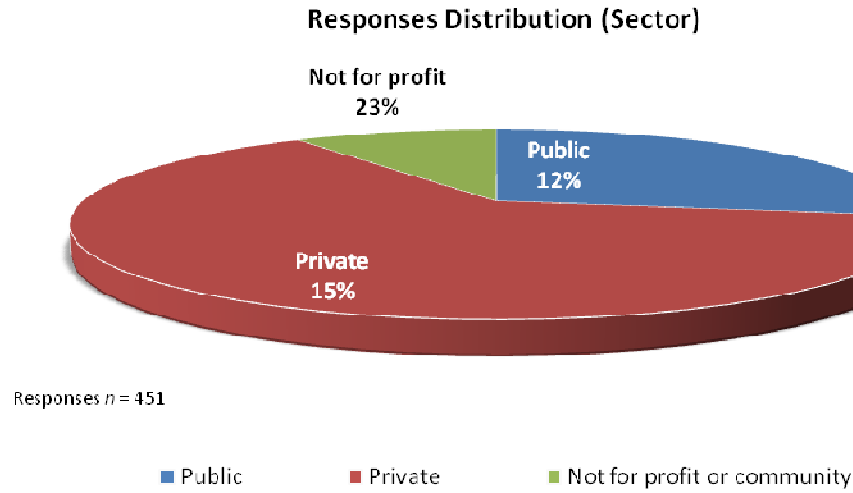
**Responses Distribution (Sector)**



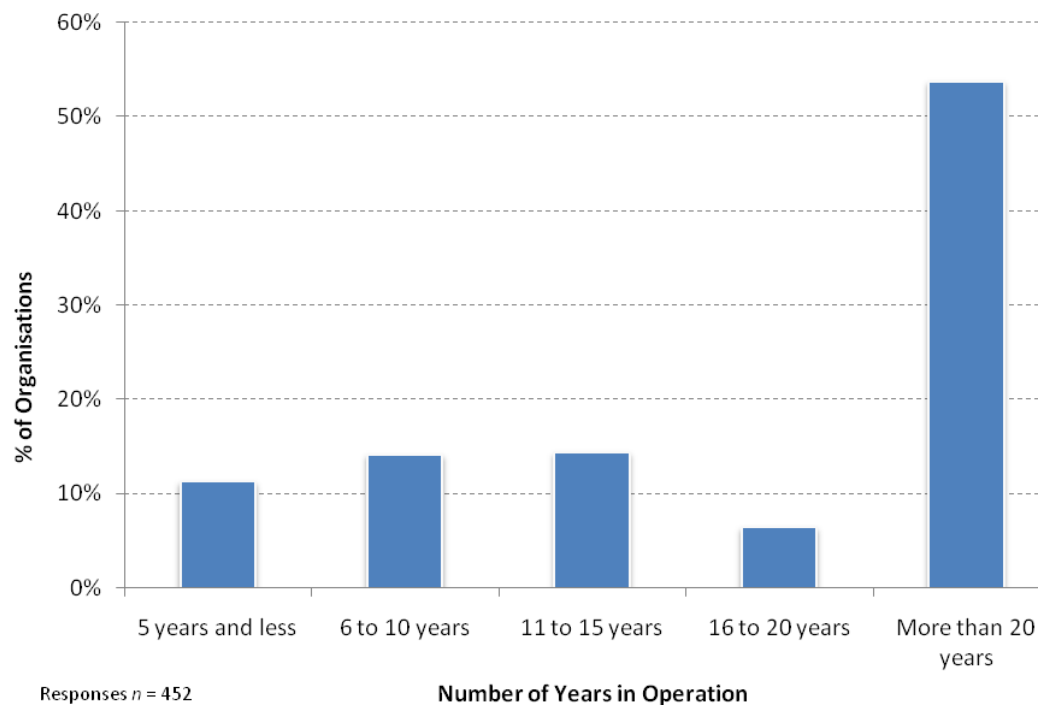
**Q1.2 What is your organisation's major business activity?**



### Q1.3 Within which sector does your organisation operate?



### Q1.4 For how many years has your organisation been operating?

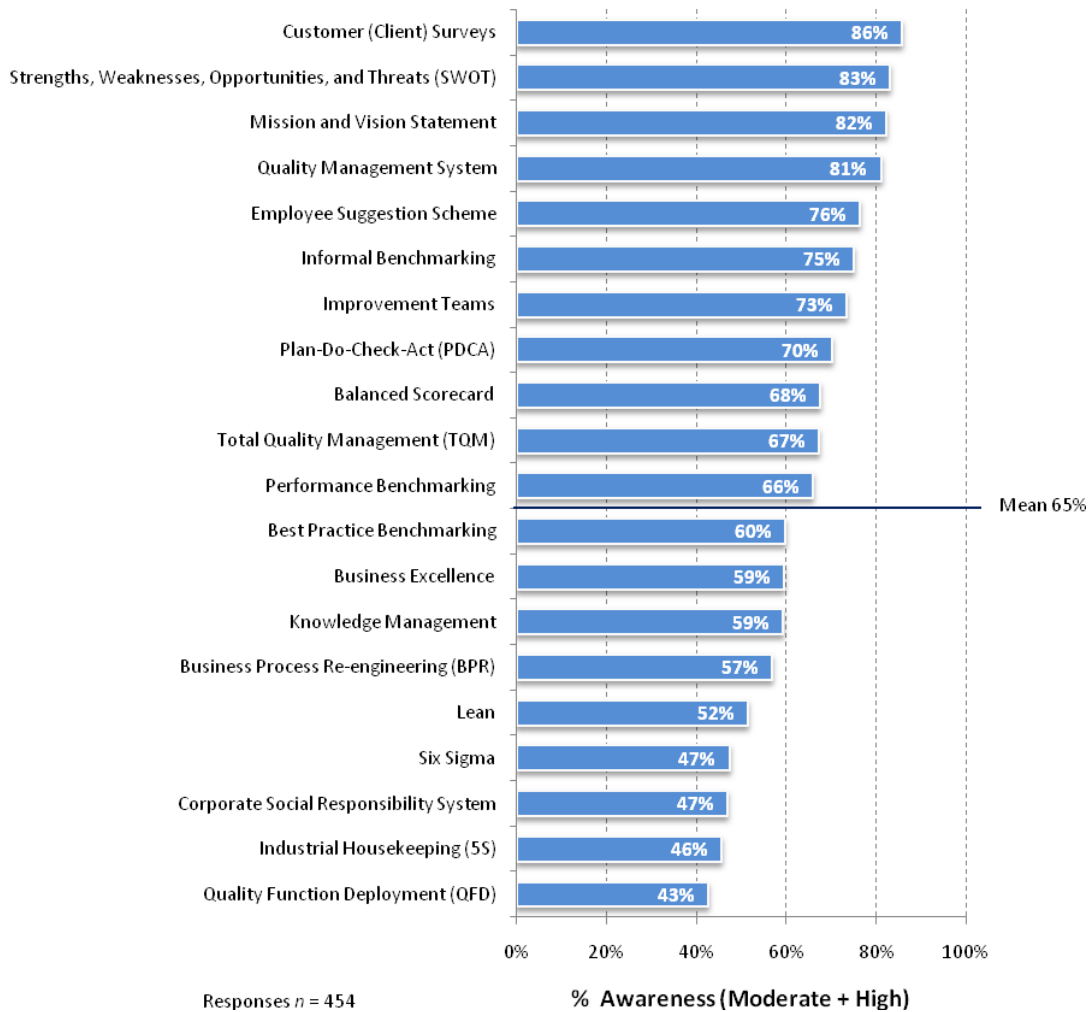


## 2: USE OF IMPROVEMENT TOOLS

### 2.1 Improvement tools

a) Level of awareness - Rate your understanding of each tool as zero, minor, moderate, or high?\*

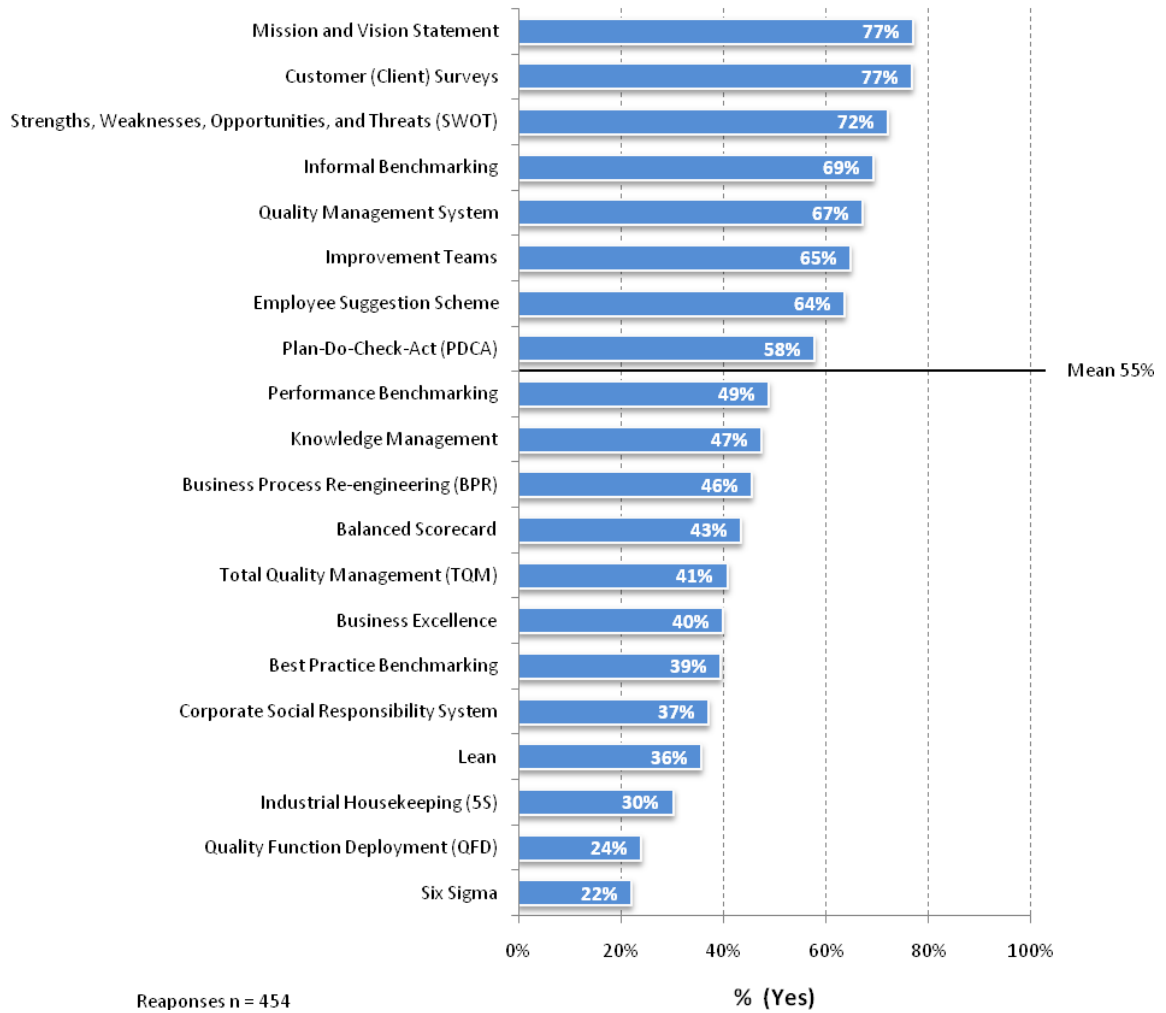
**Awareness of Improvement Techniques - Worldwide**



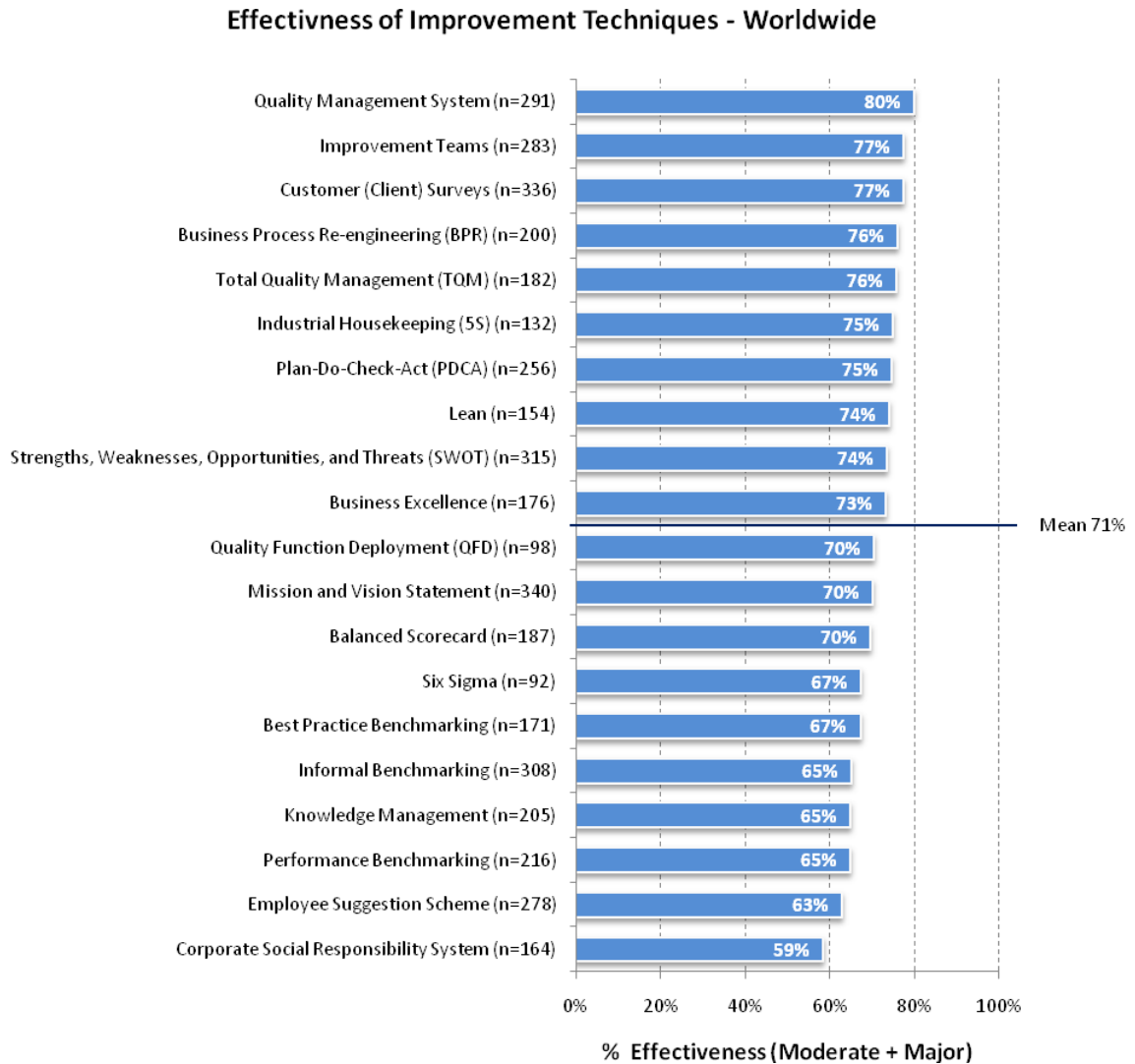
\* % showing those that indicated moderate or high awareness.

Currently, is this tool used in your organisation?

Current Use of Improvement Techniques - Worldwide



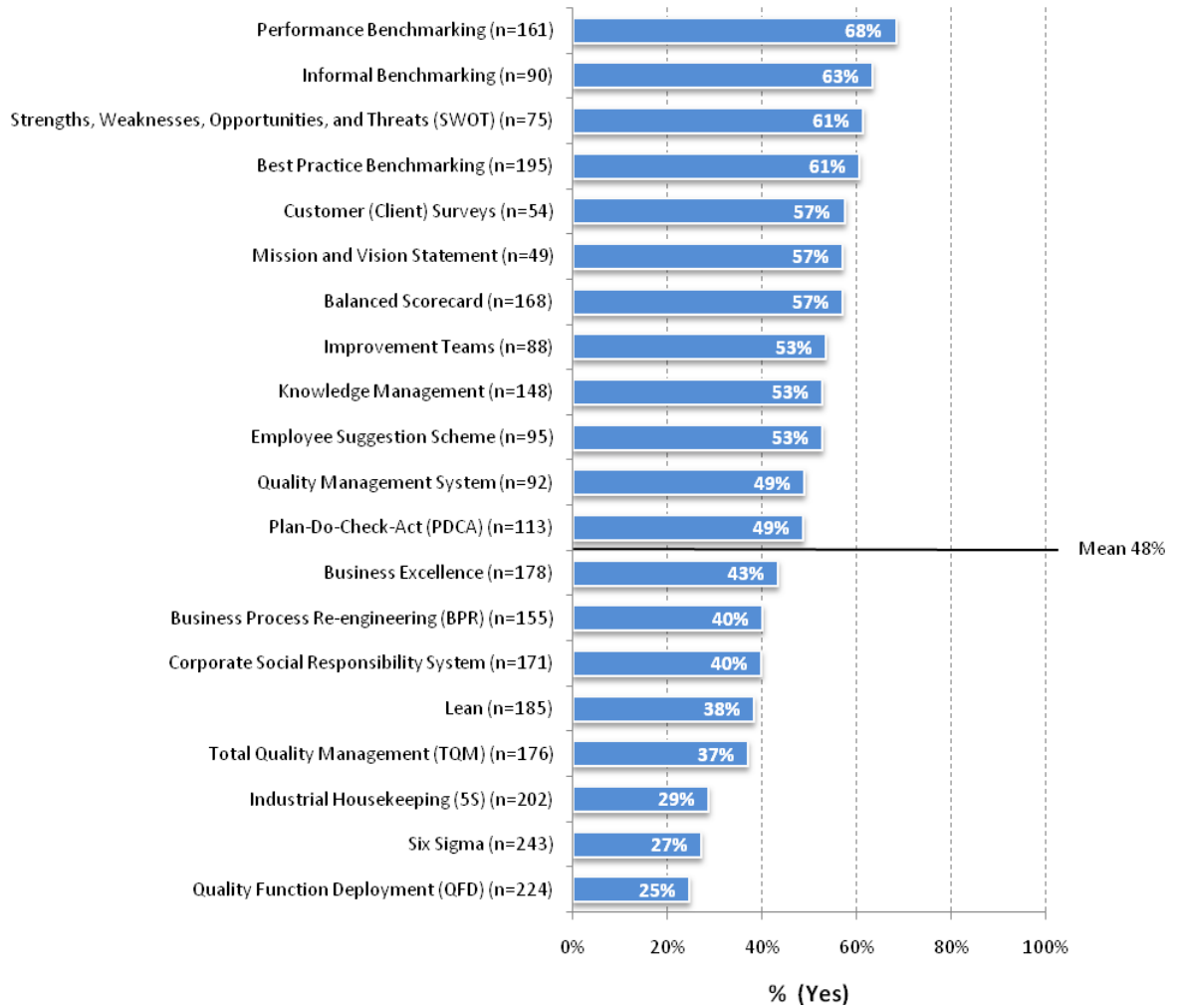
**b) How effective has this tool been in improving performance in your organisation? (Don't know, no effect, minor, moderate, major)\***



\* % showing those that indicated moderate or major effectiveness.

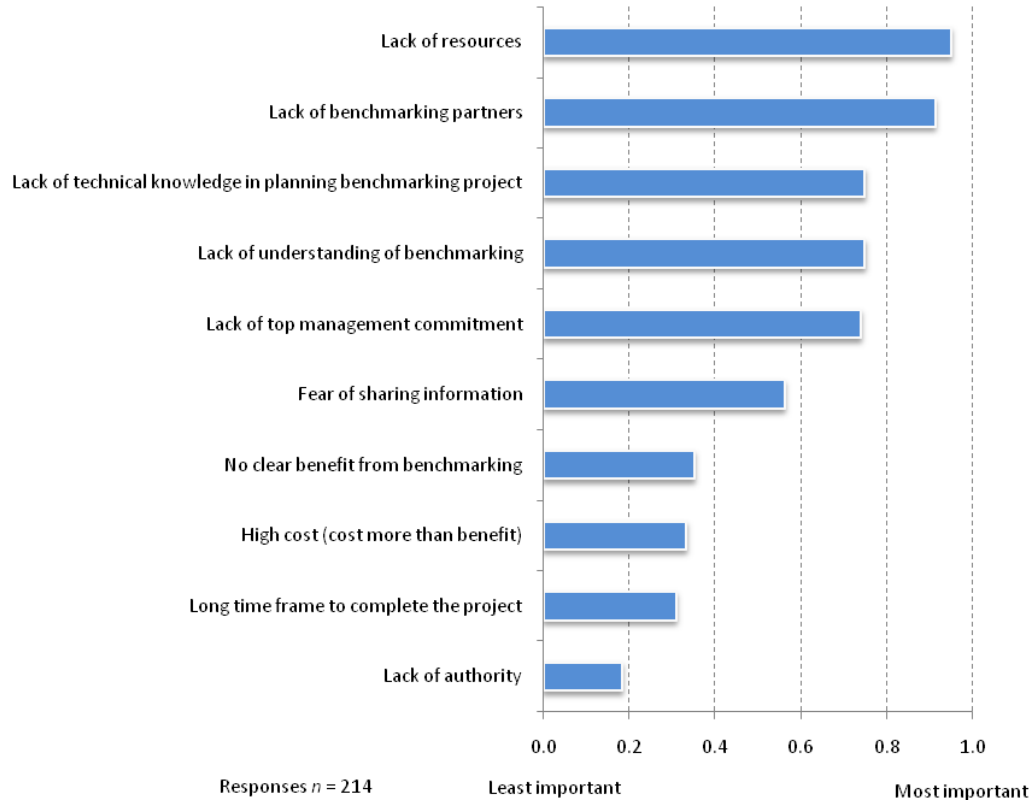
**Do you expect to use this tool in the next 3 years?** *(answered by organizations that don't currently use the tool)*

**Future Use of Improvement Techniques - Worldwide**



**Q2.2 What are the main reasons for not using performance benchmarking or best practice benchmarking within your organisation?\***

**Main Reasons for not using performance benchmarking or best practice benchmarking**

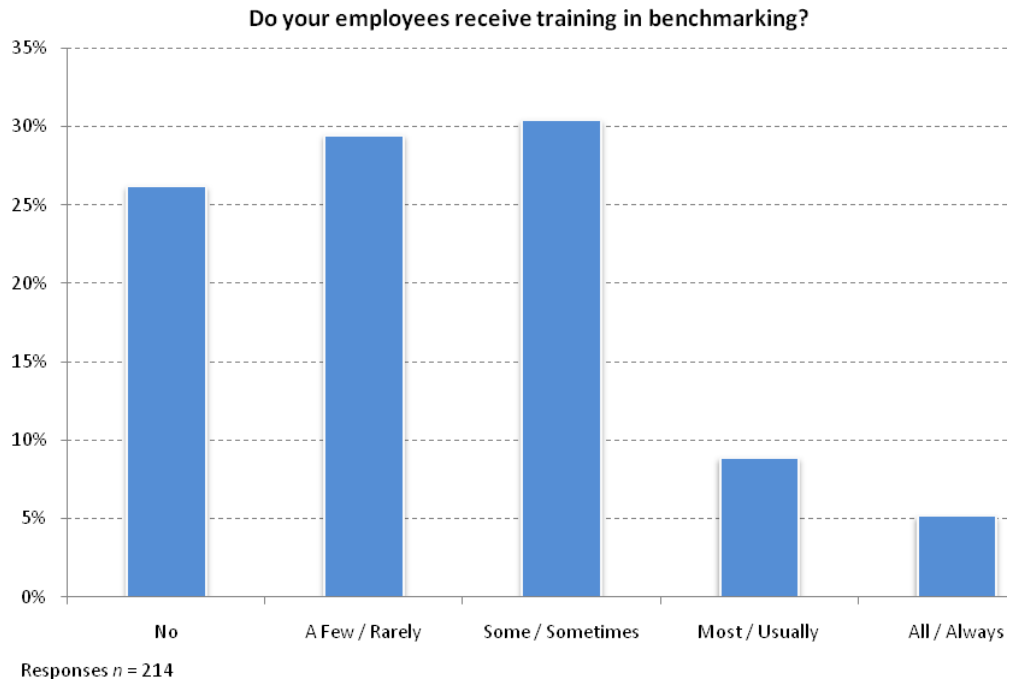


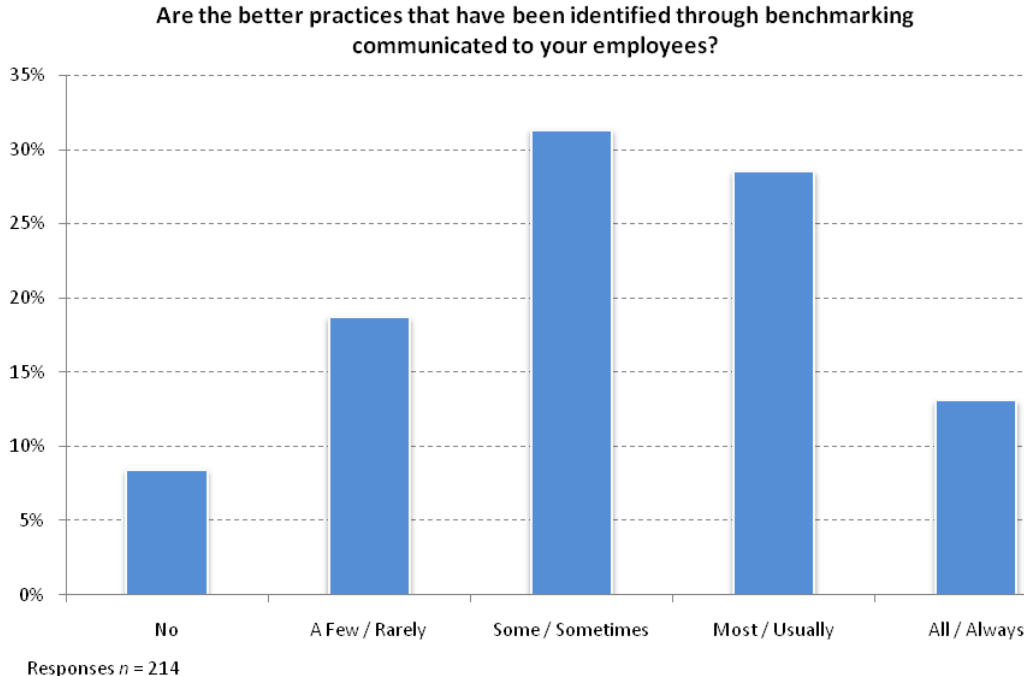
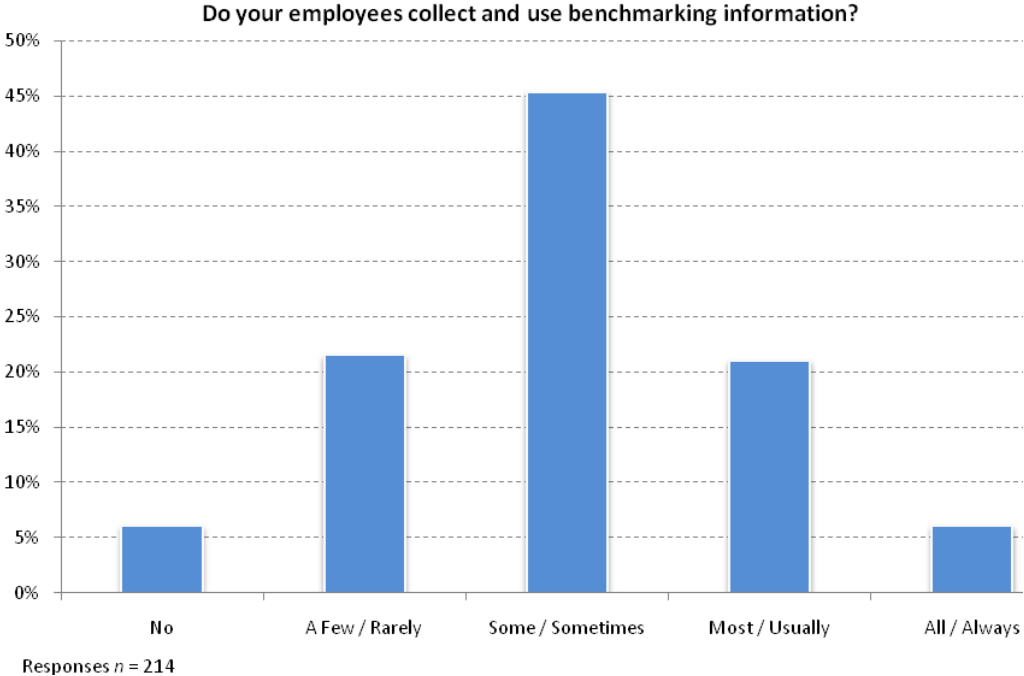
\* This question was only answered by respondents that did not use Performance or Best Practice Benchmarking. The respondents were asked to rank the three main reasons for not using Performance Benchmarking or Best Practice benchmarking in order of importance. Those that were of most importance scored three points, 2<sup>nd</sup> most important scored two points and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important scored one point. The average score for each response was then calculated.

### 3: GENERAL QUESTIONS ON BENCHMARKING

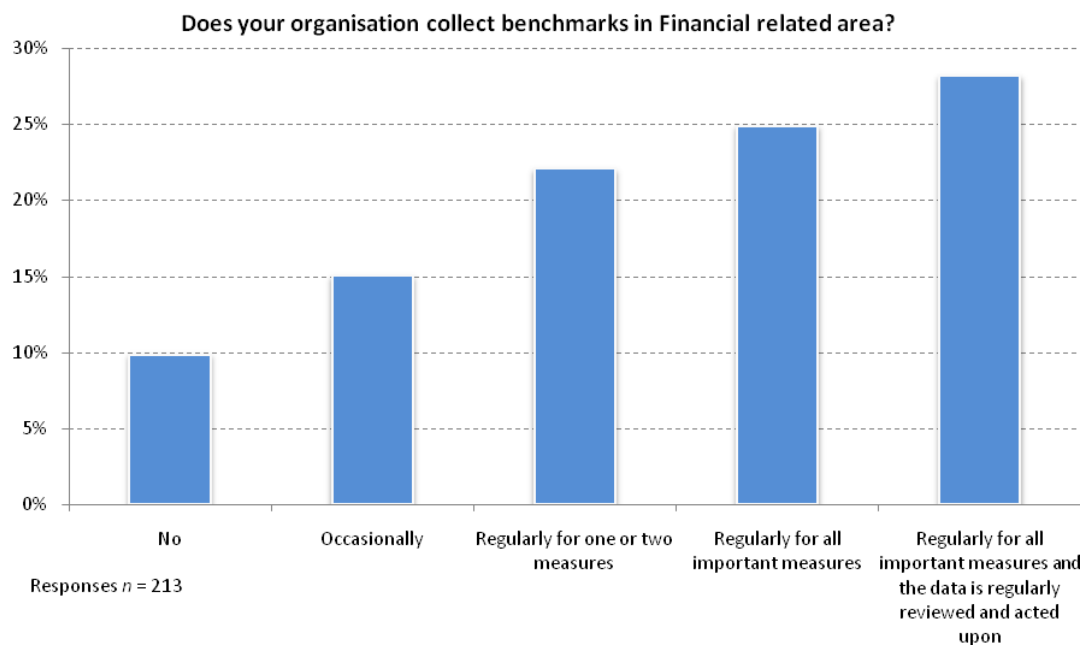
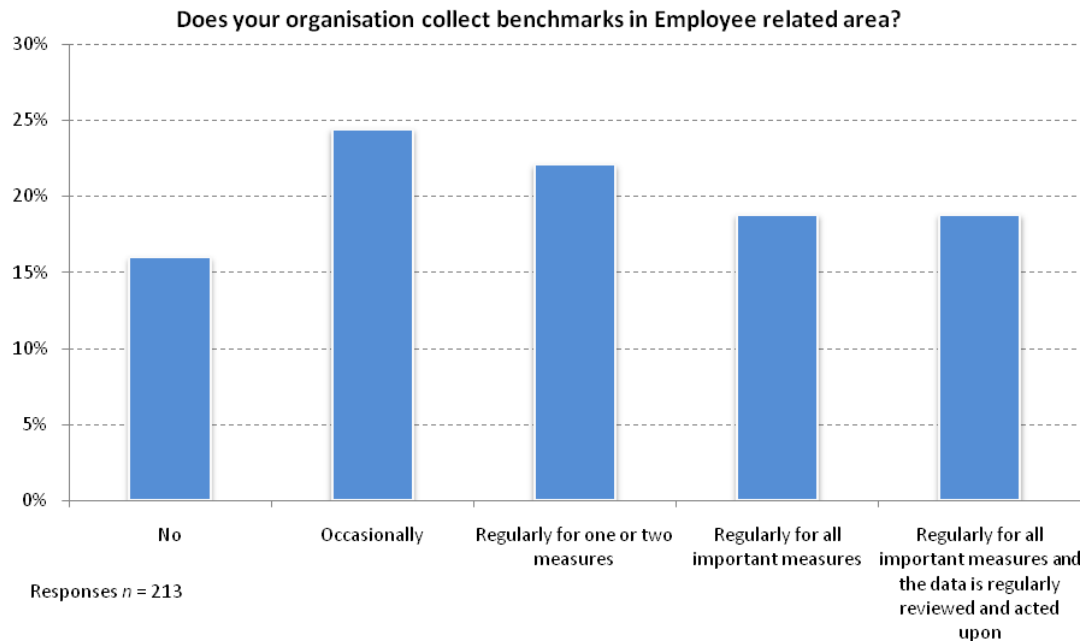
*(Only respondents that indicated they used Performance or Best Practice Benchmarking completed this section).*

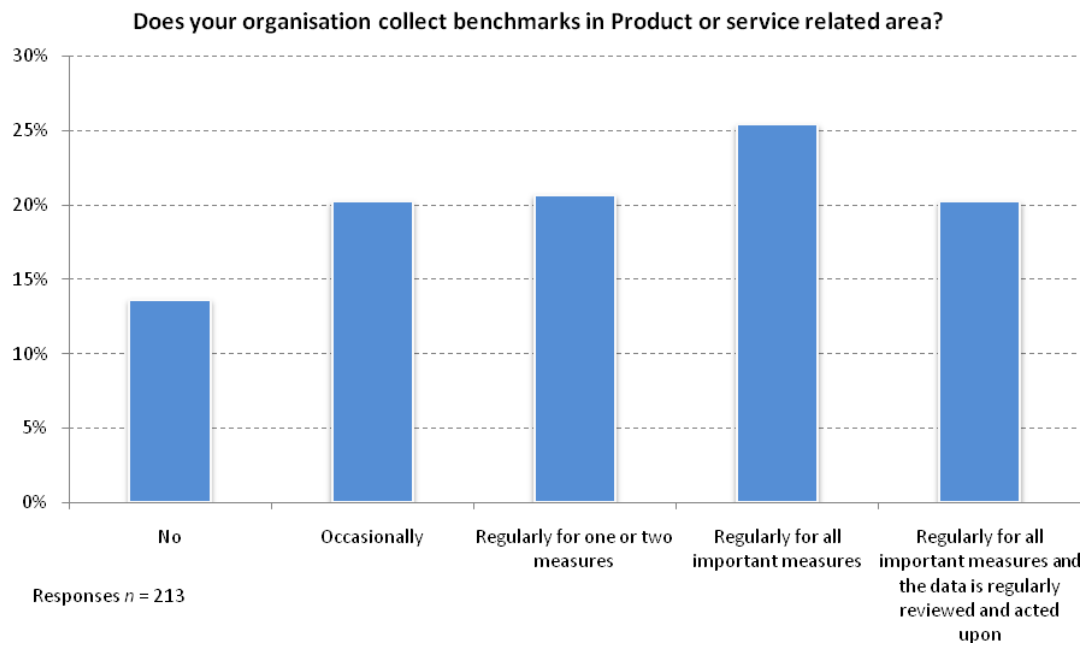
**Q3.1 For the following, select one response to each question.**

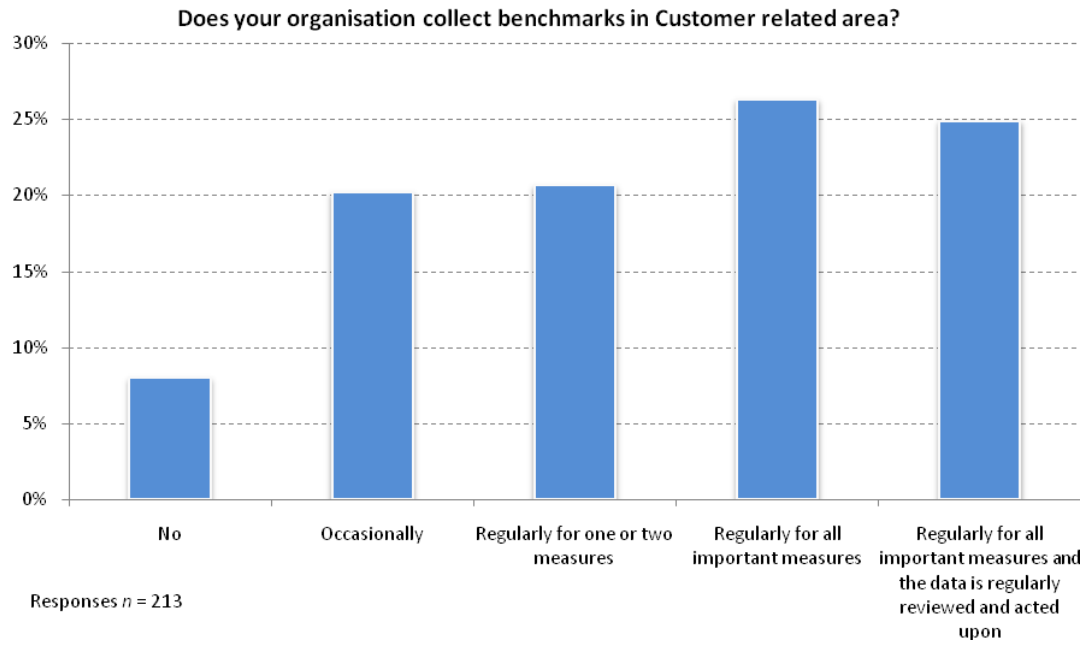




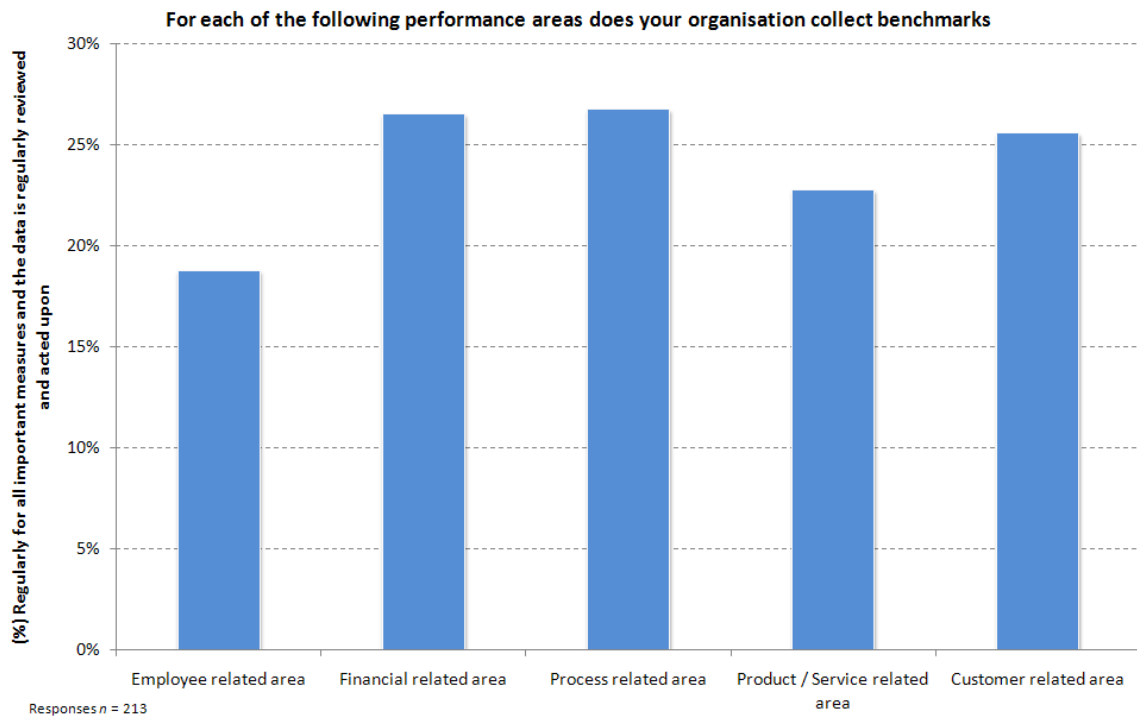
**Q3.2 For each of the following performance areas does your organisation collect benchmarks (performance comparison data on other companies)?**



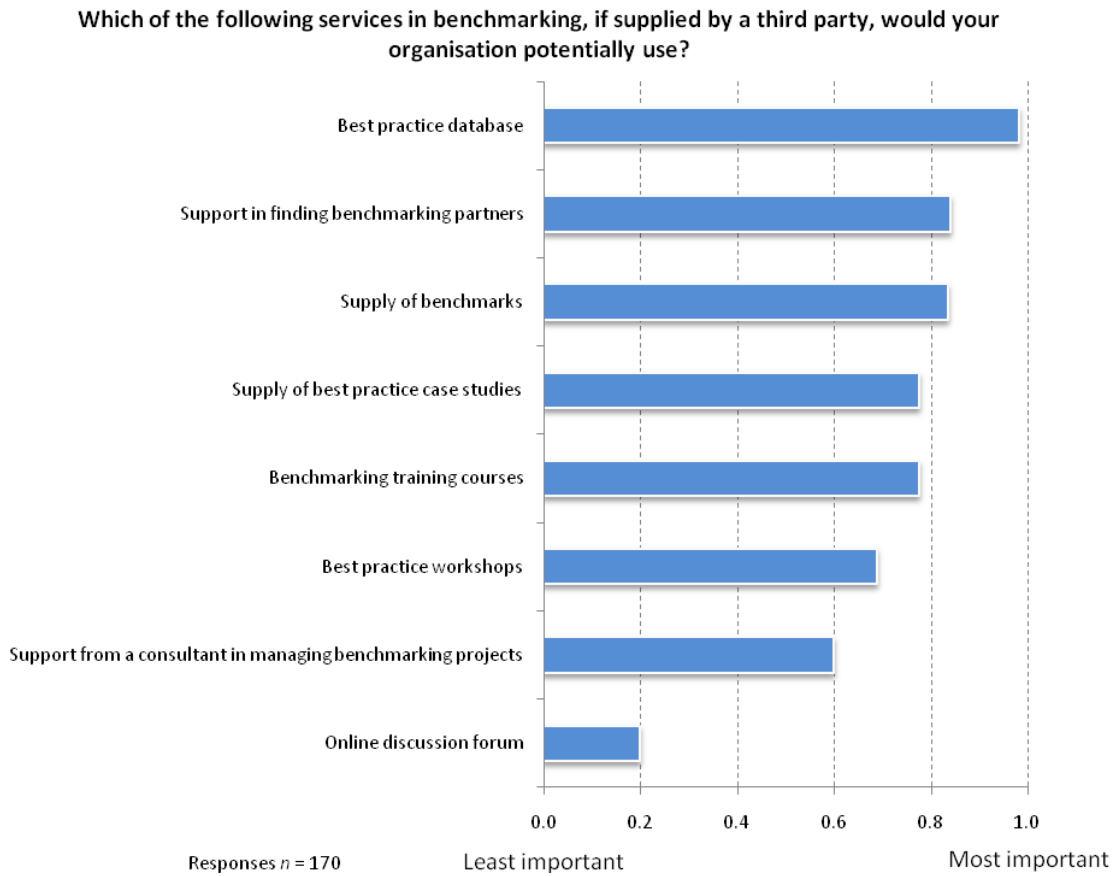




### Summary chart

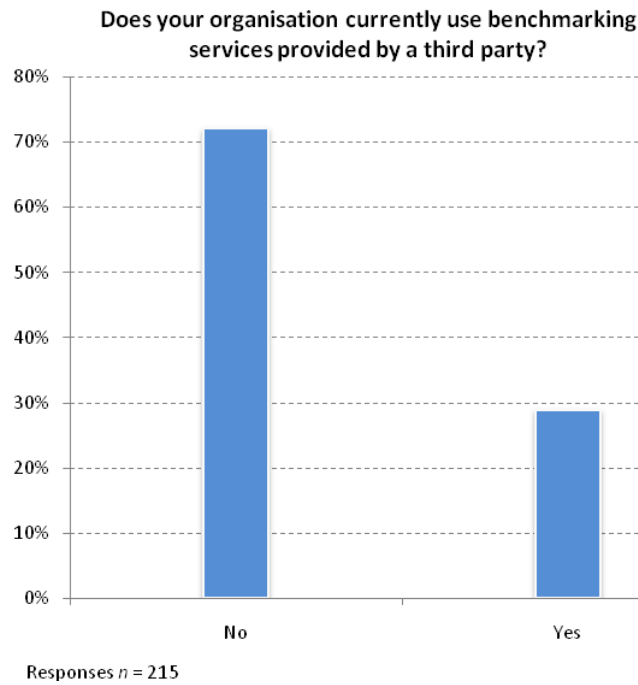


**Q3.3 Which of the following services in benchmarking, if supplied by a third party (an external organisation), would your organisation potentially use?\***

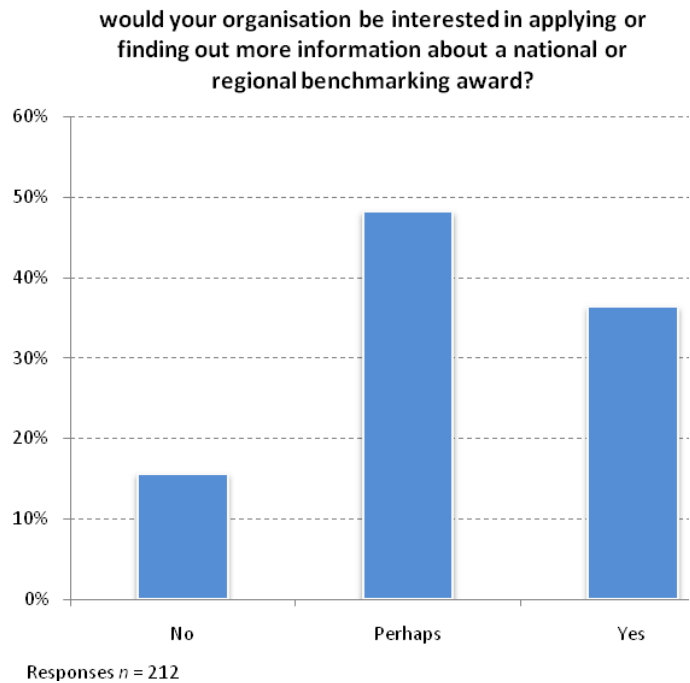


\* The respondents were asked to rank up to three services provided by an external organisation that they were most likely to use in order of importance. Those that were of most importance scored three points, 2<sup>nd</sup> most important scored two points and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important scored one point. The average score for each response was then calculated.

**Q3.4 Does your organisation currently use benchmarking services provided by a third party?**



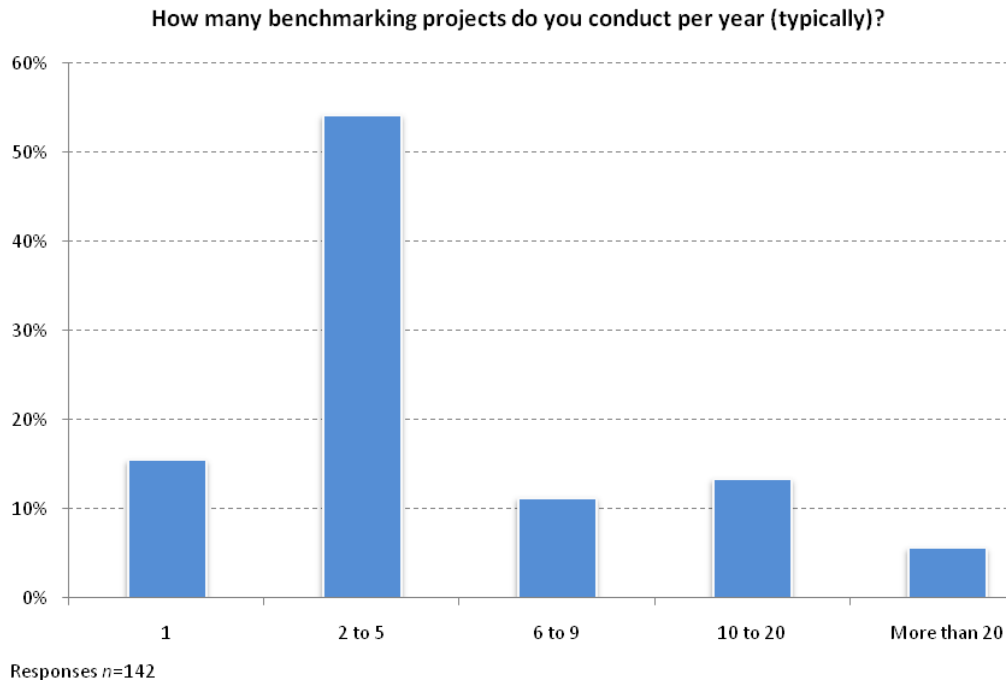
**Q3.5 If there was a national or regional benchmarking award to encourage organisations to undertake benchmarking projects would your organisation be interested in applying or finding out more information about it?**



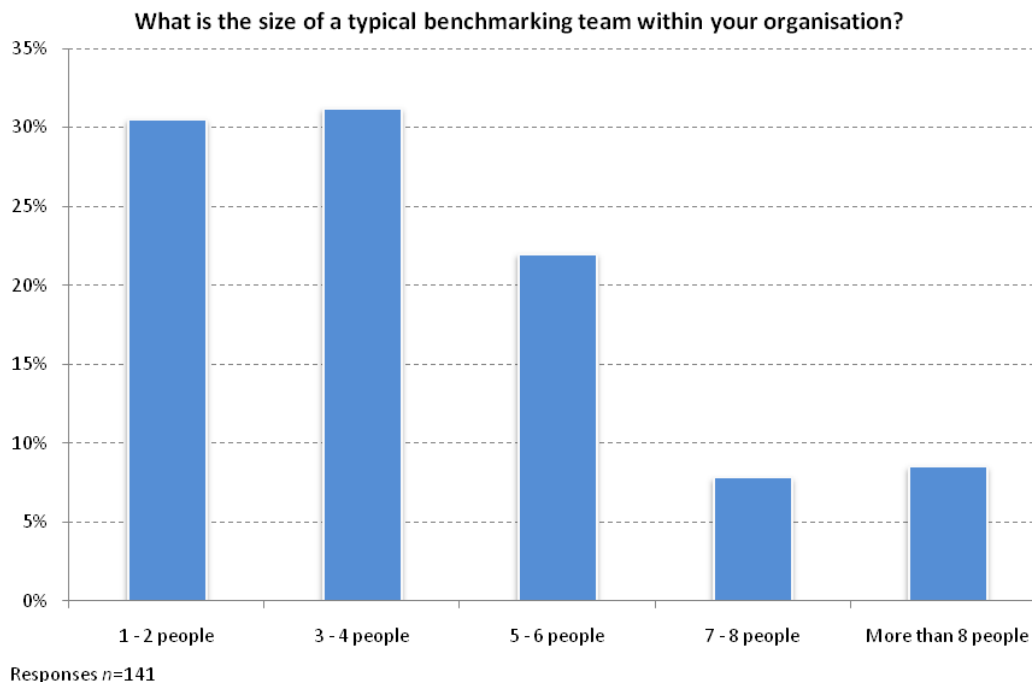
#### 4: BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARKING PROJECTS - PLANNING

*(Only respondents that indicated they used Best Practice Benchmarking completed this section).*

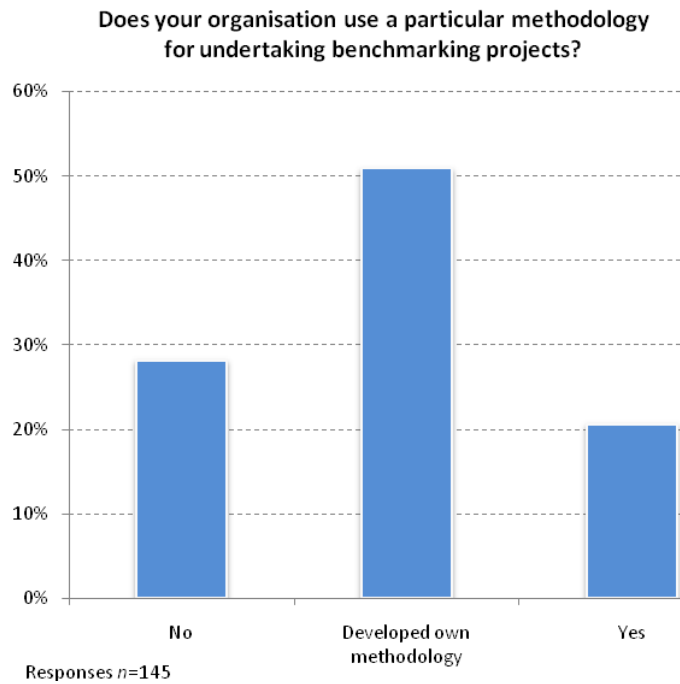
##### Q4.1 How many benchmarking projects do you conduct per year (typically)?



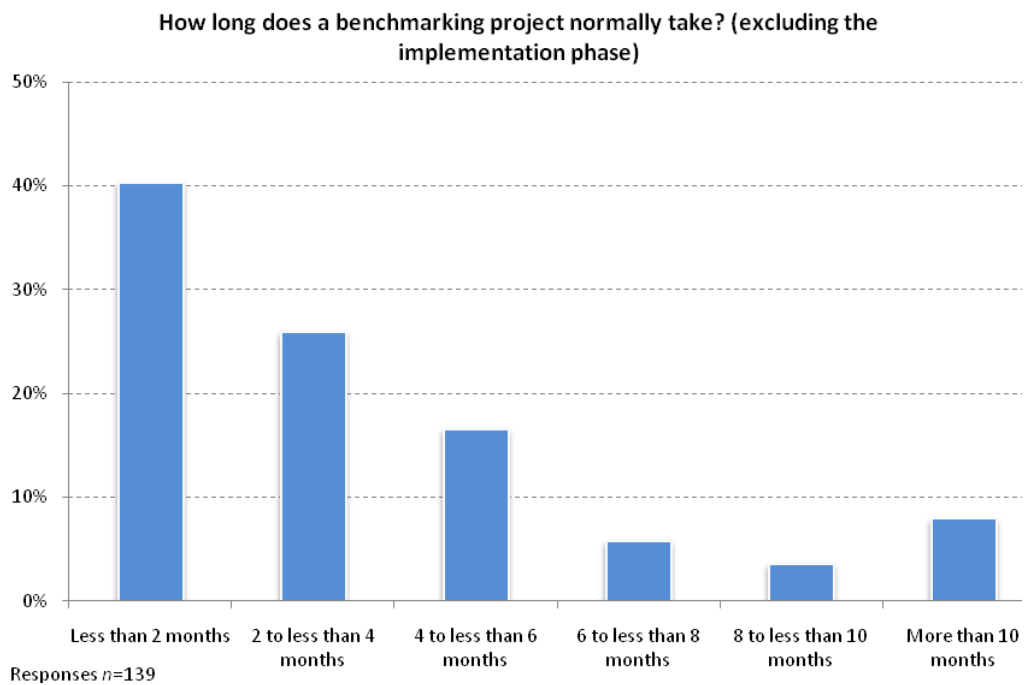
##### Q4.2 What is the size of a typical benchmarking team within your organisation?



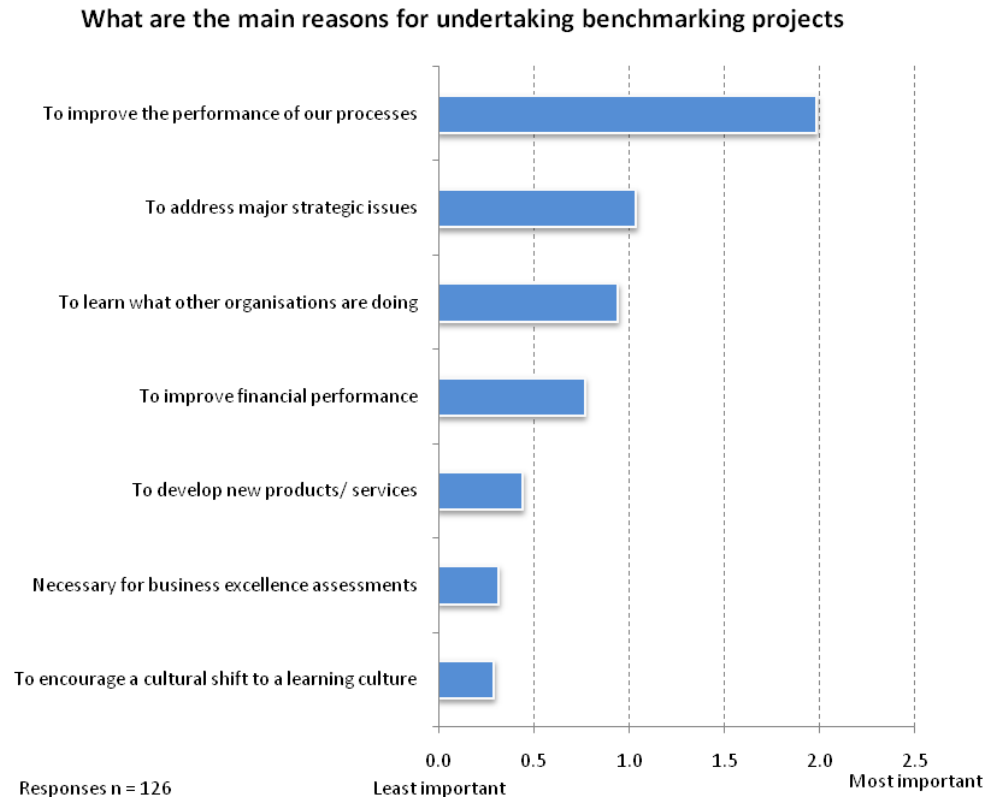
### Q4.3 Does your organisation use a particular methodology for undertaking benchmarking projects?



### Q4.4 How long does a benchmarking project normally take? (excluding the implementation phase - therefore excluding the implementation of best practices)

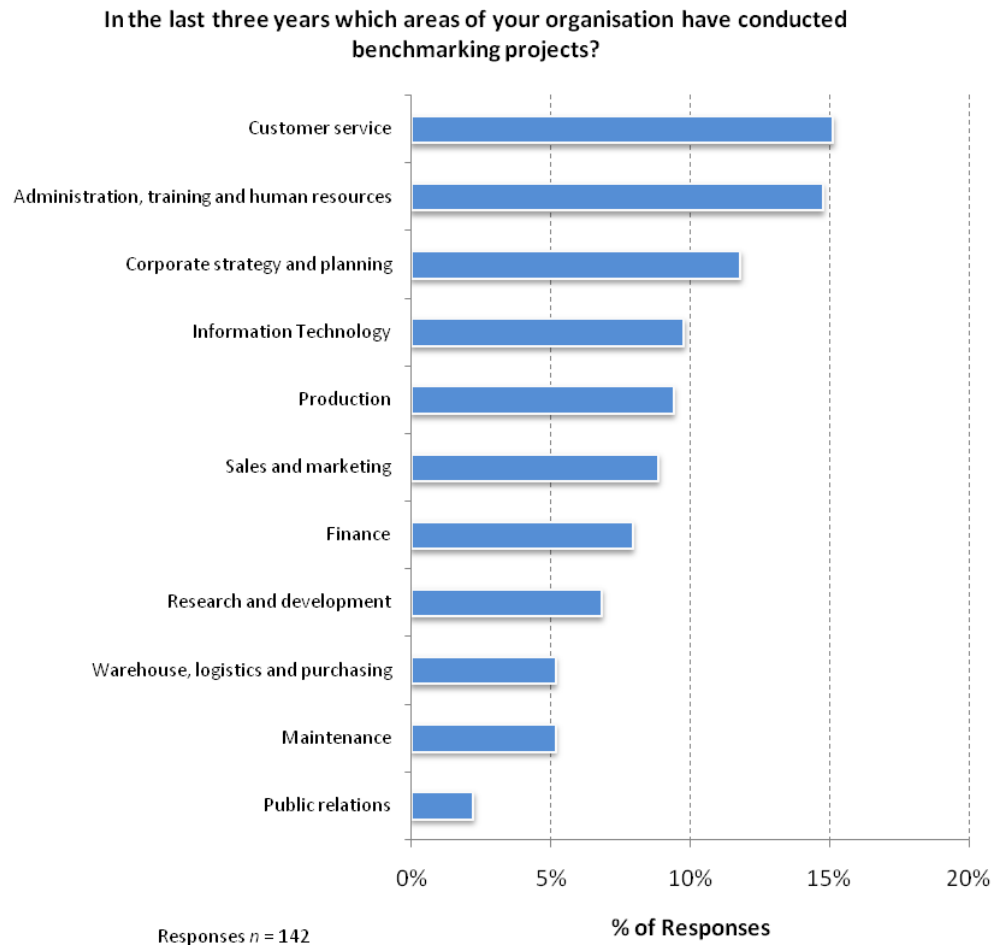


### Q4.5 What are the main reasons for undertaking benchmarking projects?\*



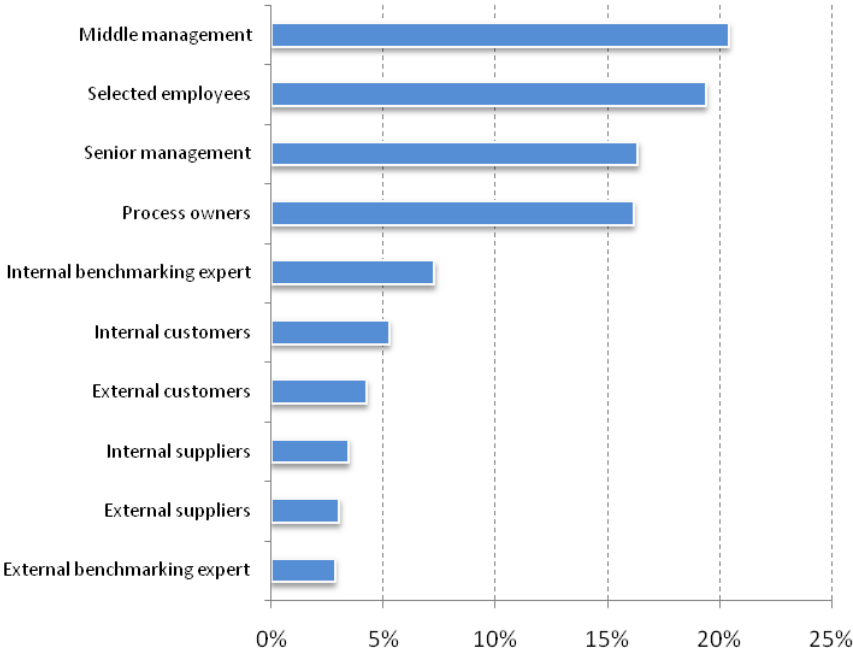
\* The respondents were asked to rank up to three reasons for undertaking Benchmarking projects in order of importance. Those that were of most importance scored three points, 2<sup>nd</sup> most important scored two points and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important scored one point. The average score for each response was then calculated.

### Q4.6 In the last three years which areas of your organisation have conducted benchmarking projects?



**Q4.7 Our benchmarking project teams usually consist of people from the following areas.**

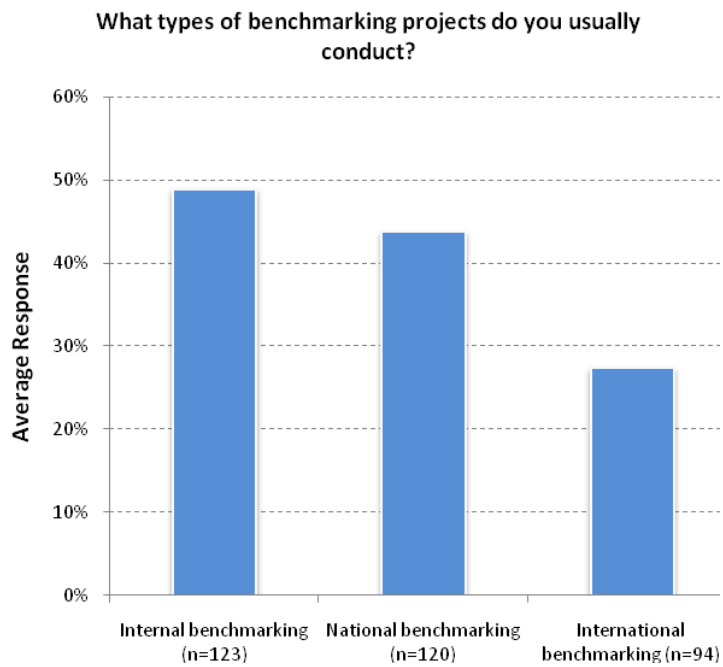
Our benchmarking project teams usually consist of people from the following areas



Responses n = 142

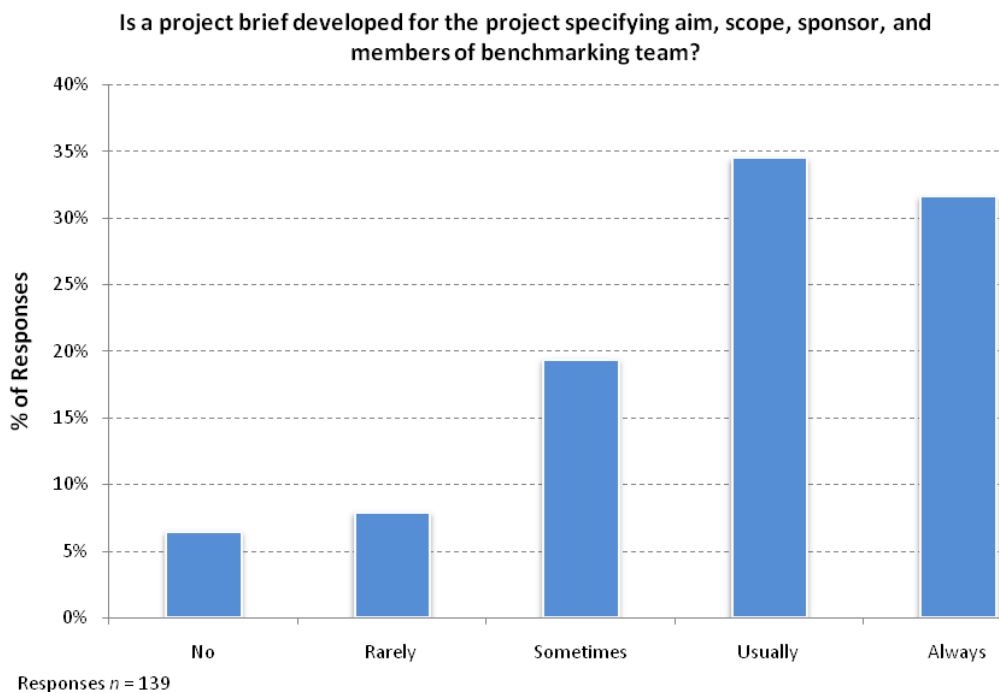
% of Responses

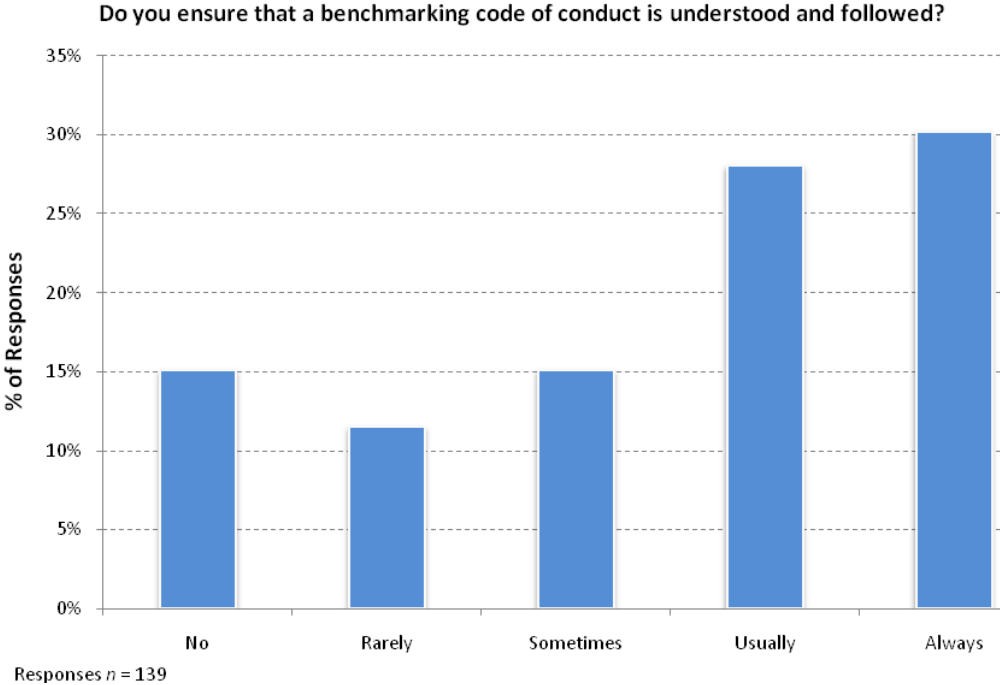
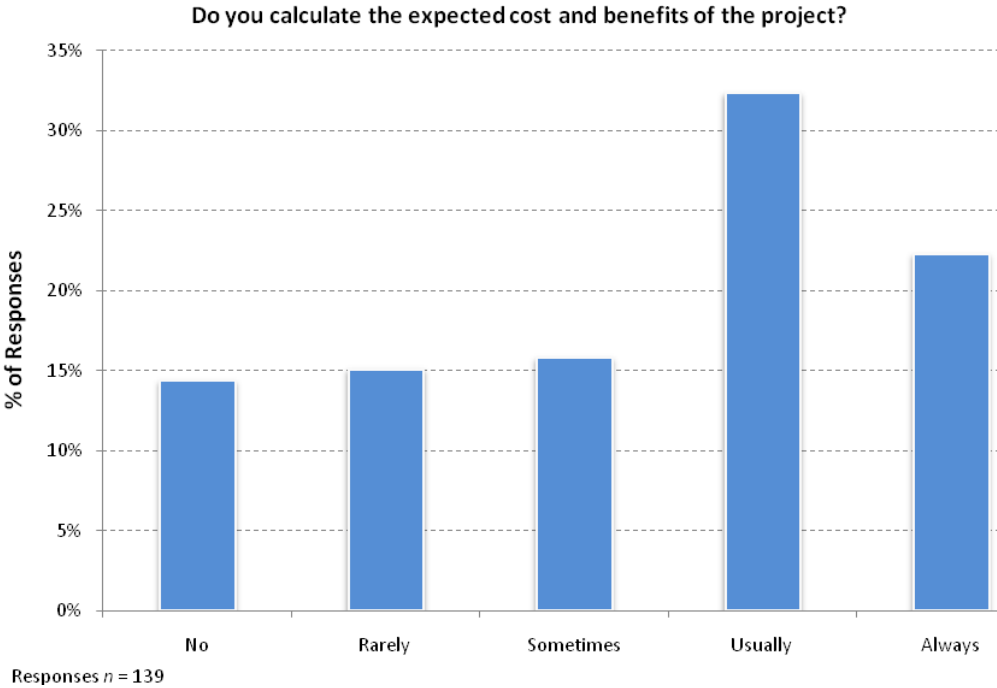
**Q4.8 What types of benchmarking projects do you usually conduct?\***



\* Key: Internal benchmarking projects (benchmarking internally within the organisation), National benchmarking projects (benchmarking with other companies in the country), International benchmarking projects (benchmarking with companies overseas)

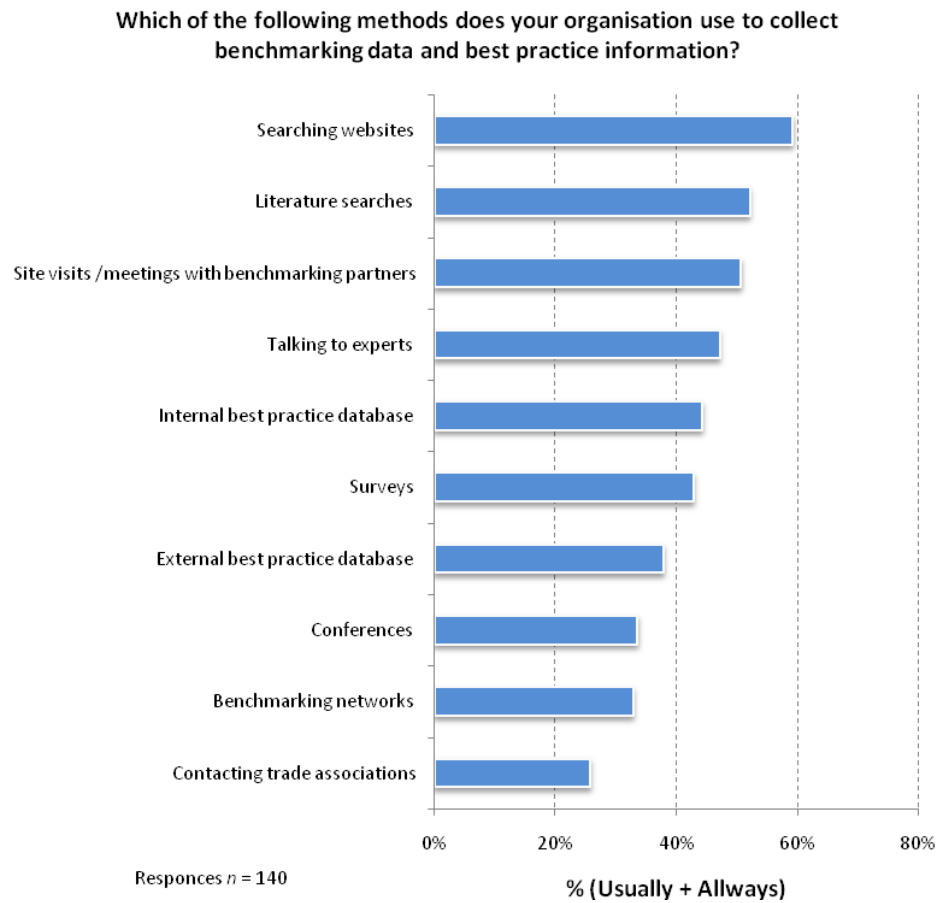
**Q4.9 When planning a benchmarking project.**





**5: BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARKING PROJECTS - RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**  
*(Only respondents that indicated they used Best Practice Benchmarking completed this section).*

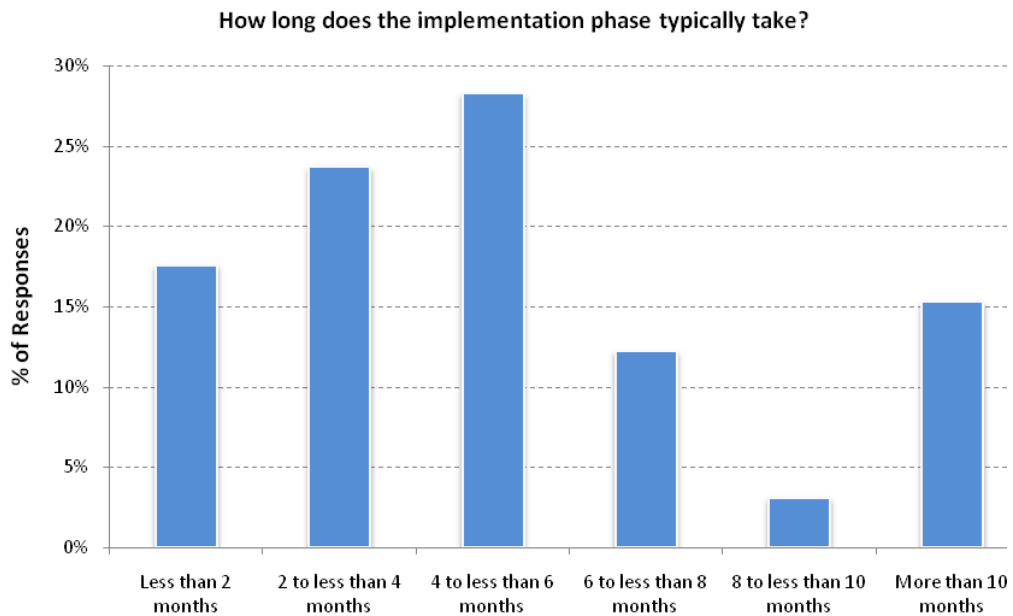
**Q5.1 Which of the following methods does your organisation use to collect benchmarking data and best practice information?**



## 6: BEST PRACTICE BENCHMARKING PROJECTS - IMPLEMENTATION

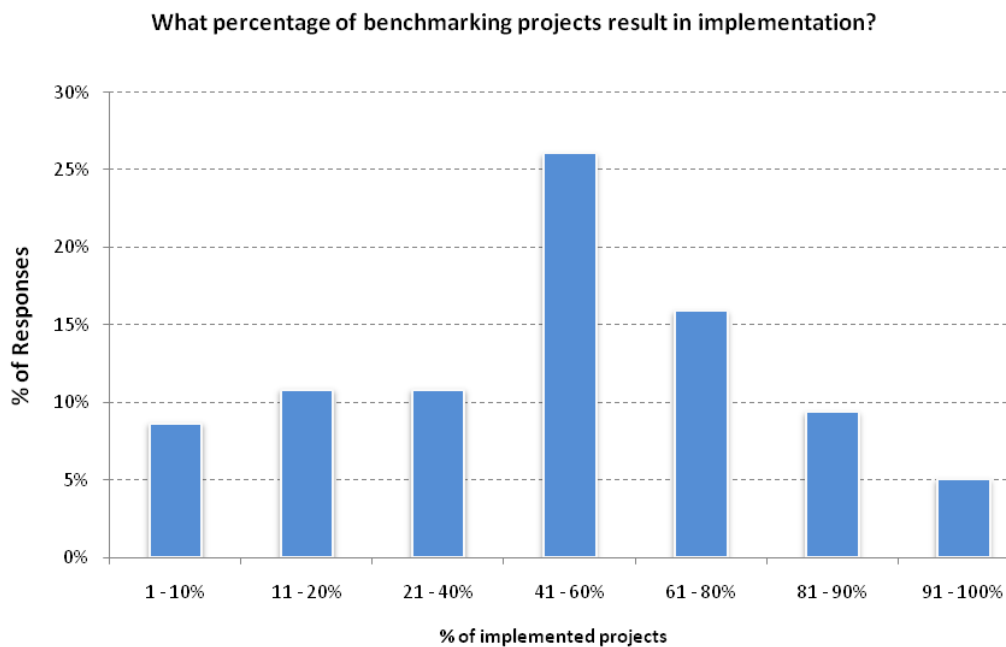
*(Only respondents that indicated they used Best Practice Benchmarking completed this section).*

**Q6.1 How long does the implementation phase typically take?** (e.g. the adaption and implementation of best practices identified through benchmarking)

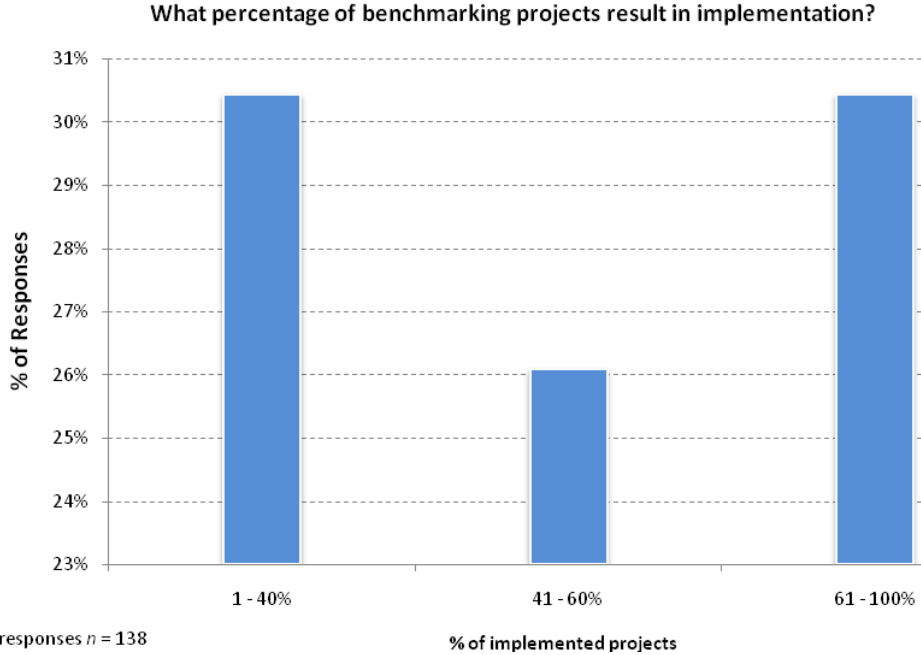


responses  $n = 131$

**Q6.2 What percentage of benchmarking projects result in implementation?**



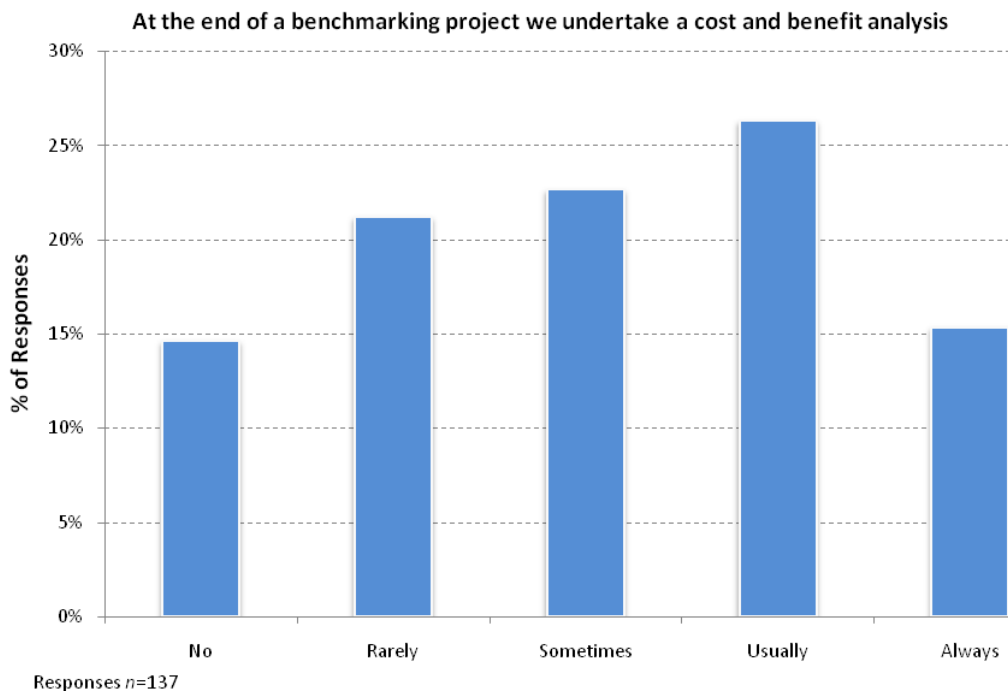
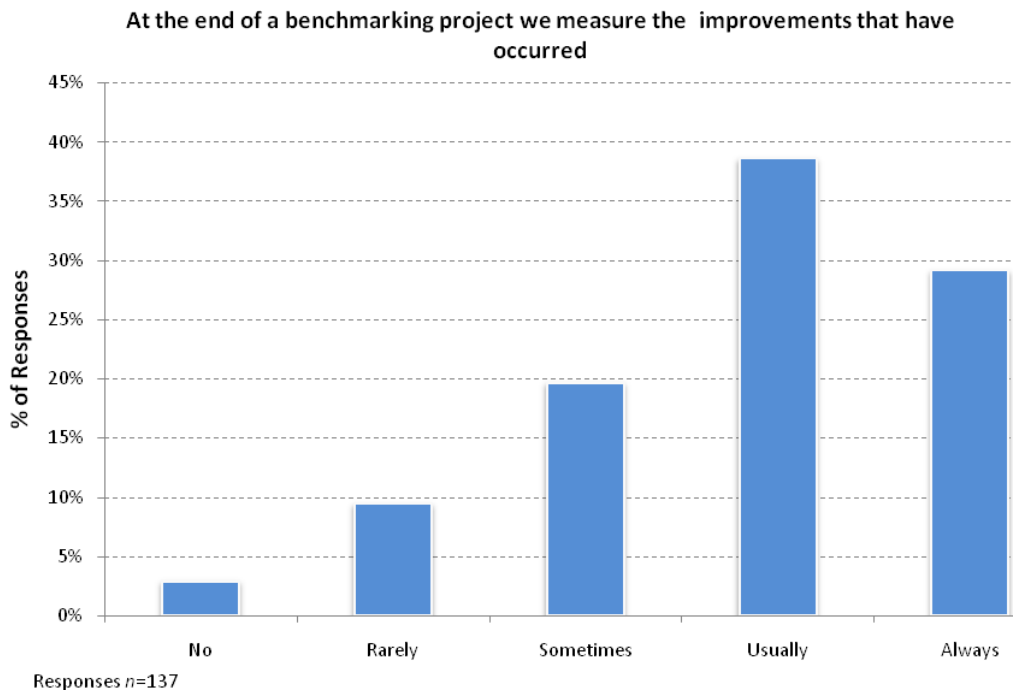
responses  $n = 138$

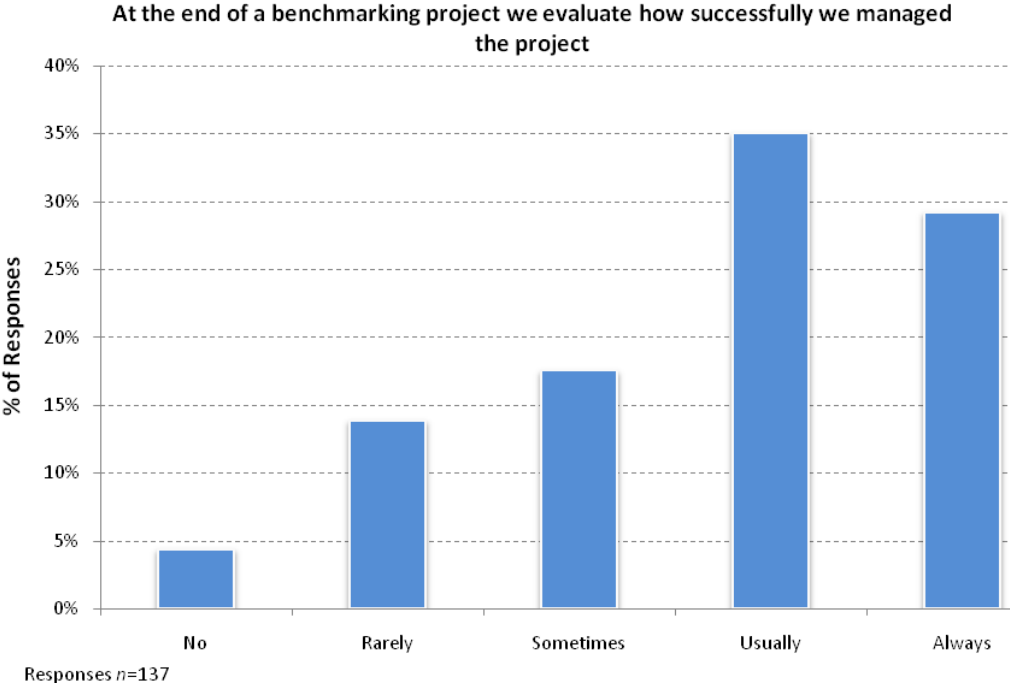


## 7: EVALUATION

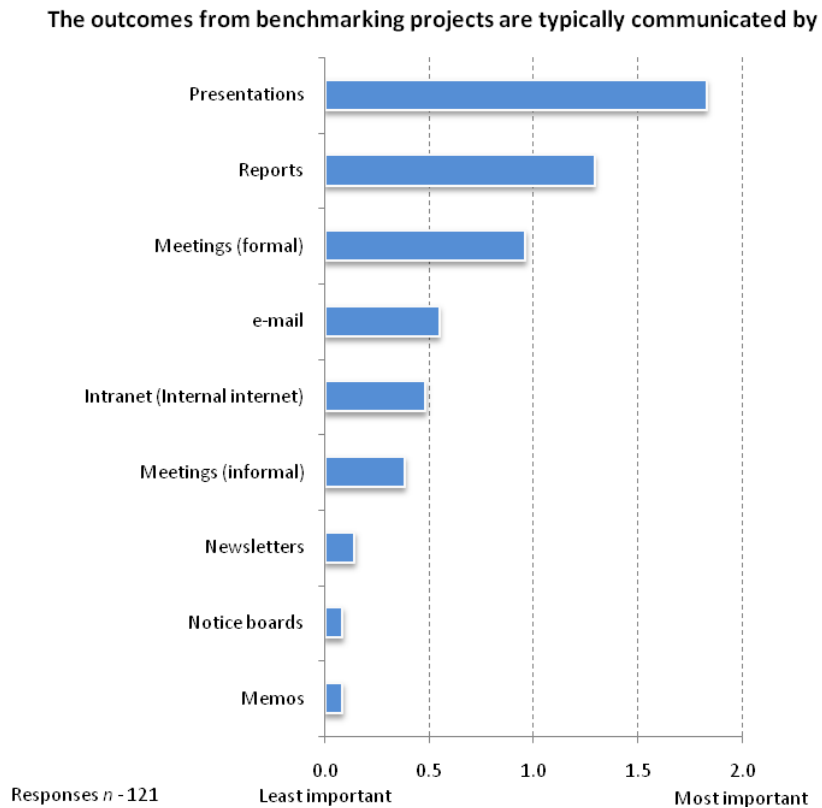
*(Only respondents that indicated they used Best Practice Benchmarking completed this section).*

### Q7.1 At the end of a benchmarking project we...



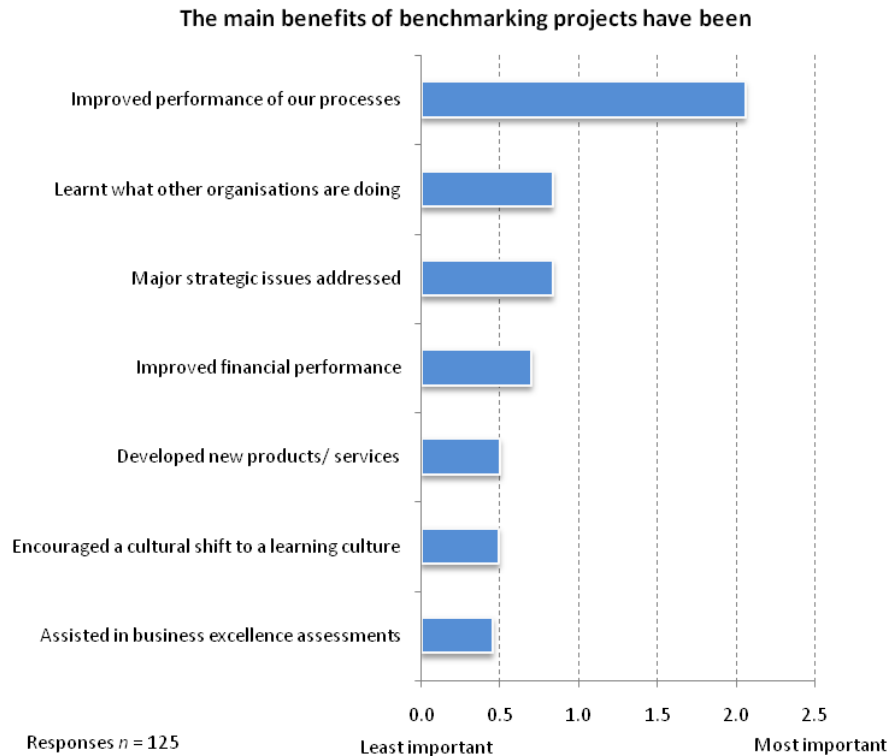


**Q7.2 The outcomes (best practices and/or results achieved) from benchmarking projects are typically communicated by\*:**



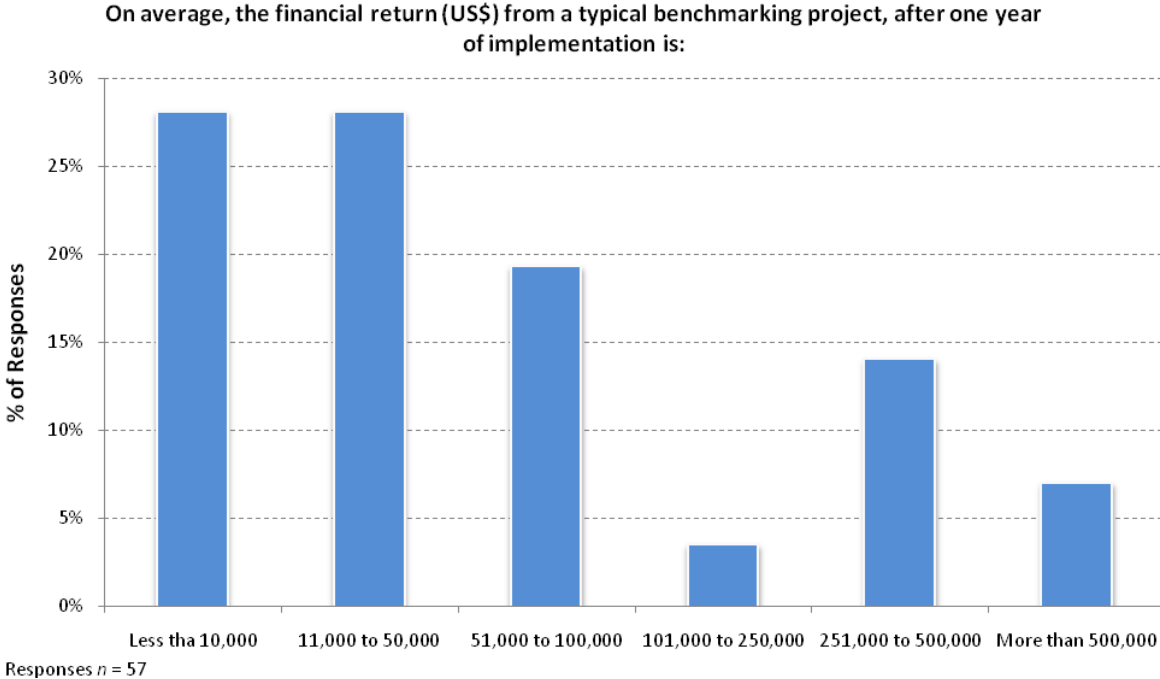
\* The respondents were asked to rank up to three communication methods they used to communicate the outcomes from a project in order of importance. Those that were of most importance scored three points, 2<sup>nd</sup> most important scored two points and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important scored one point. The average score for each response was then calculated.

### Q7.3 The main benefits of benchmarking projects have been\*:

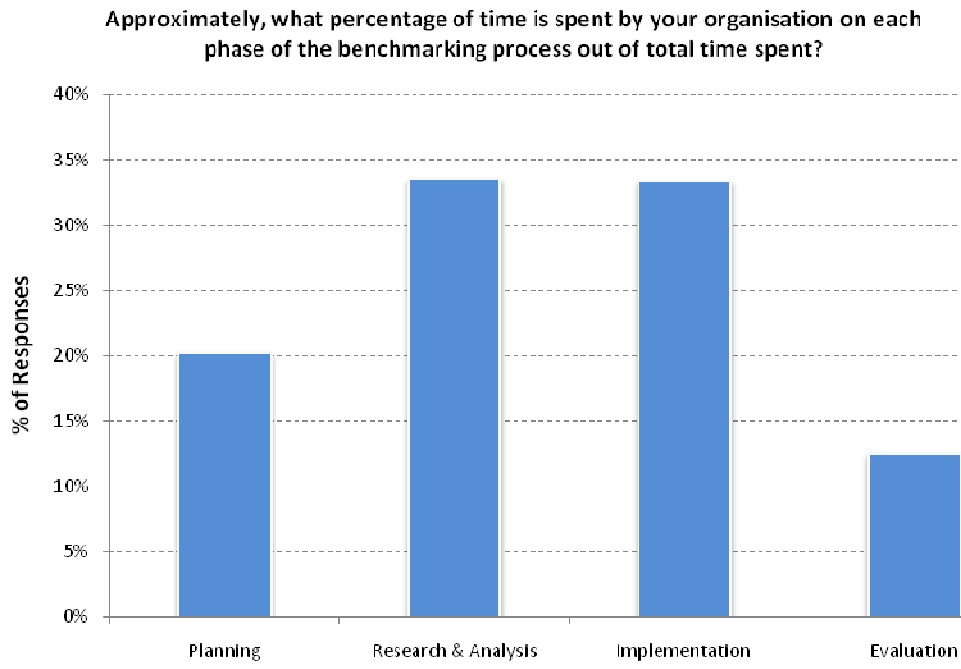


\* The respondents were asked to rank the three main benefits from benchmarking in order of importance. Those that were of most importance scored three points, 2<sup>nd</sup> most important scored two points and 3<sup>rd</sup> most important scored one point. The average score for each response was then calculated.

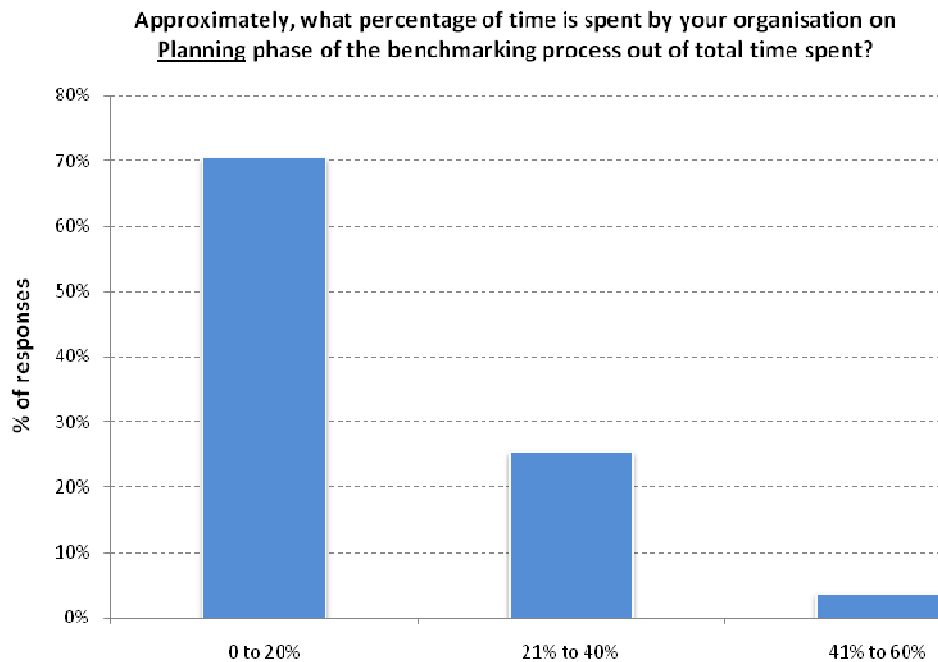
**Q7.4 On average, what is the financial return (US\$) from a typical benchmarking project, after one year of implementation?**



### Q7.5 Approximately, what percentage of time is spent by your organisation on each phase of the benchmarking process out of total time spent?

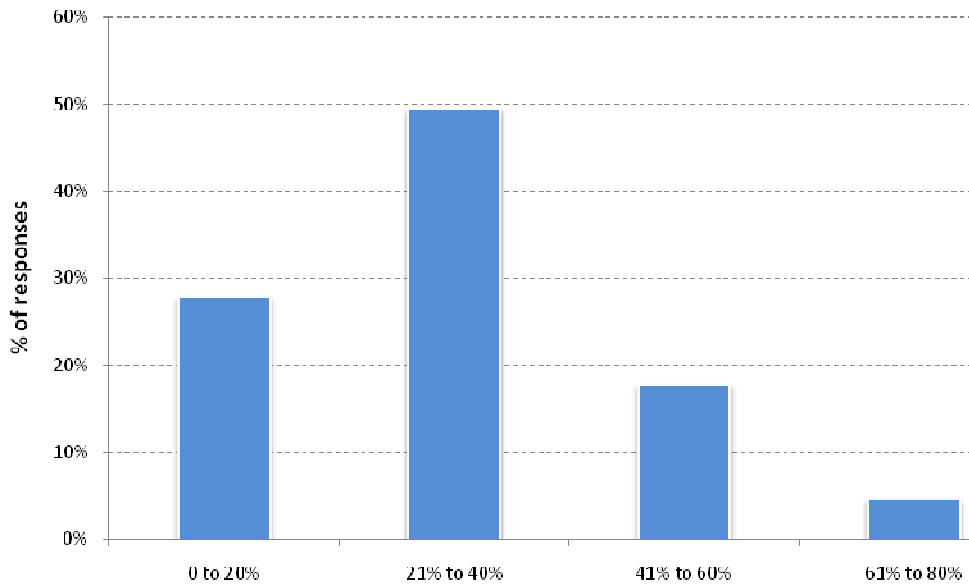


Responses n = 129



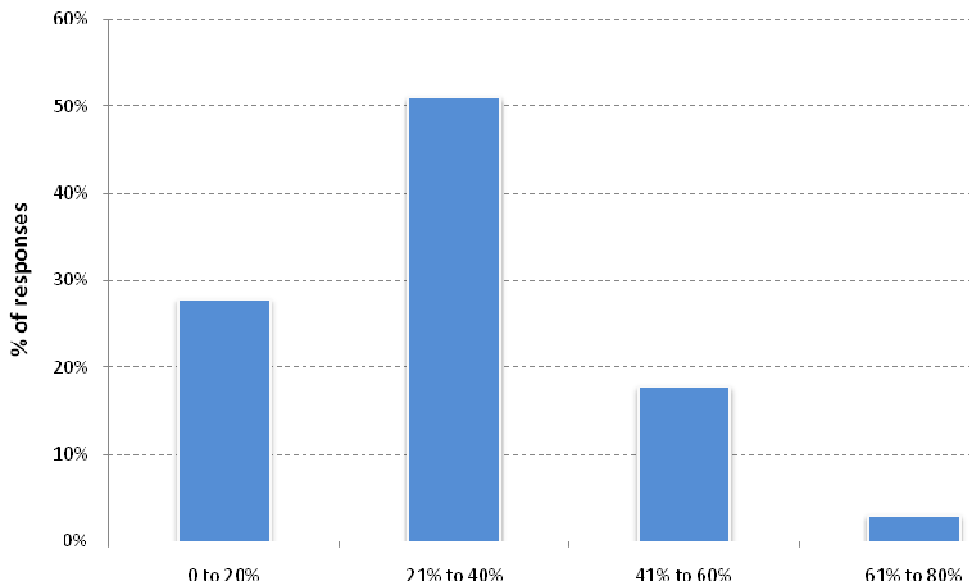
Responses n = 129

**Approximately, what percentage of time is spent by your organisation on Research & Analysis phase of the benchmarking process out of total time spent?**



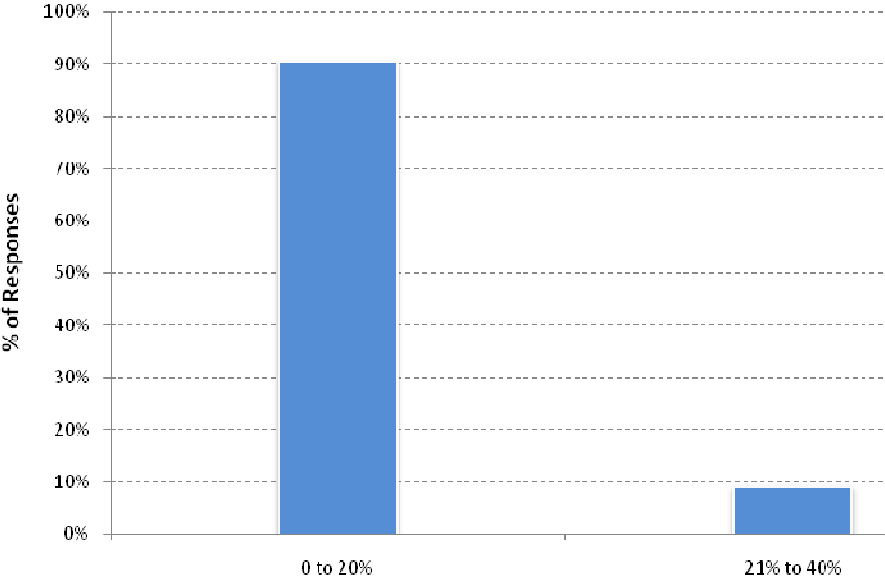
Responses n = 129

**Approximately, what percentage of time is spent by your organisation on Implementation phase of the benchmarking process out of total time spent?**



Responses n = 129

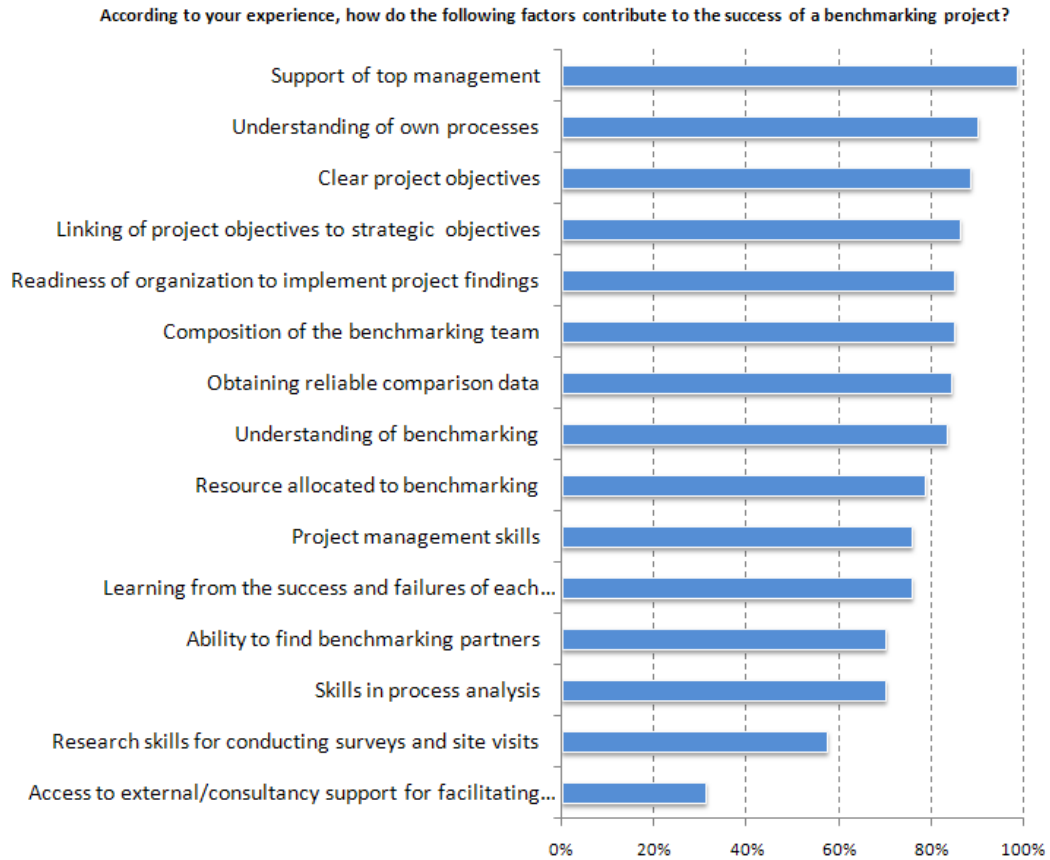
Approximately, what percentage of time is spent by your organisation on Evaluation phase of the benchmarking process out of total time spent?



Responses n = 129

**Q7.6 According to your experience, how do the following factors contribute to the success of a benchmarking project?**

*(Respondents could indicate very high, high, medium, low, very low)*



• Responses n = 141

% of responses indicating High or Very High

**APPENDIX A – DEFINITIONS OF IMPROVEMENT TOOLS.**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Informal Benchmarking</b>                                    | Actively encouraging employees to learn from the experience and expertise of other colleagues and organisations through comparing practices and processes e.g. through best practice tours, conferences, best practice websites, networking |
| <b>Performance Benchmarking</b>                                 | Comparing performance levels of a process/activity with other organisations – therefore comparing against benchmarks  |
| <b>Best Practice Benchmarking</b>                               | Following a structured process for comparing performance levels and learning why better performers have higher levels of performance and adapting/implementing those better practices   |
| <b>Balanced Scorecard</b>                                       | Used for measuring whether the activities of a company are meeting its objectives in terms of vision and strategy by focusing on a balanced set of outcomes   |
| <b>Business Excellence</b>                                      | Using a business excellence model (such as EFQM, Baldrige, or any other national excellence model) for assessment and improvement.  |
| <b>Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)</b>                    | Involves significant changes in the design and production of an organisation's products/services by focusing on processes rather than traditional functions   |
| <b>Corporate Social Responsibility System</b>                   | System designed to measure, apply, assess, and report organisational efforts to integrate CSR, particularly environmental and social concerns, into all operations  |
| <b>Customer (Client) Surveys</b>                                | Surveys to obtain customer feedback   |
| <b>Employee Suggestion Scheme</b>                               | A formal mechanism by which employees can offer their ideas   |
| <b>Improvement Teams</b>  | A team established to address a specific improvement issue  |
| <b>Knowledge Management</b>                                     | A range of practices used by organisations to identify, create, represent, and distribute knowledge   |
| <b>Lean</b>   | A process of improvement that focuses on practices aimed at reducing inventory levels and waste from the organisation's key processes   |
| <b>Mission and Vision Statement</b>                             | Brief statements of the purpose and vision of an organisation, with the intention of keeping employees aware of the organisation's direction  |
| <b>Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)</b>                                 | A four step process for continuous improvement  |
| <b>Quality Function Deployment (QFD)</b>                        | A structured team approach in which customer requirements are translated into appropriate technical requirements for each stage of product development and production   |
| <b>Quality Management System</b>                                | Such as ISO 9001, following procedures, quality manual and auditing   |
| <b>Six Sigma</b>  | A measured and fact-based approach to reducing process variation and improving performance  |
| <b>Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)</b> | A strategy development tool used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing an organisation  |
| <b>TQM</b>  | A management approach for long-term success through improving customer satisfaction, processes, products, services and culture  |
| <b>5S</b>   | A housekeeping method for organizing a workplace, especially a shared workplace (like a shop floor or an office space and keeping it organized)   |

## APPENDIX B - THE GLOBAL BENCHMARKING NETWORK

The GBN, [www.globalbenchmarking.org](http://www.globalbenchmarking.org), was formed in 1993 to spread the awareness and use of benchmarking and encourage a high standard of professionalism in how it is applied. Over 20 countries are members of the network. The honorary lifetime president of the GBN is Dr Robert Camp.

Each year the GBN organises the International Benchmarking Conference. The conference in 2009 will be held in Bahrain on the 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> October. Information on the conference will soon be shown on [www.bestpracticeconference.com](http://www.bestpracticeconference.com).

For information on benchmarking within your country, contact your GBN representative:

|   |                          |  |  |
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