



CRITICAL THINKING

COMMUNICATION

COLLABORATION

CREATIVITY

21st century thinking at Australasian law firms

2017 ALPMA/InfoTrack survey report

Executive summary

The ALPMA/InfoTrack 21st century thinking at Australasian law firms research measures how well Australasian law firms were embracing the key 21st century learning skills of creativity, critical-thinking, communication and collaboration, as defined by the influential [P21 organisation](#).

The research is part of ALPMA's on-going research program that aims to help law firms successfully adapt to the changing legal landscape. More than 100 firms participated in this year's research – and the results make compelling reading.

Perhaps not surprisingly, lawyers and law firm leaders were rated better at critical thinking than they are at communicating or collaborating, and are mostly ineffective at finding creative solutions, according to the results of research by ALPMA and InfoTrack.

The legal industry as a whole was assessed by respondents as 'ineffective' at communicating, collaborating or finding creative solutions.

While most firms placed high value on communication, collaboration and critical thinking, few firms strongly valued creativity. This is an essential ingredient for innovation, and a missed opportunity for firms seeking competitive advantage in a turbulent sector.

Efforts by firms to improve their effectiveness in these four critical skills were typically internally focused, and targeted at staff in the same office, rather than those in other offices or external to the organisation.

Interestingly, few firms focus on their suppliers as potential partners in their effort to improve creativity, critical thinking, communication or collaboration at their firms, although many firms are working with clients.

'Setting a dedicated budget' was found to be the least effective strategy to improve any of the four skills at a law firms.

Most firms focused their efforts on improving communication and collaboration over last 12 months – with varying results.

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83% of those surveyed had used internal meetings to improve communication; 72% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.

Creating new roles/teams was undertaken by 58% of survey participants; 85% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.

Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving communication were enhancing existing technology, implementing new technology, changing organisational structure and external meetings.

Efforts to improve communication had the biggest impact on motivation.

COLLABORATION

Firms reported that focusing on team performance was the most effective strategy to improve collaboration (74%).

Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving collaboration were changing organisational culture and structure, enhancing existing or new technology and creating industry specific teams or client teams.

Better teamwork was the net result when firms implemented strategies to improve their communication or collaboration efforts.

CRITICAL THINKING

63% of those surveyed had conducted training to improve critical thinking; 52% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.

Other strategies noted as effective or highly effective for improving critical thinking were creating specific teams and changing organisational structure.

CREATIVITY

The standard approach to fostering creative thinking at law firms (adopted by 86% of respondents) was asking for staff suggestions – yet only 21% of these respondents rated this as highly effective in terms of delivering results. Other strategies adopted included identifying new initiatives as a part of the firm's strategic planning process, creating teams dedicated to innovation and running innovation workshops.

Finally, the results show that law firms are not measuring their improvement efforts –nor do they typically reward or recognise staff who demonstrate these skills in their everyday work.

It is clear that the legal sector has a long way to go before becoming proficient across all four skill areas.

But it is encouraging to see most firms have well and truly embarked on this journey. If your firm has 'set sail on the 4C's', then this research provides useful insights on what is working and what isn't at other firms, and identifies a number of opportunities for continued improvement.

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	5
Objective	5
Methodology and participant profile	5
Part 1: Value of learning skills	6
Part 2: Effectiveness of learning skills	7
Part 3: Focused efforts	8
Part 4: Improvements	9
Communication	9
Collaboration	11
Critical thinking	13
Creativity	15
Part 5: Technology	17
Communication	17
Collaboration	18
Critical thinking	19
Creativity	20
Part 6: Measurement	21
Part 7: Rewards and recognition	22
Part 8: Greatest benefit	23
Part 9: Success	25
Survey participant profile	26
Firm size and location	26
About ALPMA	26
About InfoTrack	26

Introduction

Objective

The 2017 ALPMA/InfoTrack study identifies how law firms are developing and applying the four key 21st century learning skills to help drive innovation and ensure they flourish in the transforming legal landscape. The 4C's as identified by the influential [P21 organisation](#) are:

COMMUNICATION Effectively using communication skills and technology to inform, motivate, persuade, and share ideas.

COLLABORATION Working effectively and efficiently with others, sharing knowledge, talent and experience to achieve desired outcomes.

CRITICAL THINKING Looking at problems in a new light; mental processes and strategies to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts.

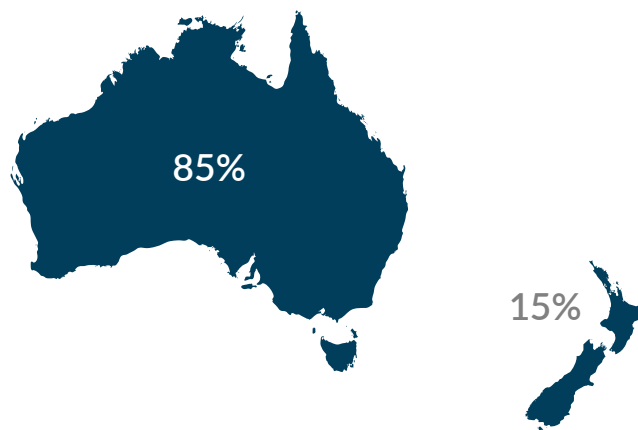
CREATIVITY Producing and implementing new, useful ideas and trying new approaches to get things done.

Methodology and Participant Profile

The 2017 ALPMA/InfoTrack Survey was open to all Australian and New Zealand law firms from 7 July to 28 July 2017. The survey was designed and distributed using SurveyMonkey software. The data provided by firms is held as strictly confidential. The results of the survey are provided in aggregate form only. No individual firm is identified in the survey results in any way.

The target audience was the Australasian Legal Practice Management Association members and subscribers, and InfoTrack law firm clients. A total of 114 law firms completed the survey by the closing date. This year's survey gathered 71 responses from Australia & 13 from NZ (30 unknown).

For the full participant profile, see survey participation profile at the end of this report.



Part 1: value of learning skills

How highly do firms value 21st century learning skills?

Respondents were asked to rate how highly they believe their firm values each of the 4C's: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = very high and 1 = not at all.

The results of each were analysed and then compared across the 4C's. The graph below shows the results as a percentage of responses.

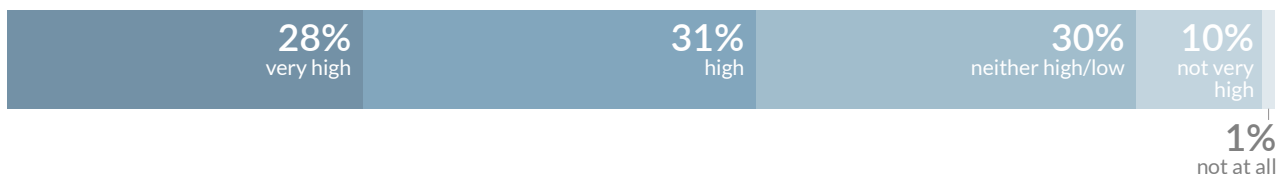
COMMUNICATION



COLLABORATION



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The results show:

- Overall, firms value communication, collaboration and critical thinking but do not rate creativity.
- More than half of firms (>58%) surveyed value communication, collaboration and critical thinking highly or very highly.
- By contrast, more than half of firms surveyed (60%) did not rate creativity highly as a valued skill.
- It is also interesting to note 20-34% of firms surveyed are ambivalent to all 4C's learning skills.
- Communication is valued by all firms surveyed, with more than 75% of firms rating it as of high importance
 - 4% rated communication as not very high but no survey response considered communication to be not at all important.
- In each of the other three learning skills, some survey respondents indicated their firm did not value that learning skill at all. 6% of firms surveyed said they did not value creativity and another 20% indicated their firm's emphasis on creativity was not very high.

Part 2: effectiveness of learning skills

How effective are 21st century learning skills across specific groups?

Respondents were asked to rate how effective specific groups were across each of the 4C's. The results were analysed and the weighted average found for each of the 4C's (see table below).

The scores equate to the following scale:

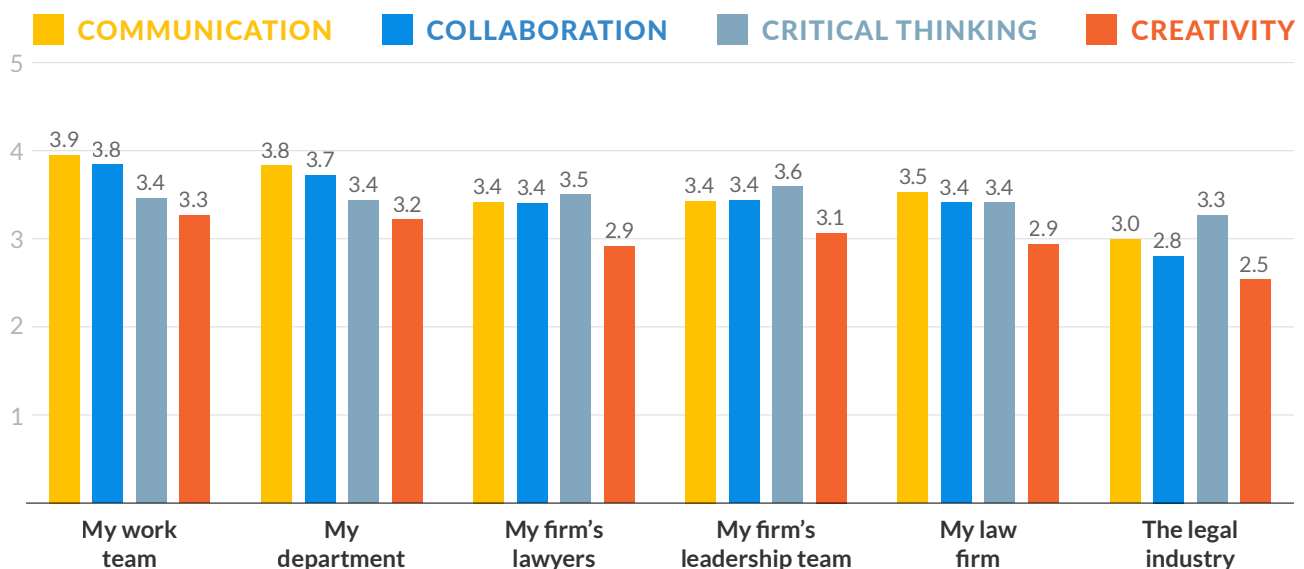
5: highly effective

4: mostly effective

3: neither effective nor ineffective

2: mostly ineffective

1: not at all effective



The results show:

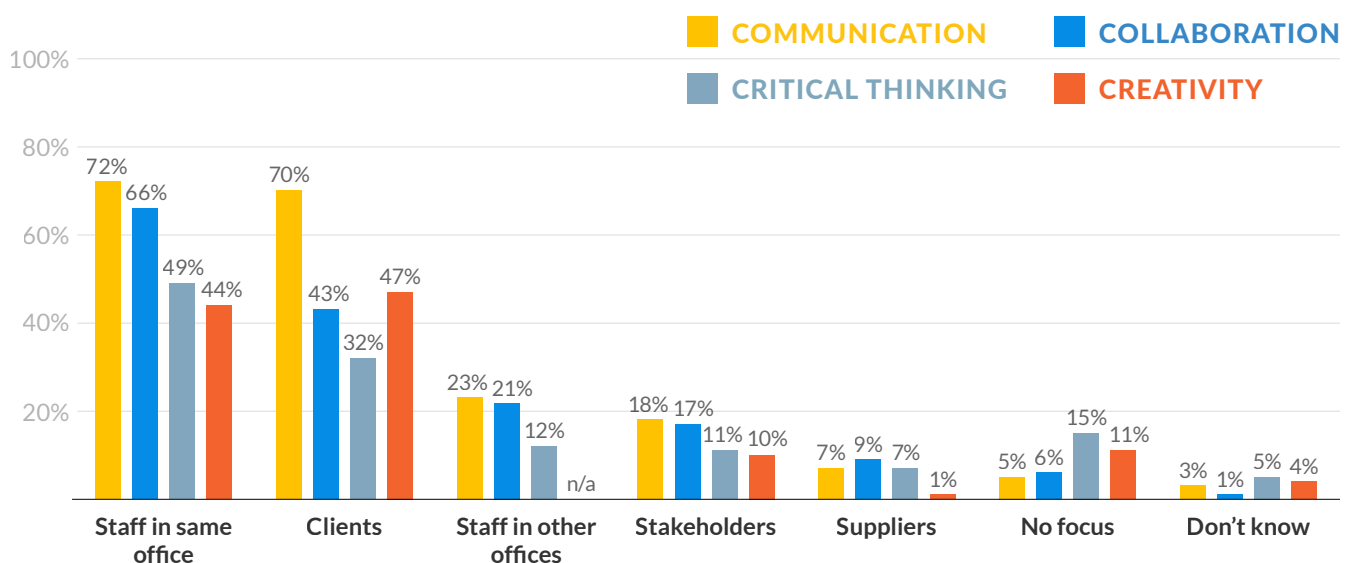
- Respondents believe the groups they work closely with are more effective at all 4C's than wider groups within the legal industry.
 - All effectiveness scores for work team or department were positive across all learning skills.
 - Communication and collaboration was considered mostly effective in work teams and departments.
- Survey respondents believe their firm's lawyers and leadership are better at critical thinking than they are at communicating or collaborating.
 - These groups are also found to be mostly ineffective at finding creative solutions.
- The legal industry is rated as ineffective at communicating, collaborating or finding creative solutions. However, the legal industry received a slightly better rating for its effectiveness at critical thinking and problem solving.

Part 3: focused efforts

Where has your firm focused their efforts in the last 12 months?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate where their firm has focused their efforts to improve 21st century learning skills. This question allowed for multiple responses where participants could select different groups, indicate if there was no focus or if they did not know. The focus areas were as follows.

- Staff in same office
- Clients
- Staff in other offices: remote/interstate/international
- Other stakeholders
- Suppliers
- My firm is not focused on [4C]
- I don't know



The results show:

- Efforts to improve all skills were mainly focused on staff in the same office or with clients.
- More than 65% of those surveyed indicated they have some focused effort on communication and collaboration with staff in the same office.
- Compared to communication and collaboration, critical thinking and creativity have had less focused effort in the past 12 months.
 - Less than 50% of those surveyed indicated efforts to improve creative solutions for clients and staff.
- Less than 20% of firms surveyed indicated they are focused on improving 4C's with their stakeholders.
- Less than 10% indicated they are focused on improving 4C's with their suppliers

Other areas for focused efforts (listed by respondents):

Communication	Accountants and bankers
Collaboration	National law firm association
Critical thinking	Employ more experienced and technically capable people
Creativity	Marketing

Part 4: improvements

What actions has your firm has taken to improve communication and how effective were these actions?

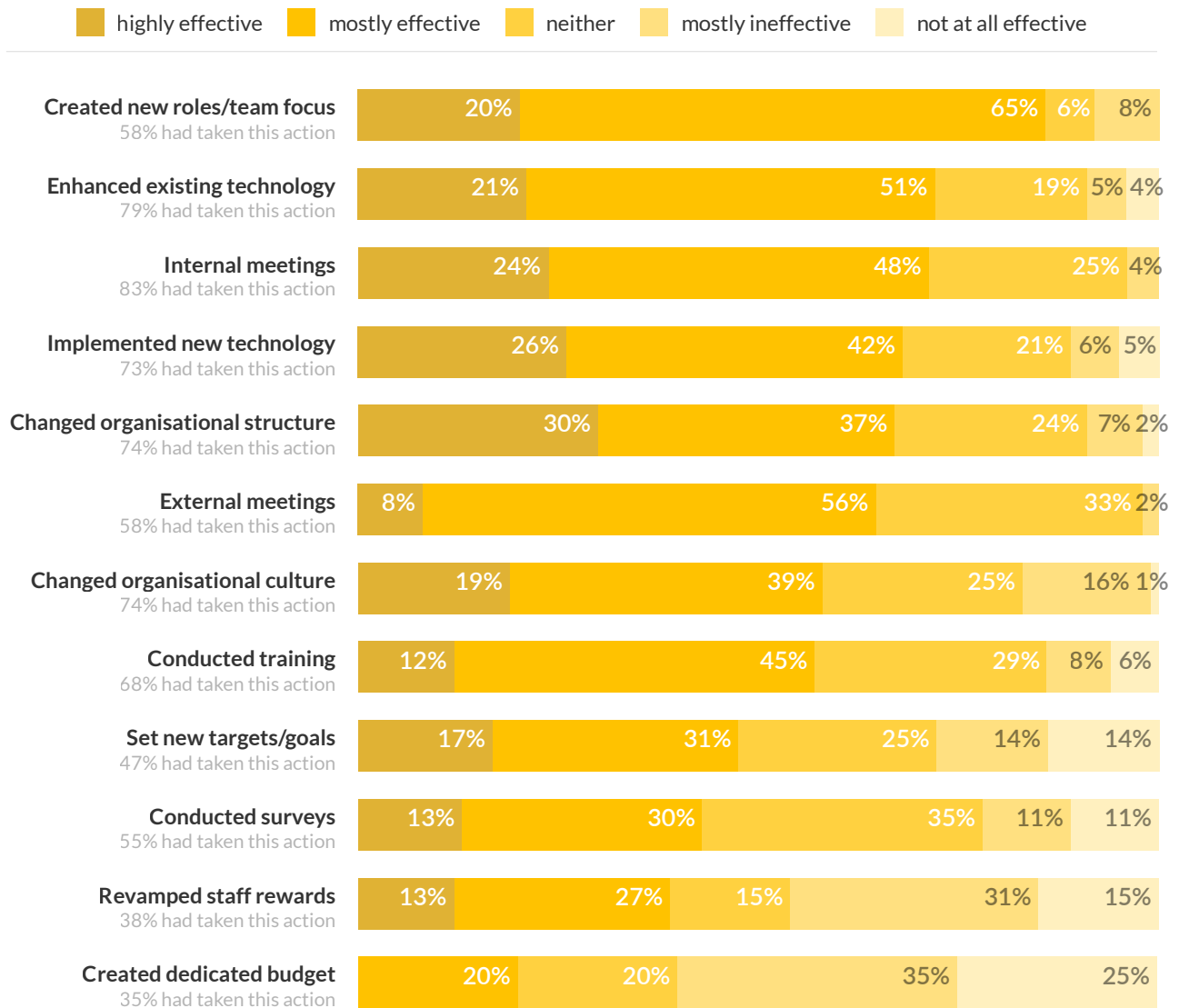
Survey respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of actions taken to improve communication. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = highly effective and 1 = not at all effective. There was also an option to record “no action taken by my firm”. The actions were as follows:

- Established/revamped internal meetings
- Established/revamped external meetings
- Created role/teams focused on improving communication
- Changed organisational structure to facilitate communication
- Changed organisational culture to facilitate communication
- Revamped staff remuneration/bonus payments to reward communication skills
- Conducted training to build communication skills
- Revamped values to include communication
- Conducted surveys
- Set new targets/goals for communication
- Created a dedicated budget for communication
- Enhanced existing technology to support communication
- Implemented new technology to support communication

The results show:

- All actions listed have been taken by some of the firms represented in our survey.
 - Nearly all firms have addressed communication via meetings, technology and organisational culture.
- The effectiveness of each action varies, with most actions having a positive impact for some firms.
 - However, all actions include some reporting of a negative or ineffective impact as a result of taking steps to improve communication.
- 83% of those surveyed had used internal meetings to improve communication; 72% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.
- Creating new roles/team focus was undertaken by 58% of survey participants; 85% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.
- Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving communication were enhancing existing technology, implementing new technology, changing organisational structure and external meeting.
- 35% of those surveyed had created a dedicated budget; this had largely been of no impact or was ineffective for improving communication (80%).

Communication improvements and their effectiveness



Other improvements/comments:

- Introduced a weekly blog to aide internal communication.
- Office renovations to co-locate teams/admin support.
- Staff meetings commenced in good faith, but soon fizzled out in the 'too hard basket'.
- We've only just revamped some of these things so I'm not entirely sure yet how effective they've been.

What actions has your firm has taken to improve collaboration and how effective were these actions?

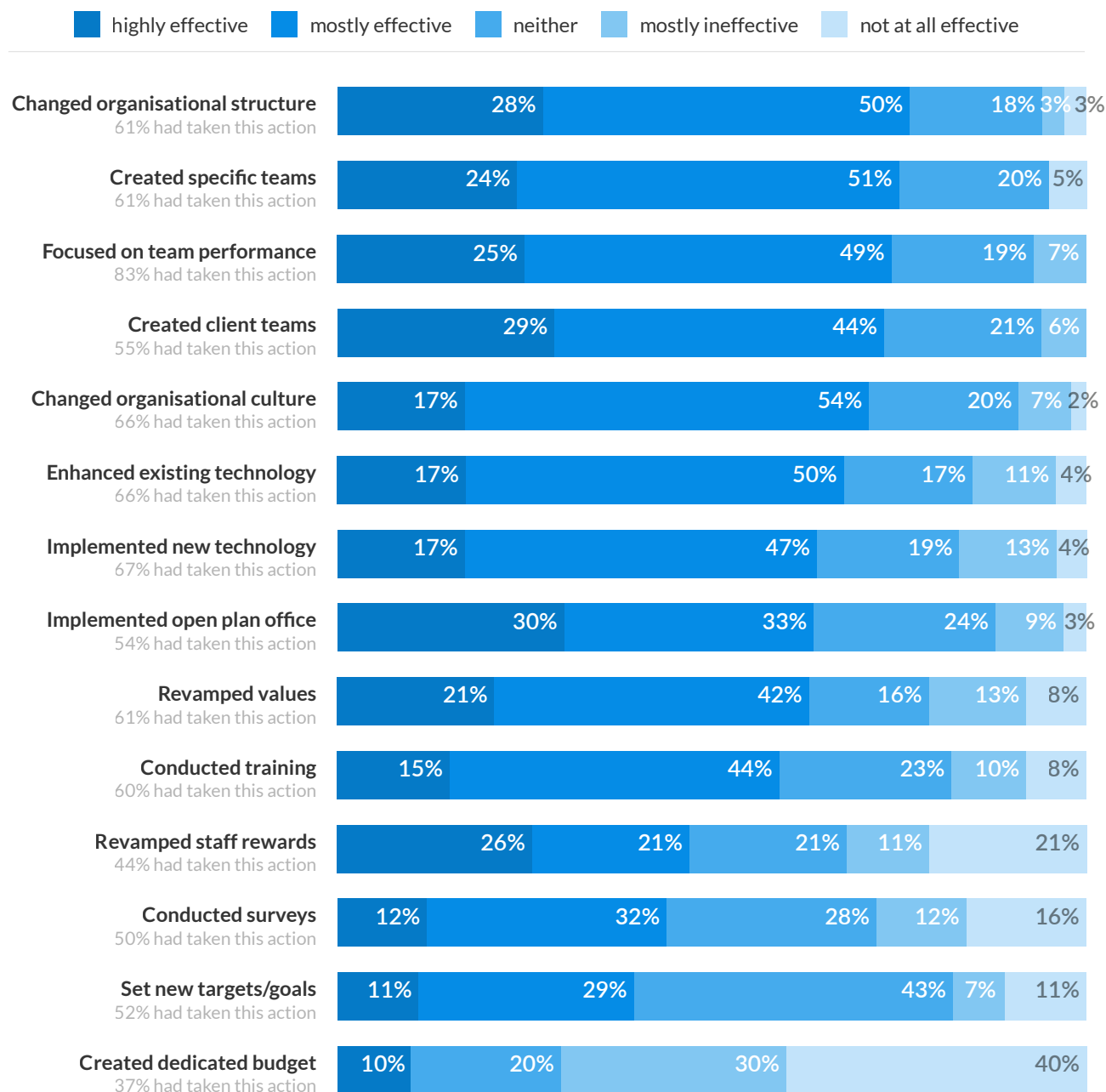
Survey respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of actions taken to improve collaboration. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = highly effective and 1 = not at all effective. There was also an option to record “no action taken by my firm”. The actions were as follows:

- Created client teams
- Created industry specific teams
- Focused on improving team performance
- Changed organisational structure to facilitate collaboration
- Changed organisational culture to facilitate collaboration
- Revamped staff remuneration/bonus payments to reward collaborative effort
- Conducted training to build collaboration skills
- Revamped values to include collaboration
- Implemented open plan office layout
- Conducted surveys
- Set new targets/goals for collaborative effort
- Created a dedicated budget for collaboration
- Enhanced existing technology to support collaboration
- Implemented new technology to support collaboration

The results show:

- All actions listed have been taken by some of the firms represented in our survey.
 - Nearly all firms have addressed collaboration via focusing on team performance, technology and organisational culture or structure.
- The effectiveness of each action varies with most actions having a positive impact for some firms.
 - However, all actions include some reporting of a negative or ineffective impact as a result of taking steps to improve collaboration.
- 83% of those surveyed had used a renewed focus on team performance to improve collaboration; 74% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.
- Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving collaboration were changing organisational culture and structure, enhancing existing or new technology and creating industry specific teams or client teams.
- 37% of those surveyed had created a dedicated budget; this had largely been of no impact or was ineffective for improving collaboration (90%), 10% reported this was highly effective.

Collaboration improvements and their effectiveness



Other improvements/comments:

- Moved where people sit in the office.

What actions has your firm has taken to improve critical thinking and how effective were these actions?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of actions taken to improve critical thinking. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = highly effective and 1 = not at all effective. There was also an option to record “no action taken by my firm”. The actions were as follows:

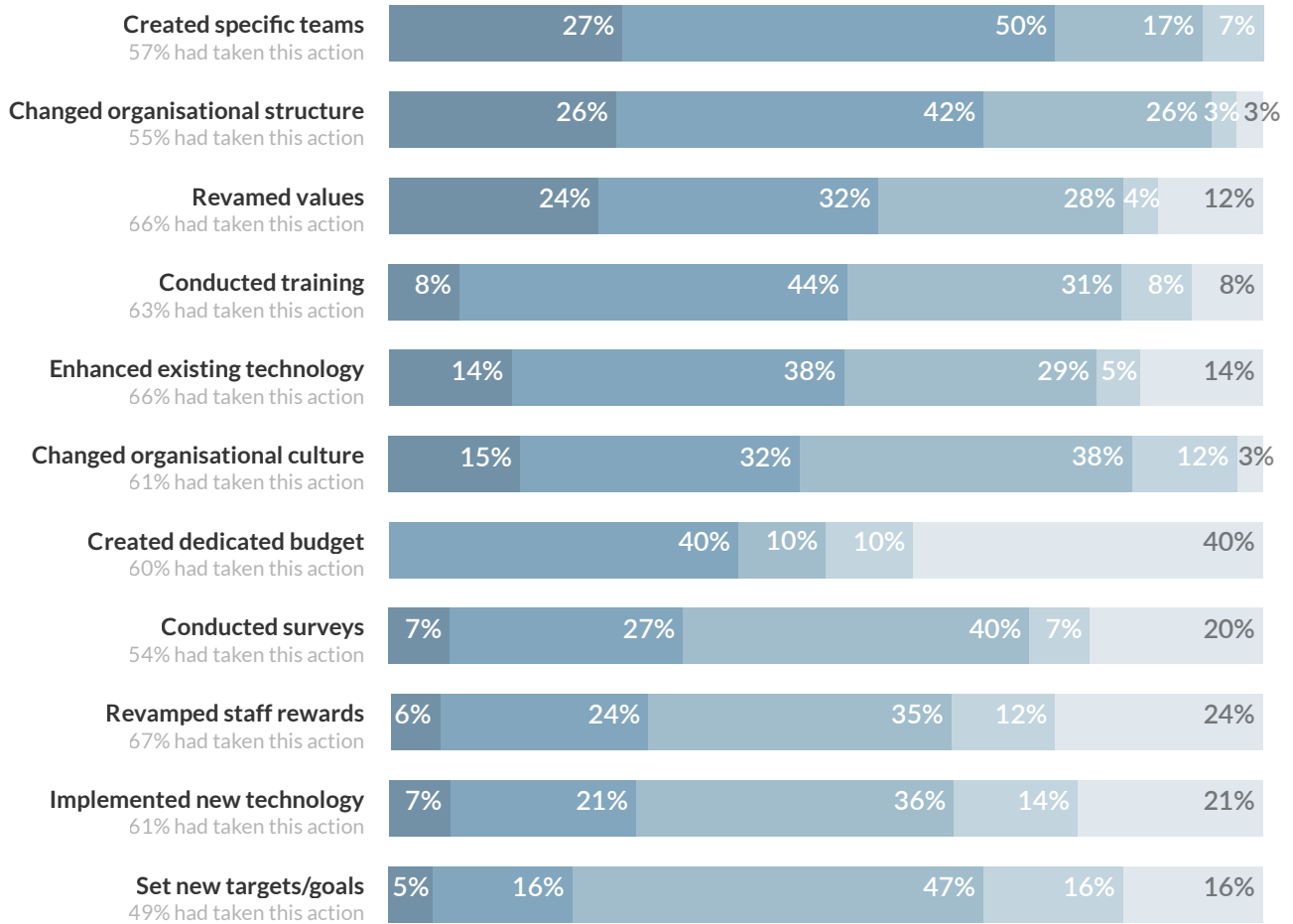
- Created teams to address specific problems/challenges
- Changed organisational structure to facilitate problem solving
- Changed organisational culture to facilitate critical thinking
- Revamped staff remuneration/bonus payments to reward critical thinking
- Conducted training to build critical thinking skills
- Revamped values to include critical thinking
- Conducted surveys
- Set new targets/goals for critical thinking
- Created a dedicated budget for critical thinking
- Enhanced existing technology to support critical thinking
- Implemented new technology to support critical thinking

The results show:

- All actions listed have been taken by some of the firms represented in our survey.
 - Nearly all firms have addressed critical thinking and problem solving via training, specific teams and organisational culture or structure.
- The effectiveness of each action varies with most actions having a positive impact for some firms.
 - However, all actions include some reporting of a negative or ineffective impact as a result of taking steps to improve critical thinking.
- 63% of those surveyed had conducted training to improve critical thinking; 52% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.
- Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving critical thinking were creating specific teams and changing organisational structure.
- 41% of those surveyed had created a dedicated budget; 40% of these noted this action was effective which represents a higher effectiveness than budgets allocated in the other 4C's.

Critical thinking improvements and their effectiveness

highly effective
 mostly effective
 neither
 mostly ineffective
 not at all effective



What actions has your firm has taken to improve creativity and how effective were these actions?

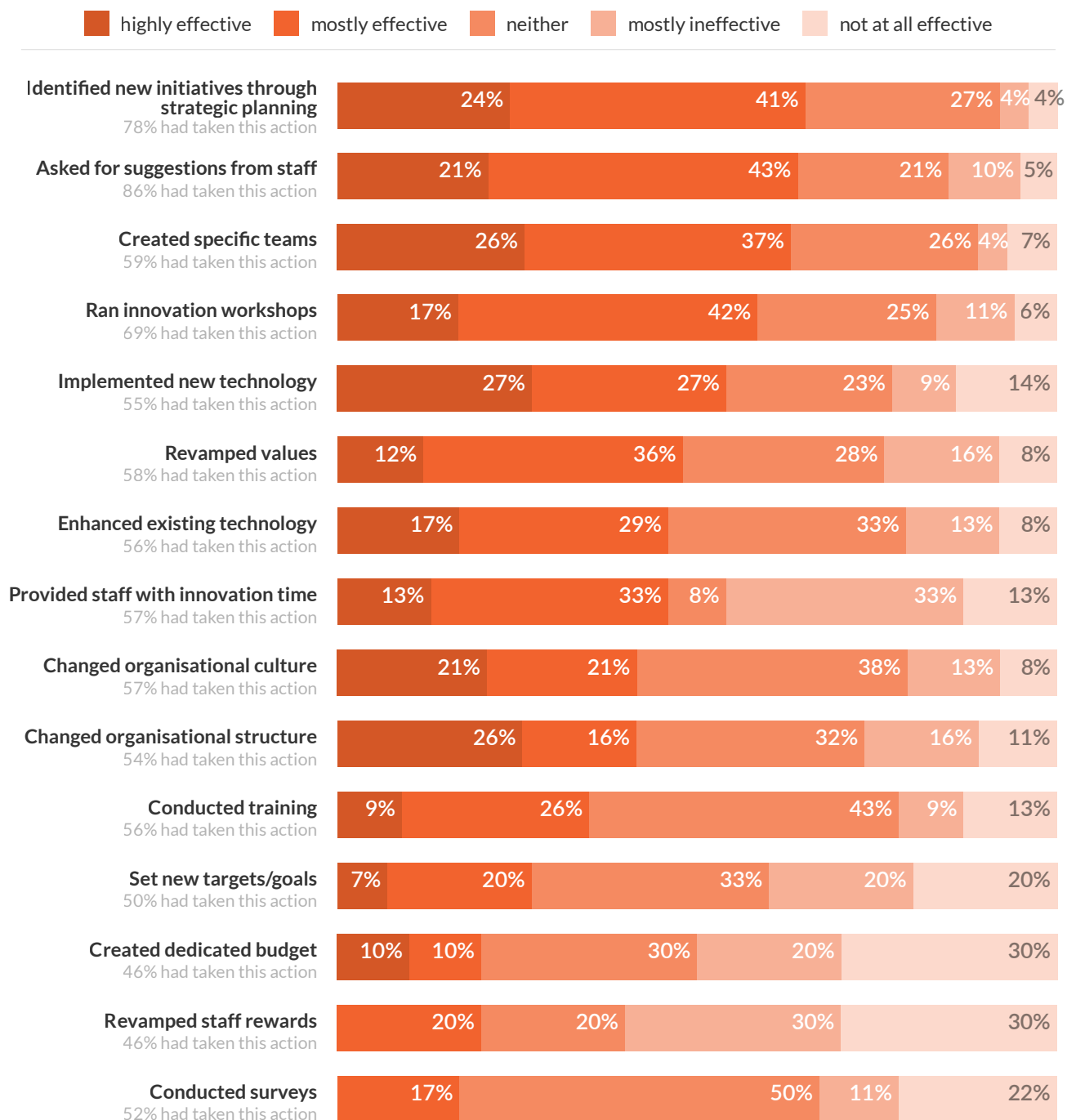
Survey respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of actions taken to improve creativity. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = highly effective and 1 = not at all effective. There was also an option to record “no action taken by my firm”. The actions were as follows:

- Established a role/team focused on innovation
- Identify new initiatives/ways of working as a part of strategic planning
- Run innovation days/workshops/meetings
- Ask for suggestions from staff
- Provide innovation time for staff
- Revamped staff remuneration/bonus payments to reward creativity/new ideas
- Changed organisational structure to facilitate creativity
- Changed organisational culture to facilitate creativity
- Conducted training to build creativity skills
- Revamped values to include creativity
- Conducted surveys
- Set new targets/goals for creative/innovative effort
- Created a dedicated budget for creativity
- Enhanced existing technology to support creativity
- Implemented new technology to support creativity
- Creativity is not a priority for our firm

The results show:

- All actions listed have been taken by some of firms represented in survey.
 - Nearly all firms have addressed creative solutions via staff suggestions, strategic planning and innovation meetings or workshops.
- The effectiveness of each action varies with most actions having a positive impact for some firms.
 - However, all actions include some negative or ineffective impact.
- 86% of those surveyed had asked for creative solution suggestions from staff; 64% of these noted this action was effective or highly effective.
- Other actions noted as effective or highly effective for improving creativity were identifying new initiatives, creating specific teams and running innovation workshops.
- 46% of those surveyed had created a dedicated budget; this had largely been of no impact or was ineffective for improving creativity (80%), although 10% reported this was highly effective.

Creativity improvements and their effectiveness

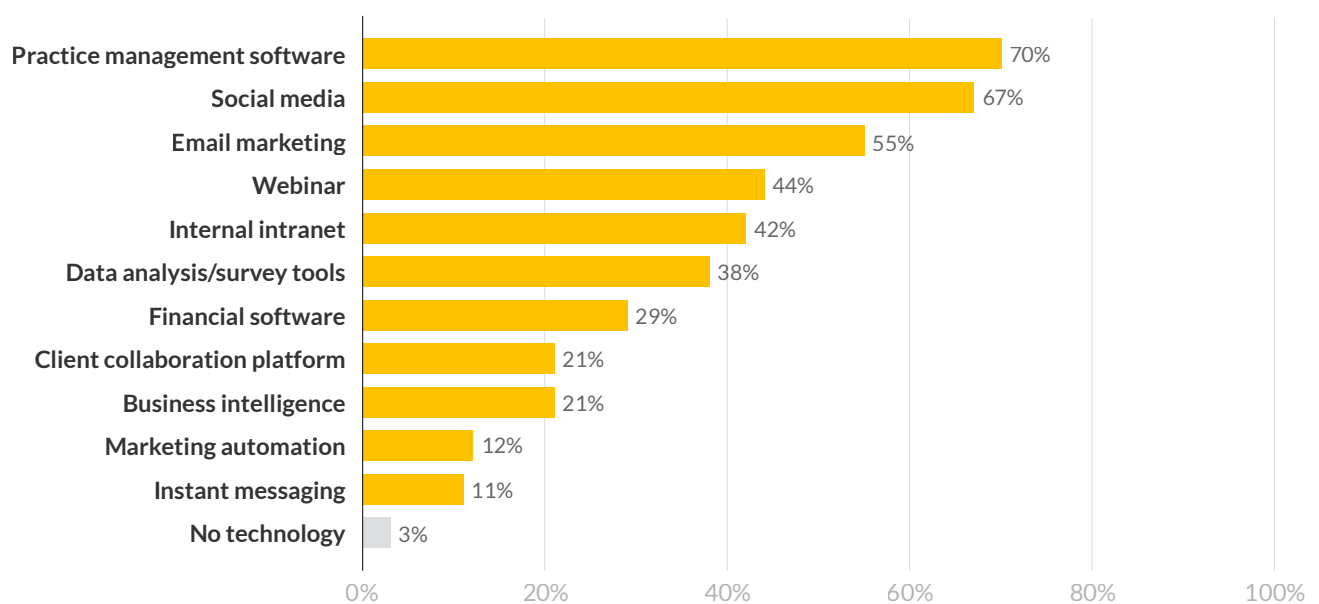


Part 5: technology

What technology does your firm use to enable communication?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate technologies used by their firm to enable or enhance communication. This question allowed for multiple responses, including if no technology was in use. The technologies listed were as follows:

- Social media
- Email marketing
- Marketing automation
- Data analysis/survey tools
- Webinar/video conferencing
- Business Intelligence
- Financial software
- Practice management software
- Client collaboration platform
- Instant messaging (slack etc)
- Internal intranet
- None - no technology used



The results show:

- Technology in law firms is purchased and utilised for communication more than any of the other 4C's.
- More modern forms of communication, eg. social media and webinars, are widely used by law firms.
- 70% of survey participants use practice management software to communicate.
- Social media platforms were used by 67% of those surveyed.
- More than half used email marketing to communicate, with nearly half using webinars.
- Approximately one third (29-38%) used data analysis or financial software to communicate.
- Only 3% of those surveyed did not use some form of communication technology.

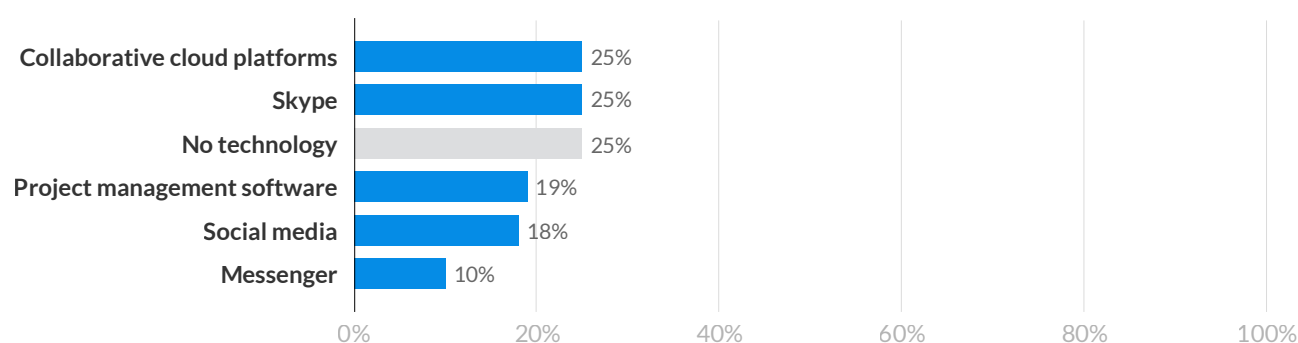
Other technologies:

- SMS to clients
- Trello
- Website
- Moved more to paperless and increased email communication with all parties on matters
- Objective Manager used to encourage communication and collaboration
- Dedicated HR portal which has been very useful at sharing info and centralising HR-type communication

What technology does your firm use to enable collaboration?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate technologies used by their firm to enable or enhance collaboration. This question allowed for multiple responses, including if no technology was in use. The technologies listed were as follows:

- Social media (eg. Yammer)
- Skype
- Messenger
- Project management software
- Collaborative cloud platforms (Sharepoint, Google Drive etc)
- None - no technology used



The results show:

- Technology designed for collaboration is not widely used in law firms; a significant number of firms (25%) use no technology.
- Only one quarter (25%) of survey participants indicated use of cloud platforms and Skype.
- Between 10-20% of those surveyed use project management software and social media to collaborate.

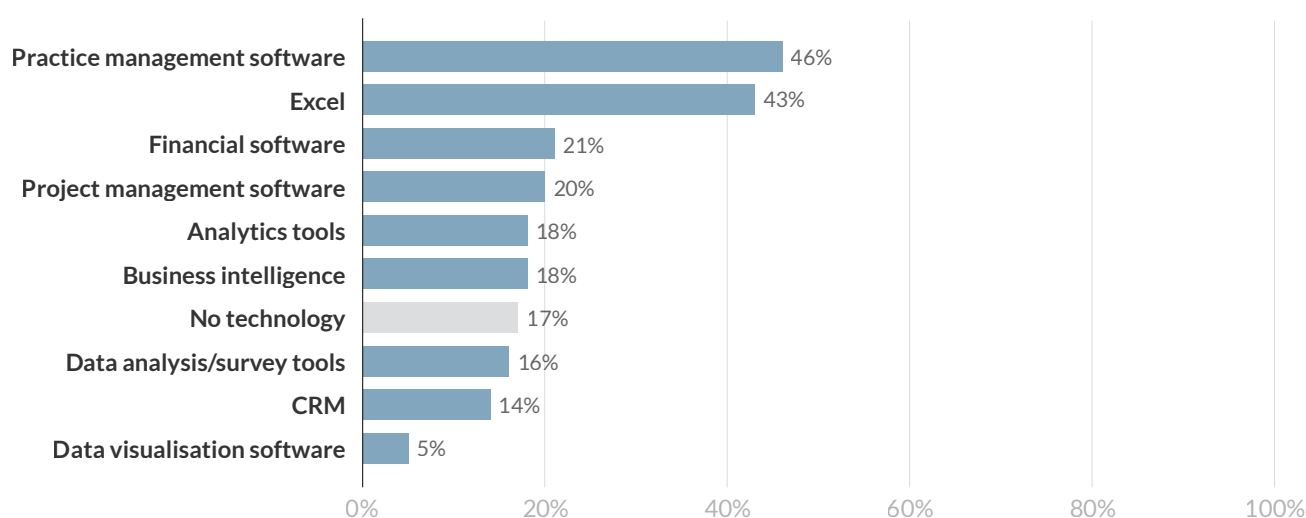
Other technologies:

- Email
- Email, telephone, video conferencing, Autotask
- In house wiki
- In-house Practice Management and Workflow Automation
- Objective Manager is being used to improve collaboration and communication
- Suitebox
- Trello
- Zoom, SMS

What technology does your firm use to enable critical thinking?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate technologies used by their firm to enable or enhance critical thinking. This question allowed for multiple responses, including if no technology was in use. The technologies listed were as follows:

- Excel
- Project management software
- Analytical tools
- Data analysis/survey tools
- Business Intelligence
- Financial software
- Practice management software
- CRM
- Data visualisation software
- None - no technology used



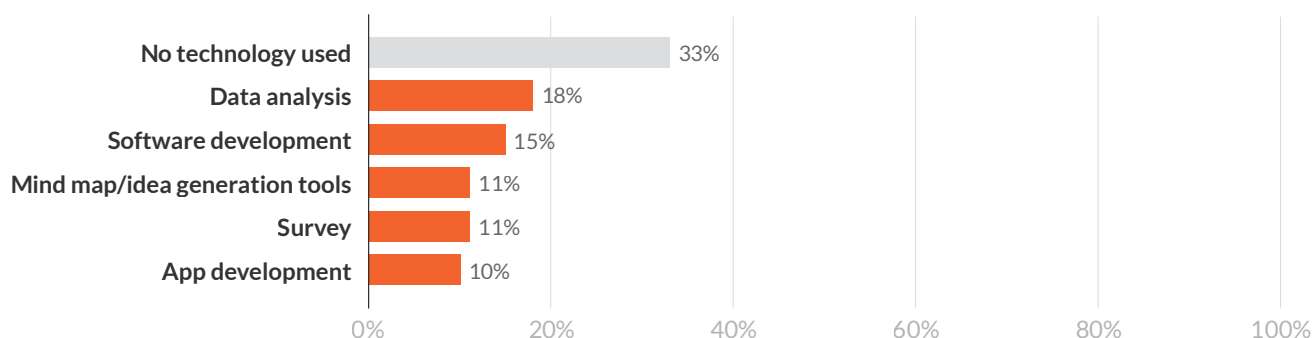
The results show:

- Nearly half of those surveyed use practice management software and Excel for critical thinking.
- Other technologies for critical thinking or problem solving are used by 20% or less of those firms surveyed.
- 17% indicated they do not use technology for critical thinking and problem solving.

What technology does your firm use to support creative solutions?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate technologies used by their firm to enable or enhance creativity. This question allowed for multiple responses including if no technology was in use. The technologies listed were as follows:

- Mind map/idea generation tools
- Data analysis
- Survey
- App development
- Software development
- None - no technology used



The results show:

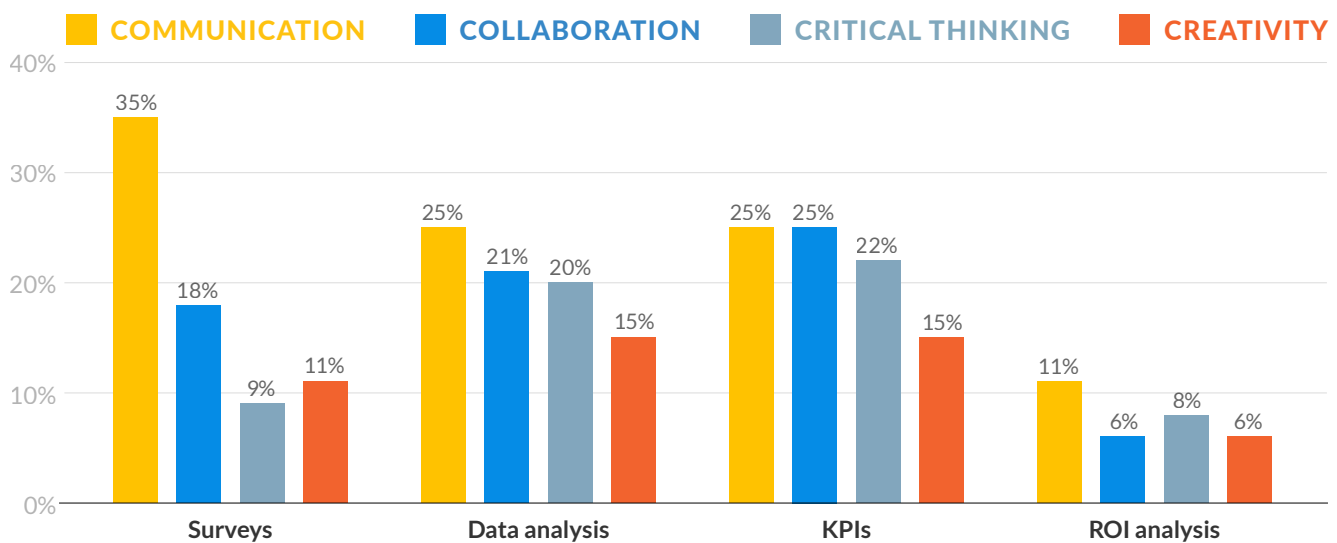
- Very little technology is utilised in law firms for developing creative solutions.
- 33% of those surveyed do not use technology for developing creative solutions.
- Other technologies for creative solutions are used by 20% or less of those firms surveyed.

Part 6: measurement

How are efforts to improve 21st century learning skills measured?

Survey respondents were asked to indicate systems their firm uses to measure their efforts at improving the 4C's. This question allowed for multiple responses. The measurement systems listed were as follows:

- Surveys
- Data analysis
- KPIs
- ROI analysis



The results show:

- Measurement of the 4C's is not commonplace in law firms with few firms indicating any formal measurement taken.
- Surveys were the most common source of gathering data with 35% surveying their people to measure communication but they are not used extensively to measure collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.
- KPIs were used across all of the 4C's but only by 25% of our survey respondents.
- Very few firms (less than 12%) use Return on Investment analysis to measure their efforts.
- Less than 16% of those surveyed have measured their efforts to improve creativity.

Other measures:

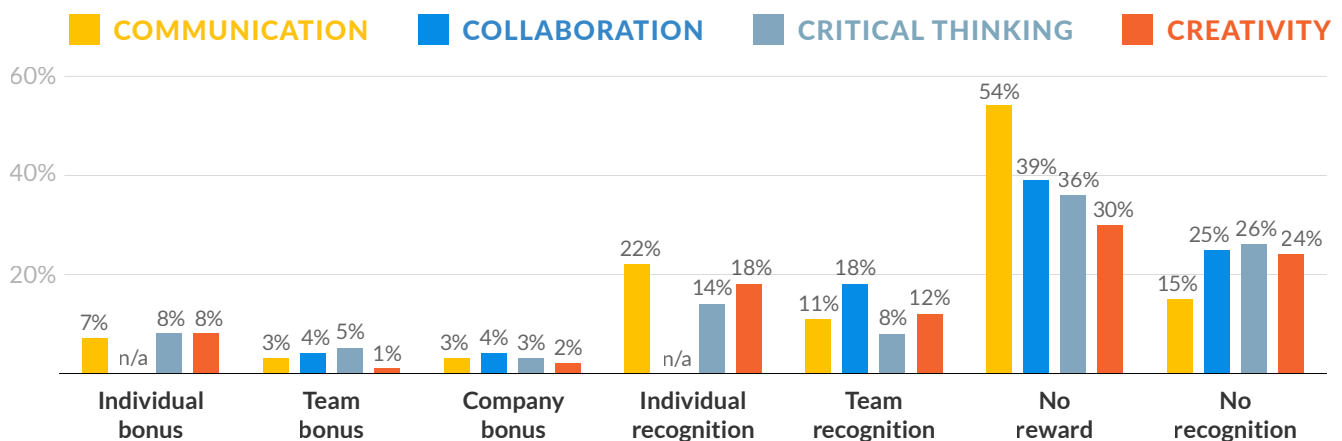
- By communicating our interpretations of communication improvement with each other
- Engagement
- Informal discussions with clients and stakeholders
- Staff Reviews
- Feedback
- Internal discussions

Part 7: rewards and recognition

How are contributions to improving the 4C's recognised and rewarded?

Survey respondents were asked how they recognised and rewarded their employee's efforts and communication improvements. This question allowed for multiple responses where participants could select different groups, indicate if there was no focus or if they did not know. The focus areas were as follows:

- Individual bonuses
- Team bonuses
- Company-wide performance bonuses
- Individual recognition/awards
- Team recognition/awards
- My company does not provide rewards
- My company does not provide recognition



The results show:

- Reward and recognition for improving the 4C's of 21st century learning skills is not common in law firms.
- Individuals were recognised in a small number of firms; teams were recognised in 8-15% of firms for improving the 4C's.
- Less than 10% of firms surveyed indicated a bonus or reward given for improving any of the 4C's.
- There were many respondents who indicated no reward or recognition given; more than 30% indicated no reward and more than 15% indicated no recognition was given.

Other rewards or recognition noted by respondents:

- Verbal and written recognition
- Feedback
- We talk about it at our full staff meeting
- Written and verbal recognition
- KPI for performance/pay review
- Overall impact on performance of those teams and then reward is at an individual level
- Communication skills are a KPI we look at when assessing performance and pay
- No individual budgets are set - no incentive to "silo" work
- Salary reviews and promotions - critical thinking a necessary part of advancement
- All factors of performance are incorporated in individual bonuses

Part 8: greatest benefit

What has been the greatest benefit of improving the 4C's?

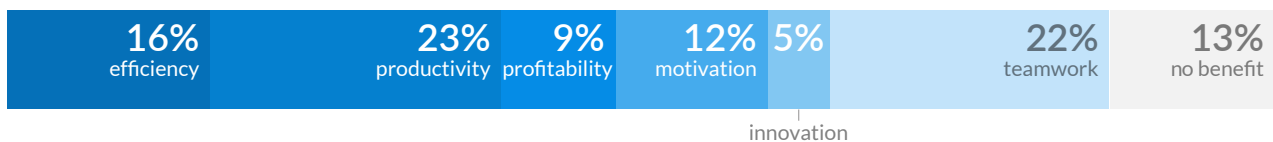
Survey respondents were asked to indicate one measure that represented the greatest benefit to their business as a result of improving the 4C's. Respondents could only select one measure for each of the 4C's. The options were as follows:

- Efficiency
- Productivity
- Profitability
- Motivation
- Innovation
- Teamwork
- No benefit

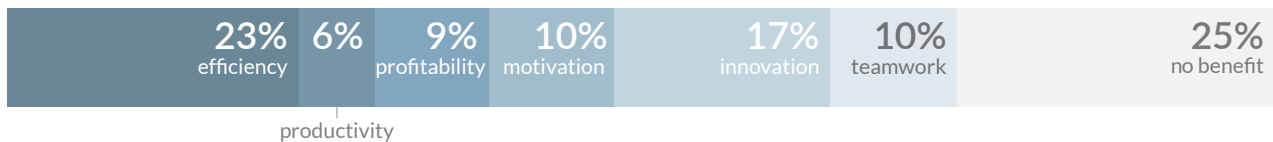
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The results show:

- While the results were spread over these business measures, the greatest benefits to improving the 4C's was motivation and better teamwork.
 - Teamwork had a great impact when firms implemented communication or collaboration efforts.
 - Motivation was the greatest impact for approximately one third of those focused on improving communication.
- Understandably, innovation was positively impacted when creative solutions were implemented.
- Productivity was impacted when collaboration strategies were employed.
- Profitability was not readily selected as the greatest measure for their efforts to improve 4C's.
- Nearly one quarter of firms surveyed reported that their efforts to improve critical thinking and creativity had resulted in no benefit.

Other benefits:

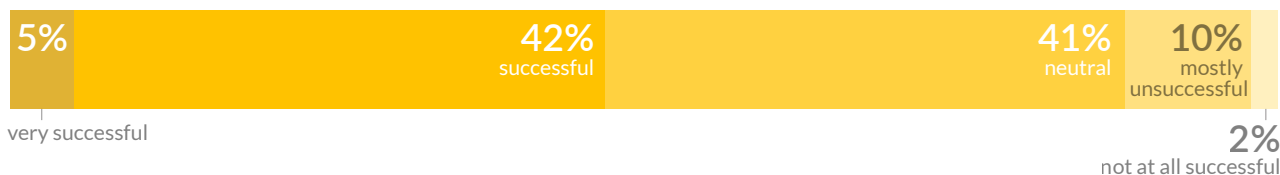
- General morale improvements over years
- Happy clients!!
- Meeting client expectations
- Risk reduction, job satisfaction
- Positive client outcomes
- Teamwork between management team
- Positive client outcomes

Part 9: success

How successful have efforts been in delivering desired outcomes?

Respondents were asked to rate how successful their efforts to improve the 4C's have been in delivering what they set out to achieve. The rating scale was from 1 to 5 where 5 = very successful and 1 = not at all successful.

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The results show:

- More than one quarter of those surveyed reported their efforts were successful in each of the 4C's.
- Nearly one half of those surveyed felt their communication and collaboration efforts were rewarded with successful outcomes.
 - However, very few respondents felt their communication and collaboration efforts were very successful.
- Only one third of participants had positive desired outcomes for creative solutions.
- One third to one half of the respondents indicated they had a neutral or as yet unknown impact from their efforts to improve the 4C's.

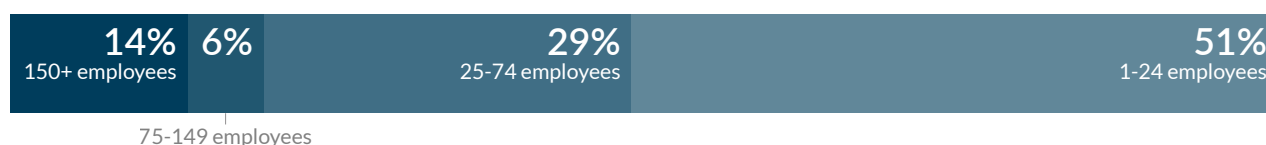
Survey participant profile

The ALPMA/InfoTrack Summit Survey 2017 was completed by 114 firms across Australia and New Zealand.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the size of their firm, their State or Region and whether the firm was situated in a capital city or regional centre.

Firm size and location

Firms were asked to indicate their size.



Respondents divided by country/state/region.



About ALPMA

The Australasian Legal Practice Management Association, (ALPMA), is the peak body representing managers and lawyers with a legal practice management role. ALPMA provides an authoritative voice on issues relevant to legal practice management. Members of ALPMA provide professional management services to legal practices in areas of financial management, strategic management, technology, human resources, facilities and operational management, marketing and information services and technology.

www.alpma.com.au

About InfoTrack

InfoTrack is a technology company with a leading SaaS platform that provides intelligent search and automated workflow for professionals across the legal, conveyancing, banking, finance, insolvency, surveying, mercantile, accountancy and government sectors. They are an indispensable partner, whose proprietary software platform helps businesses swiftly find critical information pertaining to property, company, personal and national search data. Their superior software can be seamlessly integrated into third party practice management systems, document management solutions and accounting software to deliver significant efficiencies. This allows our clients to improve their productivity, increase their profitability and stimulate their growth.

www.infotrack.com.au