Identifying new product development best practice

Gloria Barczak a,∗, Kenneth B. Kahn b

a College of Business Administration, Northeastern University, 202 Hayden Hall, Boston, MA 02115, U.S.A.

b da Vinci Center for Innovation, Virginia Commonwealth University, 301 W. Main Street, Richmond, VA 23284-4000, U.S.A.

Abstract New product development (NPD) practitioners are keen to benchmark NPD practices because identifying any practice that is able to more efficiently and/or effectively deliver a new product could represent the difference between success and failure. A common purpose is therefore to identify NPD best practices with the expectation that companies will manifest and sustain these to augment their NPD efforts. To help in identifying such practices, we present a framework developed from prior benchmarking studies, a Delphi methodology with leading experts, and a survey involving over 300 NPD practitioners. The uniqueness of the framework lies in its ability to distinguish NPD practice across seven dimensions: Strategy, Research, Commercialization, Process, Project Climate, Company Culture, and Metrics/Performance Measurement. The framework is also unique in that across each dimension, poor NPD practices are listed as a starting point from which to improve, alongside best practices to which companies should aspire. To further assist in continuous improvement, an audit tool is derived from the framework, suggesting investigative questions that practitioners can ask to evaluate their company’s NPD efforts. We conclude with general observations about NPD practice as the continued search for NPD best practice endures.

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1. Identifying NPD best practice

There is a way to do it better—Find it.
~Thomas Edison (1847-1931)

Bringing new products to market is crucial in today’s competitive business environment as market leadership, healthy market share, and sustained growth are all enabled through the process of developing and launching successful new products and services. New product development (NPD) practitioners are therefore keen to benchmark NPD practices because identifying a practice—whether a technique, method, process, or activity—that is able to more efficiently and/or effectively deliver a new product could spell the difference between success and failure in terms of vitality for both the product and company. With organizations such as the American Productivity Quality Center (APQC) and the Product Development & Management Association (PDMA) focused on NPD, major benchmarking initiatives on NPD best practice have endured (Adams-Bigelow, 2005;
2. Research: the application of methodologies and techniques to sense, study, and understand customers, competitors, and macro-environmental forces in the marketplace (e.g., focus groups, electronic surveys, ethnographic study); research portrays the company’s capability to gather and use information to drive innovation through NPD projects.

3. Commercialization: those activities related to the marketing, launch, and post-launch management of new products that stimulate customer adoption and market diffusion.

4. Process: the implementation of product development stages and gates for moving products from concept to launch, coupled with those activities and systems that facilitate knowledge management across projects and the overall company.

5. Project Climate: the means and ways that underlie and establish product development intra-company integration at the individual and team levels, including the leading, motivating, managing, and structuring of individual and team human resources.

6. Company Culture: the company management value system driving those means and ways that underlie and establish product development thinking and product development collaboration with external partners, including customers and suppliers.


Two points about these dimensions are worth highlighting. First, these dimensions were validated through a Delphi methodology with 20 leading academicians and thought leaders in the NPD discipline, in addition to the canvassing of 317 NPD practitioners from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, who reflected a median of 10 years’ NPD experience (Kahn, Barczak, Ledwith, Nicholas, & Perks, in press). Second, although these seven dimensions are all relevant to NPD practice, our survey of practitioners asked the respondents to divide 100% of perceived importance across the seven dimensions; they are listed here in order of importance assigned. Figure 1 portrays pictorially the resulting percentages for each dimension.
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