Introduction

In the 2025 edition of the Excellence in Practice Award, we received 50 applications, showcasing remarkable diversity in content and applicant backgrounds. The selection process for awards was rigorous, with a jury conducting thorough reviews of each submission and ultimately awarding the highest distinction—gold—to only three entries. This underscores the competitive nature of the challenge and illustrates the ongoing challenge of substantiating impact. In this context, impact refers to the tangible and measurable outcomes resulting from the awarded practices—for example, improvements in learning outcomes, organisational development and performance or broader societal benefits. Demonstrating such impact is often complex, as it requires robust data, credible indicators, and clear attribution of outcomes to specific interventions, areas that are not always straightforward to quantify or verify.

Given these observations, it is timely and valuable to explore in greater depth the complexities surrounding the measurement and demonstration of impact, setting the stage for a more comprehensive discussion.

For this initial qualitative analysis, we aimed to better understand what distinguishes the impact sections of gold-winning applications from others. To do so, we selected a small, exploratory sample: the three gold, three silver, and three other entries. The other entries were randomly chosen using a random number generator, the three silver based on the order of submission. The analysis focused exclusively on the "impact" sections as described in the submitted cases. The analysis deliberately excludes references to jury arguments or judgments, and was limited to grouping and examining the language and concepts presented within the impact chapters. It is important to note that the mention of an indicator or the claim of impact does not necessarily mean that it is substantiated within the case, or even that it represents a relevant indicator for the challenge addressed.

The impact chapters of the nine cases can be analysed along three axes: (1) what is or can be measured, (2) how measurements are conducted, and (3) when measurements take place. An inventory and observations for each axis are detailed in the following paragraphs.

What Is or Can Be Measured ?

Our observations (original text in italics) indicate that gold award recipients typically concentrate not only on the programme and its participants but also give considerable attention to the organisational

impact and outcomes. While this tendency is not strongly differentiating according to text analysis alone, it warrants additional investigation.

WHAT	ALL (n=9)	GOLD (n=3)	SILVER (n=3)	OTHER (n=3)
Programme	*NPS*	x	x	x
	participant satisfaction	x	x	
Personal	*application*		x	x
	promotion			x
	retention		x	
	competency improvement	x		x
	skills	x	x	x
	capabilities		x	x
	knowledge acquisition	x		
	employability	x		
	personal development	x		x
Organisation	*organisation development*			x
	productivity	x	x	x
	collaboration		x	x
	networking	x	x	
	HR key KPIs	x		
	satisfaction with manager	x		
	leadership culture		x	x
	engagement		x	x
	projects		x	
	transformation		x	x
	effectiveness	x		x
	process automation	x		
	culture		x	x
	network		x	x
	operational processes		x	
Results	*sales*		x	x
	revenue		x	x
	district level outcomes	x		
	surrounding communities	x		
	growth			x
	business impact	x		
	customer service	x	x	
	revenue growth	x		
	financial results		x	
	savings	x		x

How Are Measurements Conducted ?

Gold award winners use a wider variety of measurement methods. These go beyond participant or self-reporting and place greater emphasis on external benchmarking. For example, gold award winners often incorporate third-party evaluations and industry-standard metrics in addition to self-reported data

HOW	ALL (n=9)	GOLD (n=3)	SILVER (n=3)	OTHER (n=3)
Participant	*evaluation of trainings*	x		
	participants rating			x
	participant feedback		x	
	survey	x	x	
	feedback	x	x	x
	participants report			x
	assessments	x		
	testimonials	x		
Organisation	*course completion rates*	x		
	people management process	x		
	pulse check	x		
	performance evaluation			x
	skill mapping	x		
	manager feedback		x	
External	*benchmark*	x		
	award	x	x	
	accredited qualification			x

When Do Measurements Take Place ?

In this small exploratory sample of corporate training programmes, organisations that achieved gold awards distinguished themselves by using baseline and pre-programme measurements to assess participant and organisation progress. This practice set them apart from other award submissions.

WHEN	GOLD (n=3)	SILVER (n=3)	OTHER (n=3)
baseline & pre-programme	x		
in-programme		x	x
post-programme	x	x	x

Conclusion and Future Direction

When analysing a sample of nine 2025 submissions we found the following indications for impact proof interventions :

Organisational impact (e.g., improvements in productivity, revenue, engagement) appeared consistently as indicators in gold awarded applications.

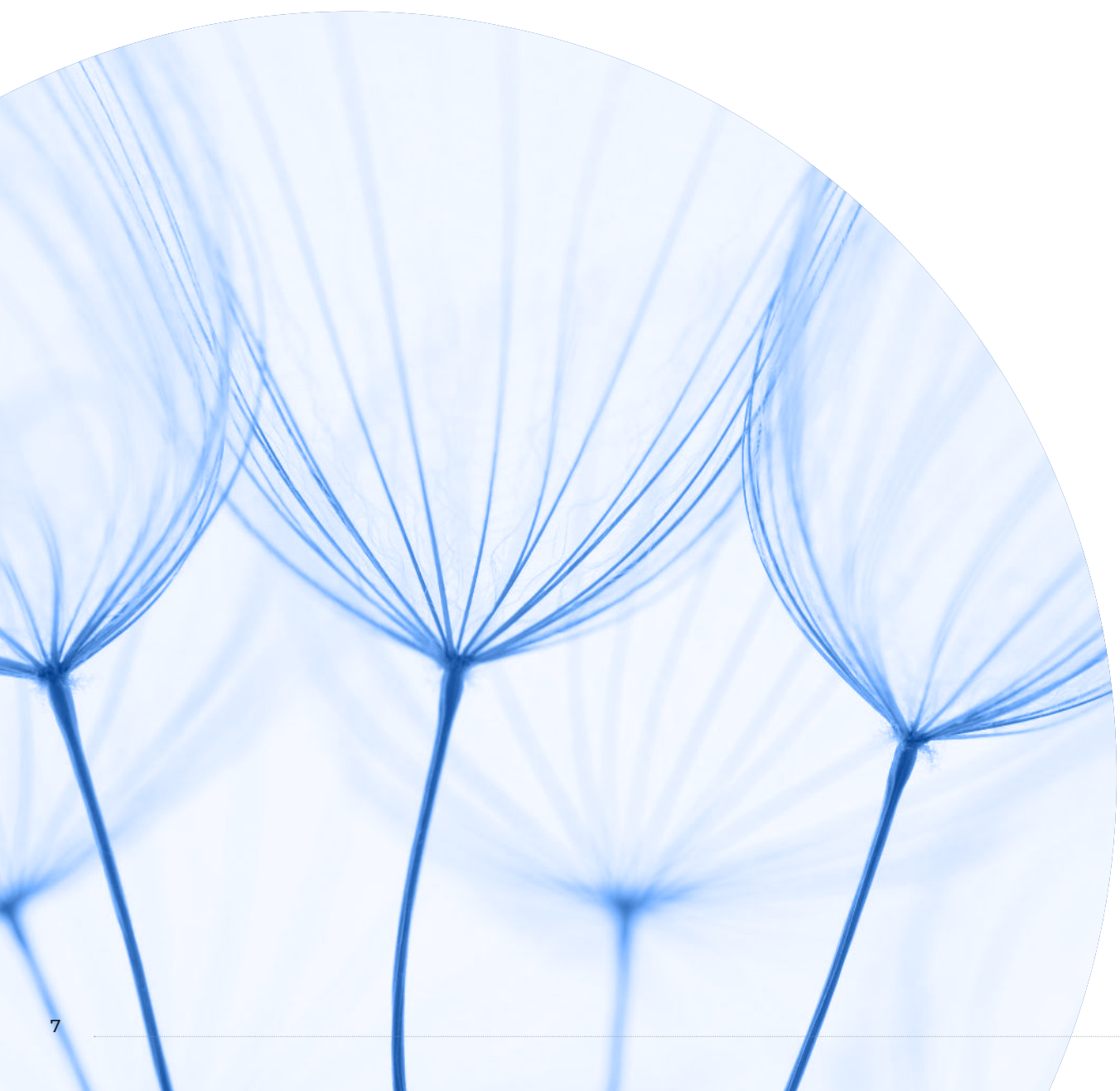
External benchmarking methods and metrics, such as third-party evaluations and industry comparisons, featured more heavily in gold entries.

Gold award winners also utilised baseline and pre-programme measurements to assess progress, distinguishing themselves from other award submissions.

Further analysis with expanded samples (over several years of the Excellence in Practice awards for instance) and systematic criteria could help clarify which elements most strongly distinguish gold-level applications, ultimately supporting all actors in the learning and development ecosystem in the pursuit of impactful, measurable results.

In any case, this exploratory qualitative analysis will spark debate and exchange at the next Executive Education Conference in Stockholm (1-2 October) and it might inspire you to put forward a 2026 Excellence in Practice award submission.

Meanwhile, enjoy reading the 2025 award winning cases !



Winners

2025 Excellence in Practice AWARDS GOLD

2025 Excellence in Practice AWARDS SILVER

Category: Organisational Development

★GOLD★

Axpo Group & University of St. Gallen, Executive School of Management, Technology & Law

★SILVER★

BrightRock Life & Abundance at Work

Category: Talent Development

★SILVER★

Tata Group & London Business School

★SILVER★

GERDAU & Fundação Dom Cabral

Category: Leadership Development

★GOLD★

NatWest Group & IMD

★SILVER★

Credit Agricole Ukraine & KROK Business School, KROK University

Category: Professional Development

★SILVER★

Zain Group & IE Business School

★SILVER★

Afreximbank & FCI & Onsi Sawiris School of Business, The American University in Cairo

Category: Ecosystem Development

★GOLD★

Principals Academy Trust & Capitec Foundation & University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (GSB)

★SILVER★

Education and Training Foundation (ETF) & Change School & King's College London, King's Business School