Introduction

1. The Pursuit of Deep Impact

The Excellence in Practice Awards recognise organisations that successfully translate learning and development into sustainable organisational development. This year's submission round was exceptionally competitive, demonstrating the breadth of transformative thinking and operational excellence across our global community. Through a rigorous review process involving a distinguished jury of more than 40 professionals and over 50 submissions, we sought to identify interventions that achieved not merely improvement, but fundamental and sustainable change.

In this highly selective process, we have again focused on impact: submissions that offer a clear proof point for the value of learning and development. In uncertain times, such proof strengthens the credibility and professionalism of those who invest in people and organisations, demonstrating not only that development activity took place, but that it created measurable value.

This article first explains why impact evidence matters for the Excellence in Practice Awards, then introduces the 2026 Impact Framework, and finally draws out what the Gold Award cases reveal about stronger future submissions.

2. Describing Impact

During 2025, we constructed a library of impact-related concepts and definitions drawn from EiP cases over time. A first attempt to structure this library was shared in the 2025 editorial of the EiP supplement and at the Stockholm Executive Development Conference. Further work led to the creation of an Impact Framework, which we used as an overlay to analyse the 2026 Gold Award winners. The key findings from that analysis are outlined below.

Last year, we highlighted the importance of a measurement timeframe: pre-intervention, post-intervention, and beyond.

We also highlighted the value of control groups or comparison conditions in supporting credible impact claims. The 2026 Impact Framework refines two further dimensions: measurement content, or the observable impact ("What"), and measurement method, or the evidence trail ("How").

"What" refers to what specifically changed or was measured. Strong descriptions move beyond broad claims such as "skills improved" and show the depth of change across individual, team, and organisational levels. "How" refers to how evidence of that change was gathered. Instead of relying on vague terms such as "feedback" or "test," submissions should specify the type of data used and the level of rigour behind it. Specific suggestions for improving impact evidence descriptions are detailed below.

Measurement Descriptions: Challenges	Suggested Improvement: The Evidence Trail	How to Implement / Example Concepts
Too Simple: survey, interviews. These methods can be high or low quality.	Quantitative Evidence (The Numbers): Objective, scalable data tied to a metric.	KPIs, ROI calculations, Attendance rates, Turnover figures.
Mixes Mediums: Many entries are just labeled "feedback."	Qualitative Evidence (The Why): Narrative data explaining why the change occurred or what it felt like.	Thematic analysis of transcripts, Open-ended feedback comments, Success stories.
High Value/Low Frequency: High-rigour, powerful data streams are undervalued.	Structured/Benchmark Evidence (The Rigour): Data gathered using specific, externally validated models or processes.	360-degree reviews, Phillips ROI model application, External accreditation scores.

The following observations translate the framework into practical submission guidance. They highlight the forms of evidence that make impact claims more convincing and the types of outcomes that distinguish strong cases from merely well-described programmes.

3. Gold Standard (2026)

Synthesis of Gold-Standard Drivers

Conceptual Impact Driver (What)	Refined Impact Claim	Evidence Trail (How)
Leadership Capability Transcendence	Elevating leaders to strategic influencers capable of driving systemic, enterprise-wide change.	Pre/Post Assessment Scores, 360-Degree Feedback, Leadership Promotions (e.g., 34% vs 16% progression rates).
Network Maturity/ Velocity	Developing a high-trust, decentralised network where knowledge flows efficiently and freely across organisational silos.	Social Network Analysis (SNA) Data (Density, Centralisation Index shift), Peer Mentorship Uptake.
Institutionalising Knowledge	Moving beyond short-term learning into scalable, integrated business practice and governance.	New Process Adoption (e.g., sustainability drives, LCA modeling), Formalised Review Cycles (Quarterly Business Reviews).
Cultural/Mindset Shift	Achieving deep, measurable shifts in the organisation's operating norms and risk posture.	Attitudinal Surveys Shift from "embarrassment barrier" to open reporting, Alignment with Mission/Values.
Ecosystemic/External Alignment	Using the internal capability gains to drive verifiable external business success or social good.	Financial Outcomes ($80M cost saving, $1B investment), Client NPS/ CSAT Scores, Policy Influence (FPIC integration).

The 2026 Gold Award cases show that strong impact claims combine two qualities: a clearly observable change and a credible trail of evidence. The strongest submissions did not simply describe participant satisfaction or learning activity. They connected development interventions to changes in behaviour, team practice, organisational capability, and, where possible, external business or societal outcomes. In doing so, they moved from reporting that learning occurred to demonstrating that transformation was achieved.

4. What this Means for Future Submissions

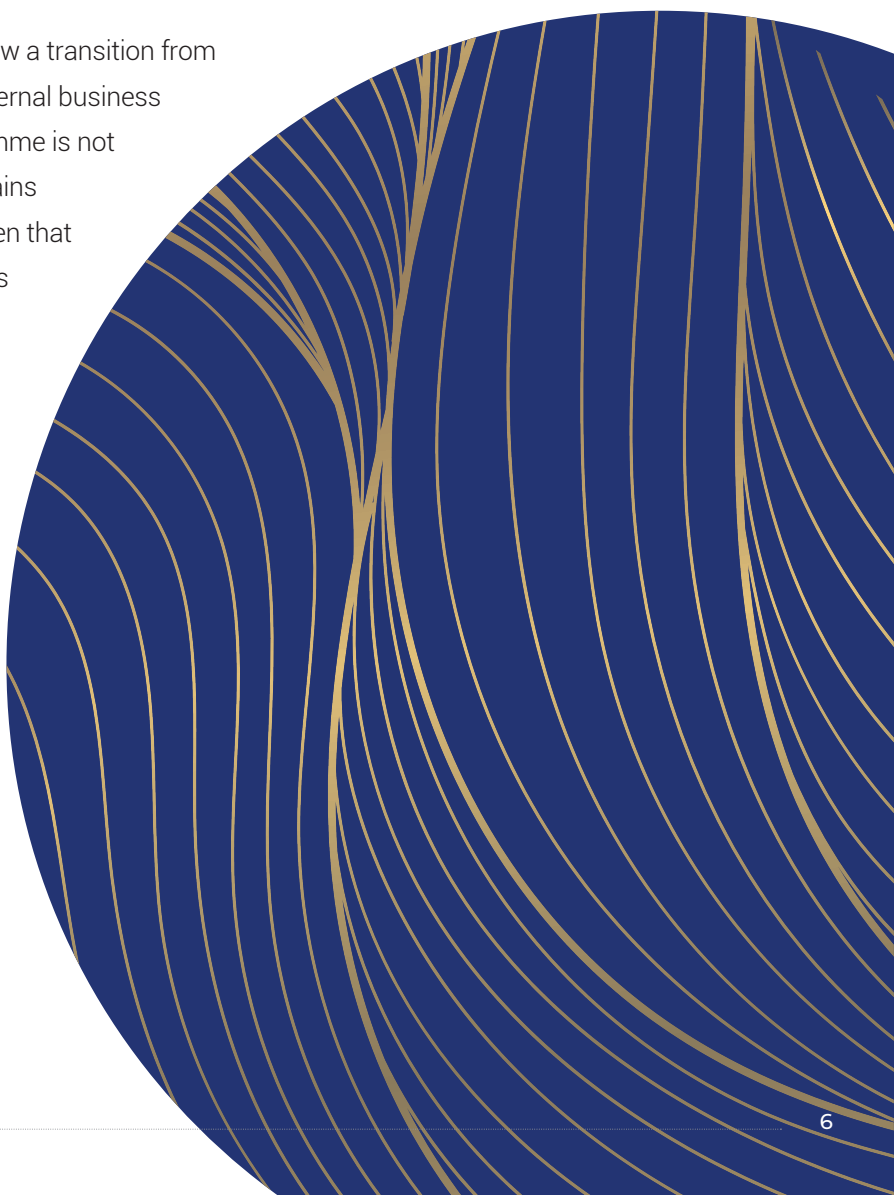
By running the gold-standard cases against the Impact Framework, we gain powerful prescriptive intelligence for future case submissions:

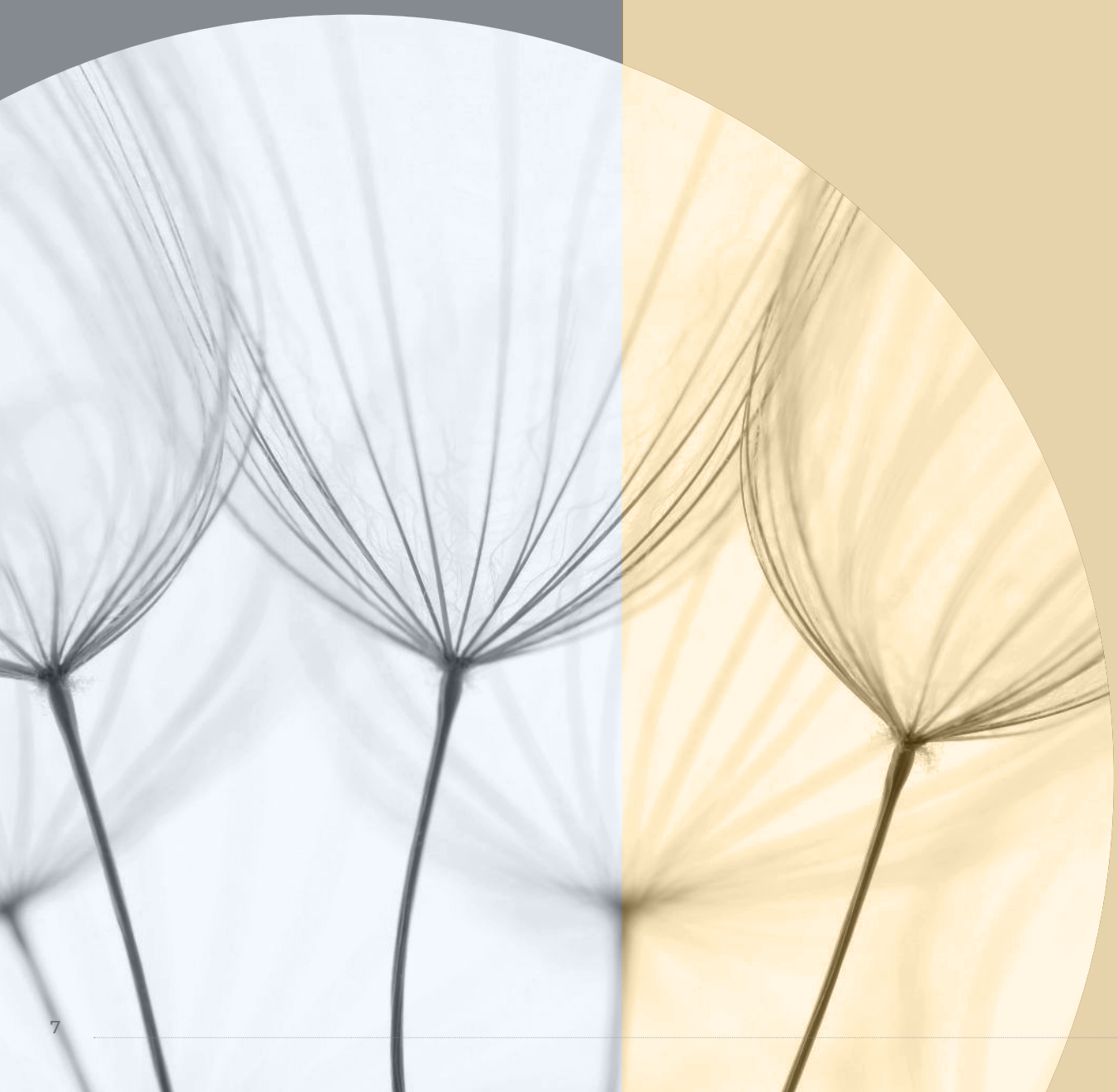
1. The most rigorous claims combine quantitative assessment data, such as pre- and post-programme scores or financial KPI tracking, with qualitative validation, such as evidence of applicability in practice. This combination strengthens both the reliability of the evidence and the plausibility of the impact claim.

2. The most powerful cases show a transition from internal skill development to external business or societal outcomes. A programme is not successful merely because it trains participants; it is successful when that training contributes to outcomes such as new revenue, reduced environmental cost, stronger stakeholder practice, or policy influence.

During **EFMD's 2026 Executive Development Conference in Dublin**, we will share experiences, exchange insights with award-winning cases, and discuss the observations outlined above.

We hope you enjoy the reading.





Winners

2026 Excellence in Practice AWARDS GOLD

2026 Excellence in Practice AWARDS SILVER

Category: Organisational Development

★GOLD★
Seco Tools
& Hult Ashridge Executive Education

★SILVER★
Sanofi
& HEC Paris

Category: Talent Development

★GOLD★
Rio Tinto
& AGSM, UNSW

★SILVER★
Tiger Brands
& Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)

Category: Leadership Development

★SILVER★
Helios Towers
& Cranfield University

★SILVER★
Standard Bank
& Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS)

Category: Professional Development

★GOLD★
Novo Nordisk
& IMD

★SILVER★
Tech Mahindra
& INSEAD

Category: Ecosystem Development

★GOLD★
Hixon Group
& Keele University

★SILVER★
Bangkok Metropolitan Council (BMC)
& Talat Phlu Metropolitan Police Station
& Thammasat Business School