COLLABORATIVE
RESEARCH

Exploring how to design an effective survey on Benefits Management

Association for Project Management
June 2019

THE CHARTERED BODY FOR THE PROJECT PROFESSION

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

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Many thanks go to Richard Breese, Claire Dellar, Sarah Earl, Neil White and Merv Wyeth and all contributors to this study.

Glossary	
Benefits management	Benefits management is the identification, definition, planning, tracking and realisation of business benefits.
Contributors	Refers to the individuals who contributed to this study.
Project management	The discipline of planning, organising, motivating and controlling resources to achieve specific objectives.
Participant observation	A qualitative data collection method which involves the researcher becoming part of the group being researched and reflecting on their experiences and the meaning systems they learn in the process.
Project team	Refers to the committee members working on the Op21 Survey Project.
Questionnaire	A set of written questions used for collecting information.
Response bias	The tendency for participants to respond inaccurately or falsely. This is a particularly problematic for self-reporting methods such as surveys. Types of response bias include 'social desirability bias' whereby respondents answer in a manner they feel will be viewed positively by others. Another is 'confirmation bias' whereby respondents recall information that only confirms their pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses.
Survey	The process of collecting and analysing data, where the questionnaire is the set of questions used to gather the information.

Executive summary

There is a need to produce knowledge, which informs and develops the quality of adoption, training and acceptance of benefits management. This report constitutes the second output[1] of a project to design a survey on benefits management (BM), initiated by the Specific Interest Group (SIG). Following a successful application for funding (output 1 of the Op21 Survey Project), the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council (ESRC) and Association for Project Management (APM) co-sponsored a 20-day secondment to draw insight from both APM members and the wider specialist practitioner community to shape the subsequent design of a suitable tool/approach and survey those who are able to provide insights into the enablers and barriers to successful adoption of BM.

This secondment constitutes the foundation for the future design of the survey itself, which will help generate knowledge about the challenges related to full adoption of BM, particularly in relation to the transition from project delivery to business-as-usual.

A qualitative approach was adopted, including semi-structured interviews with practitioners, analysis of existing surveys on the topic of BM, comments and suggestions posted to online forums and feedback provided via email. Members of the APM Benefits Management Specific Interest Group (SIG) Committee contributed to and reviewed this material throughout the secondment period. Full details are in *Appendix A – Project approach*.

The key findings have been organised in reference to the themes identified as requiring attention (see *2.1 Results from conversations and online participant observation*).

[1] The first output was the application for Innovation Fellowship funding from the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council Impact Accelerator Award.

Key findings

1. **Identifying respondents**: Targeted engagement with the senior level in the business side of APM corporate organisations is both valuable and necessary for achieving the objectives of this project. Ideally this should occur prior to the design of the final survey.
2. **Relevance and motivation:** The nature of the engagement with APM corporate members needs to be specified by the survey project team and submitted to APM to facilitate subsequent contact with APM corporate members.
3. **Relevance and motivation/alternative approaches:** If the project team agrees to continue with a survey, the goals of the survey must be clearly articulated.
4. **Identifying respondents:** A clearly bounded sampling strategy for both the survey and any other methods must be agreed.
5. **Complexity/length/format/content/distribution:** The project team must agree the research methodology (with survey as the primary focus), key themes, content, format, delivery mechanism, advertising and incentives to participate of any research tool re-purposed or devised.
6. **Relevance and motivation:** Identifying the incentives and motivation for people/organisations to participate is a priority consideration.
7. The Benefits Management SIG committee should consider whether this report (or a condensed version of it) may be published as a general guidance document for individuals interested in designing surveys.

Next steps

1. Determine the research question, appropriate methodology and design for conducting the remainder of this project.
2. Engage with the target audience, APM corporate members and APM administration, who may co-develop a specific research question, and prior to the final design and distribution of an appropriate survey instrument.
3. Agree a pilot strategy for the survey and any other methods to be deployed. For example, a questionnaire could be piloted, using MentiMeter, at an APM conference event.

1. Introduction

1.1 What is benefits management?

Benefits management is the identification, definition, planning, tracking and realisation of business benefits (*APM Body of Knowledge, 6th edition*, section 3.2.1). It is an iterative and cyclical process which is sustained beyond the project (includes programme and portfolio management) to review and manage benefits for the whole life cycle of a change initiative.

According to the same *Body of Knowledge*, a benefit is a measurable gain, realised as a consequence of a change, that is considered by one or more stakeholders to be an advantage. Identifying business benefits also involves recognising the change that could take place.

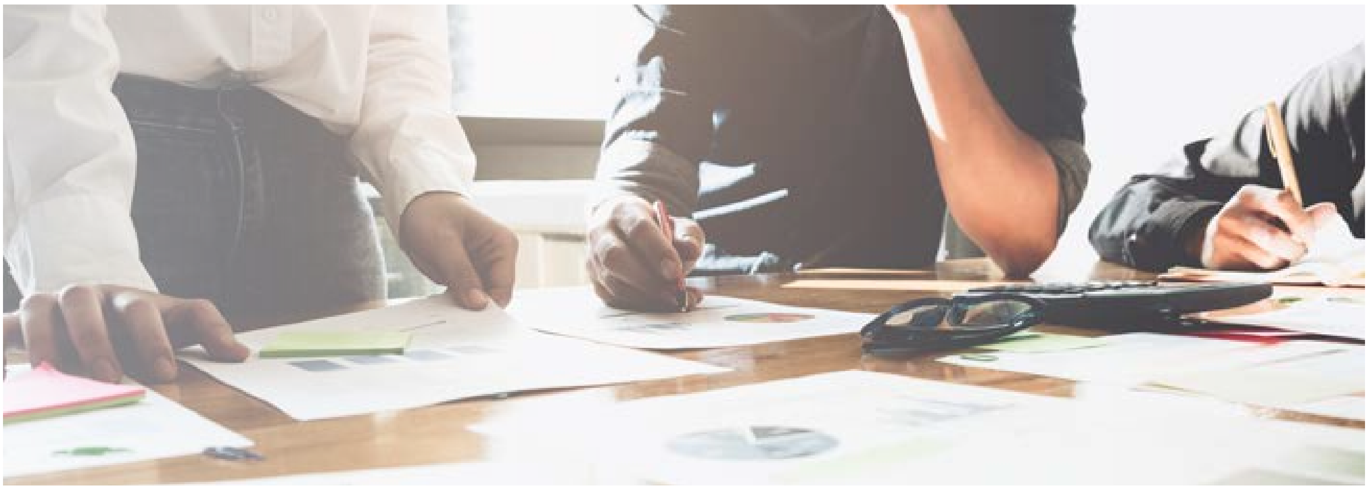
Benefits can be tangible (e.g. money saved/made, jobs created) or intangible (e.g. corporate reputation, capacity for change). They may, or may not, also be quantifiable in cash terms (e.g. reduced costs or greater customer satisfaction).

1.2 Background to the study

The Benefits Management SIG committee identified a need to understand how organisations adopt BM and the difficulties they encounter, so that practice can be improved. Whilst existing surveys have sought to address similar needs; the design, execution and reporting of these surveys is either problematic or any outcomes have failed to positively influence practice. In July 2017, the committee agreed to launch a project to develop a new survey instrument.

The project team comprised Richard Breese, Rebecca Casey, Claire Dellar, Sarah Earl, Neil White and Merv Wyeth.

Following a workshop with the project team in October 2017, it became clear that more research was needed before a high-quality survey could be designed and administered. Following a successful bid for funding from the ESRC, it was agreed that Rebecca Casey would lead on this exploratory work.



1.3 What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to *begin* to address the following questions and tasks, agreed by the project team in the original project brief:

1. What is the goal of the proposed resulting survey? This will determine what type of data (qualitative, quantitative or both) is collected and whether a cross-sectional or longitudinal approach is better.
2. How are managers and practitioners to be identified, and what is the incentive for them to respond?
3. Conduct a literature search of previous surveys on benefits management and evaluate how these might contribute to this survey.
4. What type of questions to ask (open or closed, multiple choice, single, matrix, use of Likert scales etc.) and the sequencing of these questions.
5. Identify a set of questions and set an upper limit to ensure an optimum response rate.
6. Agree the look and feel of the survey instrument.
7. Agree an appropriate sampling strategy.
8. Agree an appropriate and effective distribution strategy, e.g. would an APM linked circulation list stand the best chance of a good response, e.g. Corporate members of the APM?
9. Establish a pilot strategy.
10. Consider how the data will be analysed and subsequently reported/presented.

Answers to these 10 points are provided in section three.

1.4 Why is this study needed?

UK organisations waste the equivalent of £128m for every £1bn invested in projects and programs (source: *PMI Pulse of the Profession Survey*, 2017). The UK government's Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP) alone is delivering 133 projects worth over £423bn. Such significant sums of money represent a challenge for organisations, the professionals tasked with the successful delivery of projects and the APM, which is responsible for developing and promoting the project profession. The government has a duty to spend taxpayer money wisely, the private sector is accountable to shareholders and the third sector must fulfil the requirements of its charitable purpose.

Adopting BM is increasingly seen as a way of delivering sustainable value from projects. Existing academic research suggests that BM capability in organisations is patchy. However, the scope of these studies is either limited to a particular sector (e.g. finance, healthcare, construction) or simply whether BM exists or not, with little investigation into the quality of BM practices. The aim of this research is therefore to produce knowledge, which enables those who read it to shape and develop the quality of adoption, diffusion and sustainability of BM across a range of sectors. The target audiences are the APM and other bodies who influence sectors, organisations and professionals (such as universities and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA)), as well as individuals and organisations who are implementing BM practices.

In its 2017 industrial strategy, the UK government set out the importance of developing skills, transforming business practices and creating the right institutions and structures to support these capabilities. This research directly contributes to achieving those goals. It also meets the APM's strategic objective of advancing knowledge and research.

"I too have led many research surveys of difficult to reach groups and pre-targeting of stakeholders is essential."
(Contributor 17, LinkedIn).

2. Findings

The findings are divided into two parts; 2.1 presents the results from the face-to-face conversations and online commentary, 2.2 is the analysis of existing surveys of benefits management.

2.1 Results from conversations and online participant observation

In-depth conversations and meetings were held with eight specialist practitioners, the duration of which varied from one to three hours long. Meanwhile, online participant observation included contributions from LinkedIn, the Knowledge Hub and email, with individual comments ranging from one to five paragraphs.

Thematic analysis is used to inductively generate themes from the data. Topics include: **identifying respondents**; the need to establish **relevance and motivation** for participation in a survey; consideration of **alternative approaches** to a survey; the importance of **capturing complexity**; paying attention to the **length** of the survey; **question format; question content;** and methods of **distribution**. In order to provide a concise and coherent account, findings are presented as a narrative.

The collection, storage and analysis of the data for this study complies with the relevant ethics terms and conditions published by the Economic and Social Sciences Research Council.

2.1.1 Identifying respondents

Generally, it is felt that survey participants/respondents should not be restricted to benefits managers and/or project professionals, since this is likely to generate a response bias. The sample ought to represent a broad range of roles, including: business managers, business change specialists, business development managers, risk specialists, planning and performance and finance professionals. Respondents must also incorporate individuals from different levels of an organisation – from executives who provide sponsorship and resources to the individuals and groups expected to own benefits or those directly affected by the associated changes.

For some contributors the size of the organisation matters since it is felt that adoption of formalised methodologies is more likely to occur in large rather than small organisations.

At the London workshop in October 2017, the project team felt that obtaining comparative information on the public, private and third sectors would be useful, based on their perception and experience that BM is forging ahead in the public sector but not necessarily elsewhere. Thus, analysis at an organisational level might be more appropriate than individuals.

Some emphasised the importance of reaching the unconverted, whilst others maintained that a targeted and focussed sample would yield richer experiences. Given the substantial resources required to design, distribute and analyse a high-quality questionnaire, a clearly bounded sample seems appropriate in the first instance. This means clear identifying who is and is not a target respondent.

"What do we need or want to know, and why and what will we do (or not do) as a result of finding this out?" (Contributor 7, ProjectPlace).

2.1.2 Relevance and motivation

The survey must be of relevance and interest to participants if it is going to be completed and thereby fulfil its purpose. Participants/respondents will want to know whether anything will be done as a result of their input and if so what this will look like and over what timeline. Statements about relevance/intentions/outputs ought to be clear to respondents up front as these will impact their motivation to complete the survey.

Therefore, authors of the proposed survey need to be clear about its purpose:

"What do we need or want to know, and why and what will we do (or not do) as a result of finding this out?" (Contributor 7, ProjectPlace).

Related to 'identifying respondents' one contributor suggests:

"You need to be focussed on who the 'practitioners' are you want responses from – so some knowledge of who is/is not currently adopting a benefits-led approach – see who they are **and what might inspire them to respond** [emphasis added]. Will you just be focusing on organisations already connected to APM or will this be much wider?" (Contributor 18, LinkedIn).

Suggestions for motivating and incentivising participation include a benchmarking or baselining exercise, what percentage of expected benefits are realised by projects that do or do not adopt BM. Both quantifying and qualifying this performance is seen as important. Benchmarking an organisation's relative position in some form of maturity index to inform continuous improvement. Sharing what other organisations are doing, how they are doing it, what to adopt and what to avoid.

From the perspective of the individual practitioner, they may want to know about their market-worth. As one contributor commented:

"Is there huge unsatisfied demand for my skills among high paying international firms or am I a commodity item only of interest in the public sector until their money runs out." (Contributor 11, Knowledge Hub).

The APM's most successful survey in terms of responses is the *APM Salary and Market Trends Report*, which attracts over five thousand respondents.

Others said:

"What I've found most useful is not the design, but the marketing of the survey – really thinking about 'what's in it for me' and pre-targeting our most important stakeholders – to advise them it's coming." (Contributor 16, LinkedIn).

"I too have led many research surveys of difficult to reach groups and pre-targeting of stakeholders is essential." (Contributor 17, LinkedIn).

"Have you considered offering an asset/tool as a 'reward' for survey contributions? For example, if your target audience are active practitioners and adoption/quality of benefits realisation is your focus, could you share a health check tool with them at the end of the survey, so they have a useful take away?" (Contributor 18, LinkedIn).

2.1.3 Alternative approaches

For some, the use of a survey instrument on its own is too narrow, prescriptive or insufficient:

"There would be more value in finding out how people do it rather than whether they do – we will learn more that way." (Contributor 12, Knowledge Hub).

"Conventional surveys define what is important and set out to ask about that in a fixed framework. If that framework has not explicitly included a topic or a relationship that is in fact important, the survey is blind to these matters." (Contributor 1, LinkedIn).

Others feel it is too difficult to obtain adequate representation using a survey method. Rather, more open-ended questions with a handful of experts in the field might produce richer and more meaningful data. One alternative is SenseMaker®[2], which uses short observations and micro-narratives as inputs for providing respondents with the opportunity to indicate the balance between high level factors. The signifiers help to identify what, in the narrative, is important and to indicate when multiple factors are at work. Respondents can introduce anything they feel is significant and say why it matters to them.

Another incorporates a three-stage approach:

i. conduct a webinar on the subject of adoption and quality of benefits management with a number of online polls by participants;

ii. design a survey in both a qualitative and quantitative manner to validate initial findings from the first step; and

iii. a final qualitative survey on matters arising from the analysis of data from the results of step 2.

It is worth noting that, alongside this study, the BM SIG has been active in pioneering the use of MentiMeter during webinars, collecting up to as many as 200 responses from a known population e.g. by project delivery role, sector, years of experience, etc. In addition to closed questions and Likert scales, MentiMeter can present open questions, such as "What suggestions do you have for improving project handover" or "How can you increase benefits maturity in your organisation?", with responses being restricted to one word or phrases and one response or as many as the participant wishes. An example is the APMG Benefits Healthcheck Assessment.

[2] See http://cognitive-edge.com/sensemaker/

"In a complex environment, always in flux, we cannot expect to identify everything that is important to all the other players in a system now let alone in a year's time." (Contributor 1, LinkedIn).

A further suggestion is to reframe the exercise:

"If you are targeting a known set of stakeholders, there are other ways to do it. I think I mentioned earlier the idea of using narrative capture. If you ask for opinions, at least first off, you steer the respondents towards reflex responses, established positions and entrenched ideas. If you ask them to *describe an experience in the relevant context and then ask them to talk about what that experience shows*, so long as you avoid laying traps that will again stimulate knee jerk reactions, you might find ideas coming out that would not normally be discussed but are important underlying drivers of behaviour." (Contributor 1, LinkedIn).

2.1.4 Capturing complexity

Related to the theme of developing an alternative approach is the challenge of how to capture complexity:

"In a complex environment, always in flux, we cannot expect to identify everything that is important to all the other players in a system now let alone in a year's time." (Contributor 1, LinkedIn).

This comment highlights the importance of collecting qualitative data, considering methods beyond a survey instrument alone and the value in repeating the data collection exercise longitudinally. A related point is the issue of self-reporting typical of most survey instruments. Ideally, data from multiple sources is collected in order to corroborate or refute survey responses (a process of triangulation).

2.1.5 Length of survey

Most contributors agree that survey fatigue amongst practitioners is a common problem. People are overloaded with questionnaires, many of which are poorly designed and too long. Those with experience in administering questionnaires find that responses are more likely if surveys are short, requiring no longer than five minutes to complete. These shorter surveys might be usefully administered for very specific topics. Designing a short questionnaire, however, poses an obvious tension when simultaneously trying to capture rich and complex qualitative data, supporting the view that multiple methods are more desirable than using only a questionnaire.

2.1.6 Question format

Providing respondents with the option of a free text box is widely perceived as a valuable format both for collecting interesting data and motivating respondents to provide their own comments:

"I have too frequently been on the receiving end of multiple choice surveys where it is painfully obvious that the originator is trying to elicit a particular response. Whilst frequently free text boxes are left blank, which is no great loss, sometimes a respondent fills them with absolute gold." (Contributor 14, LinkedIn).

"Use a combination of multiple choice and open text boxes rather than too many alternatives, i.e. 'don't know' or 'decline to state'. What works for us is to add a free form text box after each multiple-choice question." (Contributor 13, LinkedIn).

"Use a combination of multiple choice and open text boxes rather than too many alternatives, i.e. 'don't know' or 'decline to state'. What works for us is to add a free form text box after each multiple-choice question." (Contributor 13, LinkedIn).

"I agree with the design being radio buttons and a free text option (we often do that at the end of a group of questions though, rather than each) – as that way we're more likely to get feedback." (Contributor 16, LinkedIn).

"Include open questions and asked participants to describe a specific example as this will provide richer insight and help us tease out the reality versus the rhetoric." (Interview 3).

Two types of open question therefore seem to be proposed: one to elicit an example or further information and a second to gather information not represented by the options included in the survey. In light of these findings, perhaps beginning with open questions initially will avoid or at least limit the risk of response bias. The use of open questions will be an important feature of the pilot exercise.

2.1.7 Question content

Social desirability and/or confirmation bias is identified as a major challenge. There is a tendency for individuals and organisations to overestimate their capability and say they do things routinely when they may do them scarcely. Thus, questions will need to be well phrased to mitigate such biases.

One contributor suggests asking at the end of a survey, 'what questions should we have asked about this topic?' as they can and do always learn from their respondents.

Others suggest:

"Perhaps focus questions and interactions around what the BM SIG agrees as the key 'factors for benefits success'." (Contributor 8, ProjectPlace).

"How do people develop their knowledge about BM?" (Contributor 10, Email).

The content of questions is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

2.1.8 Distribution

In terms of how the survey is distributed, most of the comments relate to the marketing or pre-targeting of individuals/organisations, since many of the contributors identified this as a key aspect of a good response rate. Choices here will also depend on who the respondents are, why and how the survey is relevant to them and what motivates them to participate.

A good example of an effective approach is the Energy Institute's (EI) 'Energy Barometer' https://knowledge.energyinst.org/barometer, a longitudinal survey which began in 2015. The EI has a UK membership of 15,000 professionals. Rather than distributing the survey to all of these members, they set up the 'EI College' inviting members to join. This creates psychological commitment, in return the College receives early notification of special events, reports etc. In the first year they achieved a good response rate of 23 per cent (n=857).

Further options for distribution include: face-to-face survey, introduction and link to an online questionnaire distributed and promoted by APM, postal survey, short poll type survey during a webinar, hard copy distributed at APM events.

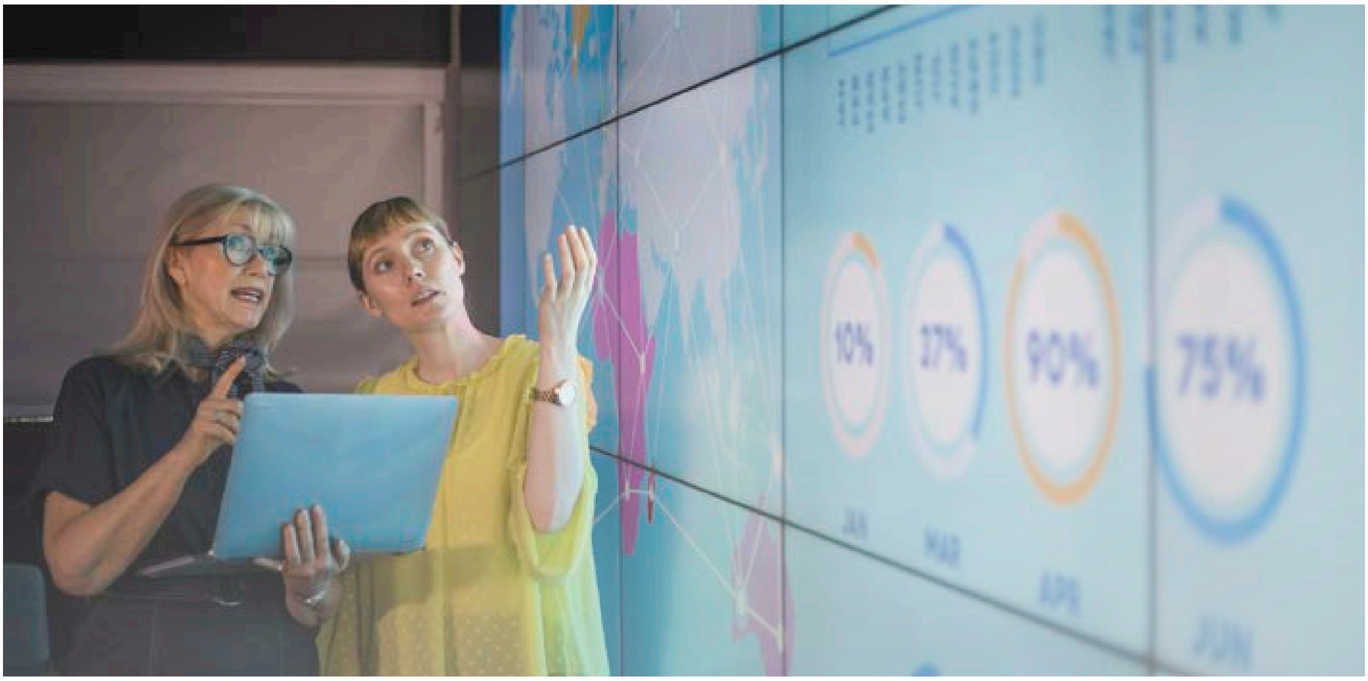
Piloting the survey amongst members of the Benefits Management SIG will help identify any inconsistencies, errors or omissions prior to wider distribution. The project team must decide how the pilot will be undertaken, who to target (including asking those who are unfamiliar with the project).

2.1.9 Summary

Themes generated from this stage of the exercise form the basis for the overall conclusions and recommendations provided in sections three and four. Next, is the analysis of existing BM surveys conducted by the project team.

2.2 Results from analysis of existing surveys

Each member of the project team reviewed a sample from a pool of 10 practitioner and academic survey informed reports or articles. These surveys were selected by the project team on the basis that they focussed either exclusively on BM or incorporated a section on BM within the survey. The project team designed a standard survey evaluation form to ensure rigour and consistency in approach (see *Appendix B – Survey review evaluation form*). The aggregated results of the evaluations are presented according to each section heading of the evaluation review form. Full findings are available in *Appendix C – Survey reviews results table*.



2.2.1 Background information

The titles of the surveys reflect a variation in understanding and use of the term BM. It is conceptualised within the context of: project governance; strategic management; project success; business performance; change leadership; project management; benefits ownership and accountability and IT evaluation.

Most of the surveys were conducted between 2012–2017, two were conducted in 1996 and 1999 respectively. Only two of the surveys are considered longitudinal; the *State of Project Management Annual Survey* and *Pulse of the Profession*. One of the academic surveys is partially longitudinal as the authors use similar questions in two separately conducted questionnaires.

The number of respondents and response rates, where these are made available, are as follows (further information about the surveys is provided in Tables 2 and 3):

#	Survey	Author(s)	Year	Online/ Postal	Sample size	Number of useable respondents	Calculated or published response rate
1	BM and project governance and success	Musawir, Serra, Zwikael, & Ali	2016	Online	1272	333	26%
2	All-Ireland study on benefits realisation	APM, CIMA & Deloittes	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	4455	Not specified
3	State of project management	Wellingtone & APM PMO SIG	2017	Online	Not specified	768	Not specified
4	BM practices and project success	Serra & Kunc	2012	Online	1034	331	32%
5	Driving business performance	KPMG	2017	Not specified	Not specified	198	Not specified
6	Benefits ownership and accountability	PMI	2016	Online	Not specified	774	Not specified
7	IT BM in Australian organisations	Lin & Pervan	1999	Postal	500	69	13.8%
8	Evaluation of IT BRM	Ward, Taylor & Bond	1994	Postal	250	60	24%
9	BM capability in the NHS	Waring, Casey & Robson	2015	Postal	200	108	54%
10	A study of BM across the UK	APM & Deloittes	2009	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

Table 1 Sample size and response rates of evaluated BM surveys

The academic publications are the only surveys to publish the original sample size so that a response rate can either be published or calculated. Five surveys fail to provide any information about sample size or number of responses.

2.2.2 Survey objectives

All of the existing surveys aim to generate some knowledge about BM. The precise nature and extent of that knowledge, however, varies. The census-style surveys focus predominantly on project management:

- the state of global project management (Value of project management, bridging value and strategy, standardised practices, relevance of certification, organisational agility, focus on benefits);
- the state of project management in the UK (project management maturity, tools and techniques, project success rates and PMO maturity);
- to identify project management best practice to help deliver investment value from projects more reliably and consistently, to identify current trends in project management and provide views on the challenges the project management community faces.

Some seek to explore the role of BM within the context of project success:

- to establish relationships between project governance, benefits management and project success;
- to assess the impact of BM practices on perceived project success rates;
- to describe the nature and interdependence between project and finance professionals.

Other survey objectives relate to BM as a practice within its own right:

- to investigate the importance placed on BM, whether developments have been initiated to support BM and if BM is becoming embedded in practice;
- to establish current industry practices and norms in managing IT benefits, whether organisations have a BM methodology and evaluate the process model of BM;
- to investigate how benefits are identified, evaluated, structured, delivered and realised including what criteria and methodologies are used and how practices are improved;
- to understand how those with accountability for business results understand BM maturity;
- gain an insight into the attitudes of, and challenges faced by, managers and their organisations, the range of activities they carry out and responsibilities they shoulder.

2.2.3 Sampling

Existing survey instruments target various and sometimes multiple individuals and groups, some closely align with survey objectives others target a broad project management or business community:

	Project managers	Business managers	IT managers	Finance managers	Senior executives
#surveys	6	3	2	1	5

Table 2 Target samples of existing survey instruments

The majority of surveys ask for a specific role or perspective rather than department or division. The larger census type surveys require a job title, department and sector. One survey asks whether respondents consider themselves to be IT or business-oriented. Interestingly, one of the census type surveys does not ask for (or at least does not report on) the specific department, division or sector.

Five of the surveys explicitly attempt to establish the training, qualifications, knowledge and experience of respondents. A further three examine either the experience or qualifications but not training whereas three surveys fail to examine this aspect at all. Given the specialist nature of BM, these questions are highly relevant to verifying whether the respondent 'knows' enough to complete the survey in a meaningful way.

The audience (i.e. individuals and organisations who will use the information from the survey results) vary from academic researchers and students to guide further research, professional bodies seeking to develop guidance on good practice, directors and leaders of organisations, project management practitioners, champions of BM, project and finance professionals, project delivery community and consultancies/software providers for the purpose of marketing their services and products.

In terms of how the information from the surveys is subsequently used: two are unclear; two are exclusively for academic purposes. Other uses include:

- to emphasise 'creation of value' as more relevant success criteria and the relevance of BM practices to the creation of strategic value;
- to classify participant organisations according to low or high BM maturity;
- to apply best practice amongst practitioners;
- to arrange follow up research to explore how organisations involve stakeholders in BM;
- to provide insight on current trends and practices;
- to use for marketing purposes e.g. marketing a management consultancy;
- to establish the Benefits Management SIG, planning SIG activities and discussing best practice.

2.2.4 Quality of the survey questions

Nine of the survey reports do not provide a copy of the original questionnaire, rather survey results are presented according to the questions asked. Three are evaluated as using simple language, free from complex terminology. A further five use simple language with the allowance that questions are either in "business consultancy speak" or appropriate to the audience. It is worth highlighting that a non-project management and non-BM practitioner community may not understand some of the technical terminology and this can undermine the validity of answers to closed questions. This is a problem, which may only come to light through robust piloting of surveys with both specialist and non-specialist practitioners. The language of one survey is somewhat free of complex terminology – the questions are clear, if sometimes rather long.

2.2.4.1 Examples of straightforward language:

Evaluations of the surveys selected the following extracts as examples of simple language (bearing in mind the pre-existing familiarity with project management terminology) used in statements or questions:

"Expected outcomes (changes provided by project outputs)" – because the term is defined.

"The management board had overall responsibility for project governance."

"Which PPM solution do you use."

"When carrying out any change management within our Trust we always look to identify benefits."

"Which function is responsible for providing best practice or guidance on benefits management within your organization?"

"How does your organisation manage the risk relating to the realisation of benefits?"

2.2.4.2 Examples of complex language:

The following extracts are examples of complex language:

"Strategic objectives", "value created", "Integration of project outputs to the regular business routine" – these are fairly simple in context, but assume respondents understand the meaning of and difference between the terms.

"Talent management will make gains as a key focus for project organisations. Organisations that successfully align their talent strategy to organisational strategy have a higher success rate than those not aligned, and consequently risk fewer project dollars."

"Activities aiming to ensure the integration of project outputs into the regular business routine were executed as part of the project's scope."

"Does your organisation recognise your PMO as a value add business partner?"

Whilst the questions themselves are mostly concise, free from bias and leading statements, there are some exceptions. For example, "...the factors that most positively support the realisation of benefits" could have been phrased as "...the level of support the following factors give..." or something similar. This type of phrasing appears in four questions in this survey, with Likert scales for the responses. There is also one which asks "How satisfied are you..." rather than "how do you feel..." or "what is your judgment..."

The responses to a question about the use of project management software in one of the census surveys, sponsored by a Microsoft partner organisation, reports that the majority use Microsoft products.

There is little evidence of steps taken to mitigate the issue of respondents answering questions where they may have little to no understanding, thus suggesting knowledge where none may be present e.g. response bias previously mentioned in section 2.1. Only one questionnaire incorporates screening questions to filter out respondents with the required background or knowledge. It was clear that some of the surveys include preventative steps by selecting specific groups or practitioners as respondents, who have relevant experience and understanding. One survey requires respondents to focus on a single specific event within the last two years (to reduce the risk of recall bias). Another survey asks questions about training and development to cross-reference against questions asked at the beginning of the survey.

2.2.5 Format of the survey questions

Most of the surveys use multiple question formats and predominantly closed questions:

Format of survey questions	Number of surveys
Multiple choice questions	6
Likert scales	10
Yes/No	2
Open ended i.e. free text	3
Questions included an alternative option e.g. "don't know", "decline to state", "other, please state"	2

Table 3 Format of survey questions

One evaluation notes that very few questions contain "not applicable" or equivalent and most which do are in the section about the respondent, not the sections on the benefits practice. This is problematic since it may result in inaccurate responses suggesting some knowledge where little exists.

Nine of the surveys do not provide a copy of the original questionnaire, rather survey results are presented according to the questions asked. This makes it difficult to accurately evaluate the format of the survey questions.

2.2.6 Further comments on overall format of the survey

The project team offered the following comments in relation to the overall format of the individual surveys:

"One of the surveys develops a scale for effective corporate governance, based on principles developed by the APM, and linked to two major corporate governance standards, the UK corporate governance code and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act."

"The *'state of project management'* survey states on page 9 that in response to the question 'what the most difficult project management process is to embed ranked in order of frequency of selection', benefits realisation is the clear leader. Fifty-one per cent of respondents identified this as troublesome to embed, an increase from 45 per cent in 2016."

"Where a copy of the original questionnaire is not included, it can be difficult to know the finer points of set up (e.g. tool used, introductory details etc.). Acknowledgement of study limitations in the academic surveys is good practice e.g. in this study, the dual roles of some respondents (as sponsor and customer), and the large number of 'project team member' respondents may influence results. Survey designers may choose to apply stricter (or to broaden) criteria when selecting respondents, to produce more meaningful/reliable results, depending on what the survey is intended to achieve."

"It appears that UK-pioneered BM based on John Ward's[3] model which precedes Gerald Bradley[4] and Steve Jenner[5]."

"A final general question is asked at the very end of one questionnaire to determine the respondents' views on the scope for improvement in their current approach to managing IS/IT benefits. The same survey asks a question on use of other methodologies (project management, investment appraisal and systems development) and whether these are perceived to be effective. This helps contextualise the general attitude towards methodologies/approaches."

"The Project Management Institute (PMI) pulse of the profession survey includes screening questions to filter out respondents not qualified to answer all of the questions. Filters also segment respondents into three categories (project professionals, senior executives, PMO directors) who subsequently receive questions specific to their role."

"Some of the presentation methods were not as good as they could be, preventing easy visual comparison of answers, because neither the start nor end point of any of the middle colours line up with the same colour in the other bars."

[3] Professor John Ward, Emeritus Professor at Cranfield University, along with colleagues at the University, developed the first BM process model in 1996.
[4] Gerald Bradley is a management consultant. He founded Sigma as a consultancy and training organisation focussed exclusively on benefits realisation management.
[5] Stephen Jenner is author of several books in the field and chief examiner for APMG's *Managing Benefits*.

3. Conclusions

The 10 questions asked at the beginning of the document are used to structure the conclusions into five meaningful clusters (*goal of the survey research, identifying participants, type of questions, length and aesthetics of the survey, analysis and presentation*).

Goal of the Survey Research

Phase two of the project will start with agreeing a clear research goal. Phase one gave an understanding that the purpose of any research needs to be clearly articulated so that the survey authors/designers fully understand what it is they want to know (e.g. barriers to effective transition of BM from project to business-as-usual (BAU) or what and how is BM undertaken in practice) and what they will do with that information. This will then determine who to target and when, the nature of the research (qualitative/quantitative, surveys, interviews, etc.) and how to motivate and incentivise individuals/organisations to respond.

The emerging conclusion seems to be that there is value in trying to understand the barriers to effective transition of BM practices from project to business-as-usual. The aim will be to baseline the current position then repeat the survey longitudinally to understand whether BM SIG interventions influence development in this area.

Identifying Participants

The answer to the first part of this question depends on the representativeness of the final sample. A decision on this is partially linked to the availability of resources to design, promote, distribute and analyse the final questionnaire. Options include identifying organisations and sectors or focussing on a broad range of individuals/roles within organisations of different sizes, across different sectors. The decision about who to target will also influence the incentives and motivation for people to participate.

There is emerging consensus that participation is not restricted to the project management profession but must include individuals with the authority and resources to champion (or otherwise) BM in the business. The incentive will include a benchmarking exercise, priority notification of new BM knowledge and resources, and a BM maturity index. Another consideration is a prize draw.

To address the key concern about whether respondents are sufficiently qualified/knowledgeable to complete the survey in a meaningful way, the survey will include questions on how much training and explanation of BM has been made available to individuals.

Given the resource constraints, a clearly bounded sample, targeted through APM is likely to provide a higher response rate. Following Owen Anthony's experience, this is likely to involve multiple methods aimed at building momentum and engagement rather than a cross-sectional, one-off exercise.

Type of Questions

Using a combination of question types and formats seems to be the preference. Also, ensuring the list of possible responses is exhaustive to include options for 'Do not know' or 'Not applicable' etc.

Careful use of open questions could be used. In a survey, they could be sequenced either at the beginning or at the end of a sub group of closed or multiple-choice questions, will allow respondents to comment on their own experiences and potentially capture some of the rich narrative and complexity identified as essential to developing practical knowledge and understanding of BM. If open questions appear first this will help limit the social desirability bias that may occur when the respondent realises what the survey is about and will try to give 'expected' answers. In semi-structured interviews, the use of open questions should elicit reasons behind answers and examples.

Length and Aesthetics of the Survey

A short questionnaire of no more than five minutes was frequently mentioned; however, this constrains the opportunity to capture potentially rich and complex data. The alternatives are to undertake short surveys during webinars or adopt a multi-method approach using in-depth interviews/round-table discussions alongside a survey instrument to capture breadth.

Taking into account the number of questions asked in each of the ten existing BM surveys, the arithmetic mean is 26, possibly representing an upper limit. The feedback from the online participant observation would suggest that 26 is too high. Therefore, establishing an optimum number will be an important consideration for the pilot exercise.

Once the goal of the survey is agreed, the project team can begin with selecting appropriate questions from the existing BRM survey instruments. These can be tested, for example, during webinars and/or physical APM conference events in autumn 2018.

Based on findings from the online participant observation, the aesthetics of the survey instrument are important. The final design might include use of embedded images including personalised introduction with smiley face of BM SIG chair/APM inviting people to respond.

Analysis and Presentation

The constrained usefulness of the surveys which did not publish their data became clear in the reviews. Basic analysis can be completed using either survey or appropriate statistical software. In terms of reporting, distributing and presenting these findings, a variety of means can be adopted. This might start with a PDF report (as well as the anonymised raw data, in compliance with ethical requirements) on the APM website, which is available as a free download, then use other media to socialise the report. Other existing methods include the online publication of MentiMeter findings – for example Owen Anthony's webinar on project handovers http://bit.ly/2LyPv6C.

Follow up events – physical and virtual – can disseminate findings whilst simultaneously promoting participation in future surveys. Focussing on particular communities such as LinkedIn or the GovPDC Benefits Management Specialist Group. To incentivise long term participation, the BM SIG can potentially establish a system for advance notifications of special activities and/or dissemination of new knowledge (similar to the 'Energy Barometer' and 'Energy Institute College').

4. Recommendations

1. The project brief for 'Op21 Survey Project' must be reviewed in light of the findings from this report.
2. The BM SIG committee should approve progression to phase 2, identifying content.
3. Phase 2 should begin with identifying a clearly agreed research goal, followed by the research methodology and themes/subjects.
4. Targeted engagement with the senior level in the business side of APM corporate organisations is both valuable and necessary for achieving the objectives of this project. Ideally this should occur prior to the design of the final survey.
5. The nature of the engagement with APM corporate members needs to be specified by the survey project team and submitted to APM to facilitate subsequent contact with APM corporate members.
6. The motivation/incentives to participate, format and delivery method of any research tool must be clearly defined.
7. The Benefits Management SIG committee considers whether this report (or a condensed version of it) can be published as a guidance document for individuals interested in designing surveys.
8. The OP21 project team should recommend enhancing any future edition of this report by consulting APM corporate members (or other available sources) on their experience of benefits management and previous research tools they have experienced.

"Perhaps focus questions and interactions around what the BM SIG agrees as the key 'factors for benefits success'."
(Contributor 8, ProjectPlace).

Appendix A – Project approach

A1 Scope

The geographic scope for the data collected online via practitioner forums such as LinkedIn and Knowledge Hub has been unlimited. Contributors came from the UK, continental Europe, America and Australia. Likewise, the scope of the existing surveys we analysed was global and included both practitioner and academic surveys. The scope of physical data collection (face to face interviews, meetings and events), for expediency of access and availability, has been limited to a convenience sample in the UK. Originally, the aim was to meet with APM corporate members. It is hoped this engagement will take place in the next phase of the project.

A2 Data collection

Three types of data were collected for this study. Firstly, comments posted to online forums in response to a question posed about how to improve survey response rates on APM's official LinkedIn page, Knowledge Hub's benefits management practitioner forum and feedback received via email in response to an APM newsletter. Secondly, 10 practitioner and academic surveys were reviewed by the project team (see attached template). Thirdly, eight semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of specialist practitioners covering the following areas:

- purpose of the survey;
- respondents and audience;
- format of the survey;
- motivation/incentivisation for people to respond;
- distribution.

A2.1 Interview questions

General

1. Definition of benefits realisation management
    a. What does this concept/term mean to you? (Is it perceived as a component of project management or a management process in its own right?)
    b. Can concepts/terms be interpreted differently? Why?
    c. What is the level of awareness of BM in organisations? At what level of the organisation? (Horizontal structure here too, and the degree of separation of projects, programmes and portfolios from BAU. Also, IT departments/IT-enabled change/all changes as aspects of levels.)

d. Are there any definitions of BM which are more popular than others? Why?

e. Are there any similarities or differences between the private/public/third sector organisations?

f. Do organisations develop their own definitions of BM?

2. Purpose of benefits realisation

   a. What is the purpose of BM?

   b. Is it useful/valuable? For whom? Why/why not?

   c. What/who drives BM? User pull/technology push? C-suite? Public sector requirement? Achieving project management maturity levels?

   d. What/who should drive BM?

   e. Can adoption of BM be improved? How?

3. Process of BM

   a. What is your understanding of what is involved in BM?

   b. Do you have any knowledge of approaches/models to BM used within organisations you have worked for/with?

   c. Are these approaches formal/informal, top down/bottom up, qualitative/quantitative/both?

   d. Which people/teams/roles within the organisation are involved with BM? What is their background/training? How do they keep informed?

   e. In your opinion at what stage of a change initiative should BM be undertaken?

   f. Are unanticipated benefits captured? How are these dealt with?

   g. At what point is BM undertaken?

   h. Which stakeholders are usually included in the process? Who should be included/excluded?

   i. Can your current process (whether this refers to best practice or customised approach) be improved? How?

Design of the survey

a. What are your thoughts on what the objectives of this survey should be?

b. Who are the respondents? e.g. individuals vs. organisations, C-suite/project managers/programme managers/business analysts/change analysts? Private/public/third sectors?

c. Who is the audience? i.e. who will use the information from the survey results?

d. What are your thoughts on distribution of the survey?

e. What are your thoughts on format of the survey?

f. How do we motivate/incentivise people to participate?

g. Can a partial survey (subset) be implemented?

h. How is integrity of survey questions and results assured?

i. Who undertakes/is authorised to facilitate the survey?

j. How should we analyse and present the results of the survey?

k. How often should the survey be undertaken?

l. How does your organisation [1] conduct surveys? [2] What are the preferences? [3] Do you respond/what factors would increase response rates? [4] Do you attend online sessions e.g. webinars? [5] Do you complete polls/Mentimeter/otherwise contribute?

m. What if anything do you do differently as a result of completing a survey? (Thinking about the relationship of behaviour and what people say.)

n. Linking in with the final point above, we always have an implicit purpose of influencing behaviour by asking questions – might this be an explicit aspect of this work?

Appendix B – Survey review evaluation form

Purpose

The purpose of evaluating existing surveys is to inform the design process for our own survey so that we can deliver a high-quality instrument, which people feel motivated to respond to, answers the 'so what?' test and ultimately delivers the insight that people are beginning to tell us they want e.g. baselining BM capability, understanding what people/organisations/sectors do differently, is BM valued etc.

Instructions for using this form:

1. Please try to answer all of the below questions. However, given the variation in surveys we are evaluating it is understood that answering all questions may not be possible.
2. There is a variation in the types of questions you are asked to answer on this form. Some are dichotomous yes/no, some require you to qualify your answer using a scale, and others are open where you provide either a discrete answer or a descriptive judgement. With the descriptive responses it would be helpful, where possible, to include or refer to examples from the survey instrument you are reviewing.

Question		Response
Background information		
1a	What is the title of the survey?	
1b	Who are the authors?	
1c	Where was the survey published?	
1d	When was the survey conducted?	
1e	Is the survey longitudinal in nature?	Yes/No
1f	How many people responded and what was the response rate?	
1g	When were the results published?	
1h	Where were the results published?	
What are the objectives of the survey?		
2a	What are the authors trying to learn from the survey results?	
2b	Was a scenario provided which positioned the survey i.e. some PESTLE type reference used to justify the need for the survey?	Yes/Somewhat/No
2c	Who is the target population? i.e. who are the authors surveying?	
2d	Has the survey tried to establish the training, qualification, knowledge, experience, background of the participants?	Yes/Somewhat/No
2e	Does the survey ask for the specific department, division, sector of the participant? (Please specify)	Yes/Somewhat/No
2f	Who is the audience? i.e. who will use the information from the survey results?	
2g	How is the information from the survey used?	
Quality of the survey questions		
3a	Is there use of simple language? i.e. free from complex terminology.	Yes/Somewhat/No
3b	Provide examples of simple language.	
3c	Provide examples of complex language.	
3d	Are questions concise and to the point?	Yes/Somewhat/No
3e	Are questions neutral i.e. free from bias or leading statements.	Yes/Somewhat/No
3f	What steps are taken to normalise responses? i.e. the answer to a question which the recipient has little knowledge may result in an inaccurate reply suggesting some knowledge where little knowledge is present.	

Question		Response
Format of the survey questions		
4a	What question formats are used? (e.g. Yes/No, Multiple Choice, Likert scales, Open-ended).	
4b	Is the choice of question format appropriate?	
4c	Provide examples of good format where all possible responses are captured, options are logical, scales are labelled etc.	
4d	Do questions include an alternative response? (e.g. Don't know, Decline to state, Other).	
Format of the survey overall		
5a	Is there an introduction to the survey?	Yes/No
5b	Does the introduction include a topic and why participation will help?	Yes/No
5c	Does the introduction include assurances that involvement is voluntary and confidential?	Yes/No
5d	Does it include who is sponsoring the survey and who to contact with questions or concerns?	Yes/No
5e	Is there a logical order to the questions?	Yes/Somewhat/No
5f	Are questions grouped by topic?	Yes/Somewhat/No
5g	Are questions intriguing and easy to answer?	Yes/Somewhat/No
5h	Is the length of the survey appropriate?	Yes/Somewhat/No
5i	How long is the survey ? i.e. number of questions	
5j	Does the survey indicate progress through the survey, e.g. 60 per cent complete?	Yes/No
5k	What incentives for completion are used? e.g. prize.	Yes/No (please specify)
5l	Does the survey allow the respondent to leave contact details for a follow-up interview?	Yes/No
5m	Is the survey innovative in nature? i.e. more than just typical SurveyMonkey.	Yes/Somewhat/No
5n	What survey tool was used and how was it used? e.g. real-time during events or asynchronously, posted online with a completion deadline.	
Format of the survey overall		
6a	Please provide any further comments about the survey you feel are relevant to our own project.	

Appendix C – Survey reviews results table

	#1	#2	#3	#4
Is there an introduction to the survey?	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Does the introduction include a topic and why participation will help?	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Does the introduction include assurances that involvement is voluntary and confidential?	Unknown	No	Yes	Unknown
Does it include who is sponsoring the survey and who to contact with questions or concerns?	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Is there a logical order to the questions?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Are questions grouped by topic?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Somewhat
Are questions intriguing and easy to answer?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Somewhat
Is the length of the survey appropriate?	Quite long	Yes	Somewhat	Yes
How long is the survey i.e. number of questions?	38	21	39	12
Does the survey indicate progress through the survey, e.g. 60% complete?	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
What incentives for completion are used? e.g. prize	Unknown	Unknown	Vouchers and conference tickets	Unknown
Does the survey allow the respondent to leave contact details for a follow-up interview?	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
Is the survey innovative in nature? i.e. more than just typical Survey Monkey	No	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
What survey tool was used and how was it used? e.g. real-time during events or asynchronously, posted on line with a completion deadline	LinkedIn – exactly how is not stated	Unknown	Unknown	Tool unknown. Survey was advertised via institutional website and social networks, and invitations sent via LinkedIn

#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Unknown
Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
No	Unknown	Unknown	Yes, but anonymity was optional	Yes	Unknown
Yes – front and last pages	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
Yes	Yes	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Unknown	It can be surmised that there is.	Yes	Yes	Yes
Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Somewhat	Yes
Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Yes
29	Unknown	Unknown	59	35	23
Unknown	Unknown	No, postal questionnaire	No, postal questionnaire	No, postal questionnaire	Unknown
Unknown	Not stated but presumably mapping orgs to a BM maturity level	Unknown	Unknown	Sharing the findings and producing a maturity index	Unknown
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Unknown
No	Unknown	Unknown	No	No	Unknown
Online survey, tool not specified, independent insight agency TRA used for analysis	Online survey	Postal survey – 18 years ago	Postal questionnaire	Postal questionnaire, phased to avoid collusion	Specific tool unknown but distributed via APM channels

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APM Collaborative study

APM Collaborative studies include research and/or policy-based content between APM and like-minded organisations. The aim is to develop and generate innovative studies that help promote a profession built around learning and collaboration.

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