

Abstract

This research:

- Establishes a link between organizational learning (OL) theory and practices;
- Reviews 5 prominent OL theories and models;
- Identifies 13 OL principles;
- Proposes a list of 87 validated OL practices;
- Validates identified practices a second time through interviews with 16 practitioners from international development organizations, which are widely recognized for their leading edge in OL.

Introduction

Objectives of the research:

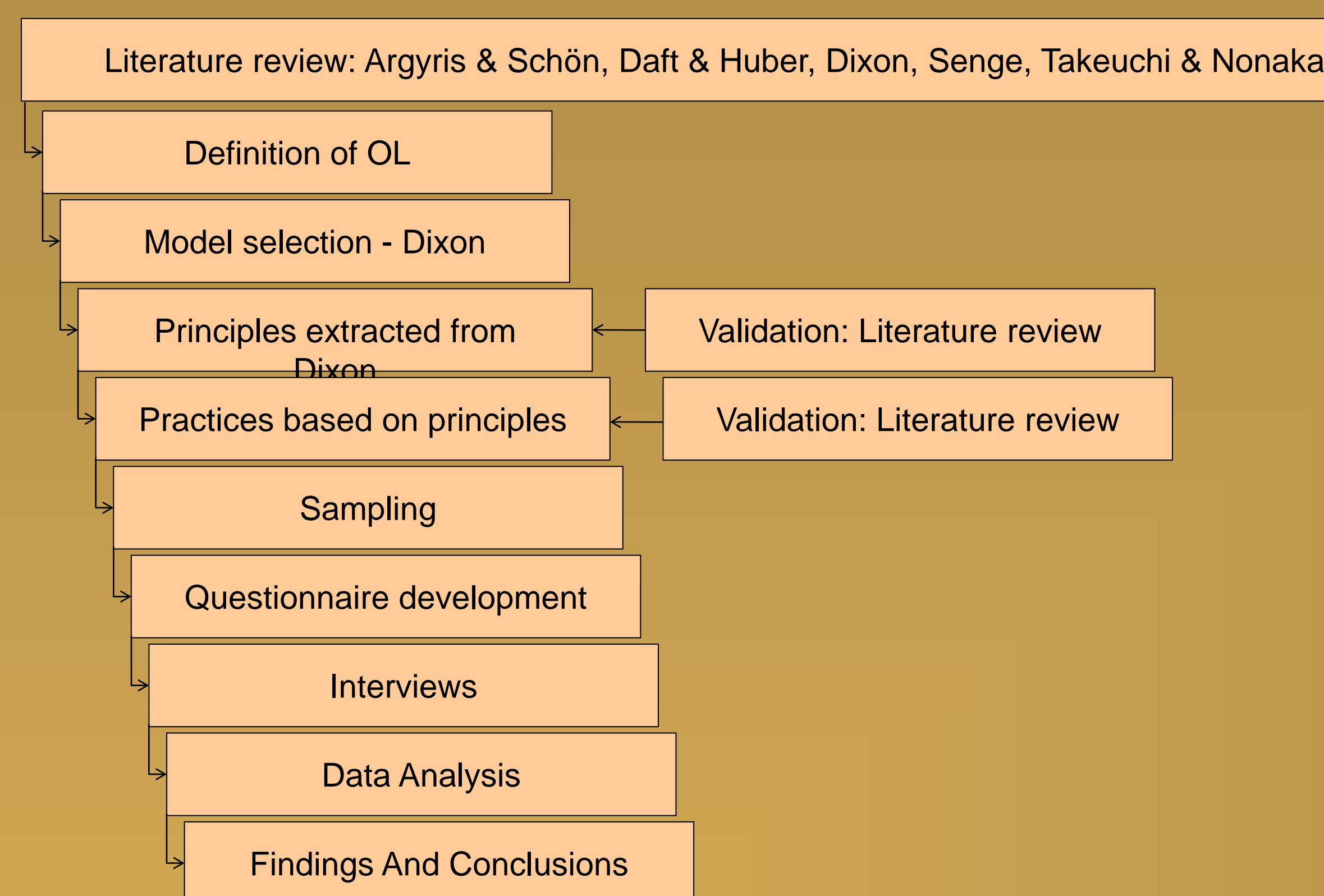
- To establish a link between organizational learning (OL) theory and practices through a list of theoretically and empirically validated OL practices;
- To determine the extent to which these practices are implemented and considered as effective contributions to OL.

Achievements of the research:

- Link between theory and practices established;
- List of practices validated through a literature review;
- List of practices validated through interviews;
- Perception of practices' effectiveness measured;
- Way opened for further research.

Making Organizational Learning Real

Methodology



Operational Definition of OL

Organizational Learning is a **process** generated by **proactive practices**, through which an organization acquires and/or generates **knowledge** that produces **cognitive changes** and modifies the **scope** of the organization's **potential behaviours**.

Why Nancy Dixon's Model?

Because of all the theoretical models reviewed, hers showed (1) a higher adequation with the selected operational definition; (2) an organizational perspective (as opposed to psychological or sociological); (3) a better applicability within the framework of this research.

Composition of the sample: 16 managers in the fields of policy, planning, programs, evaluation, and knowledge management.

Organizations: Canadian International Development Agency; World Bank; Danish International Development Assistance; Global Environment Facility; United Nations Development Programme; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

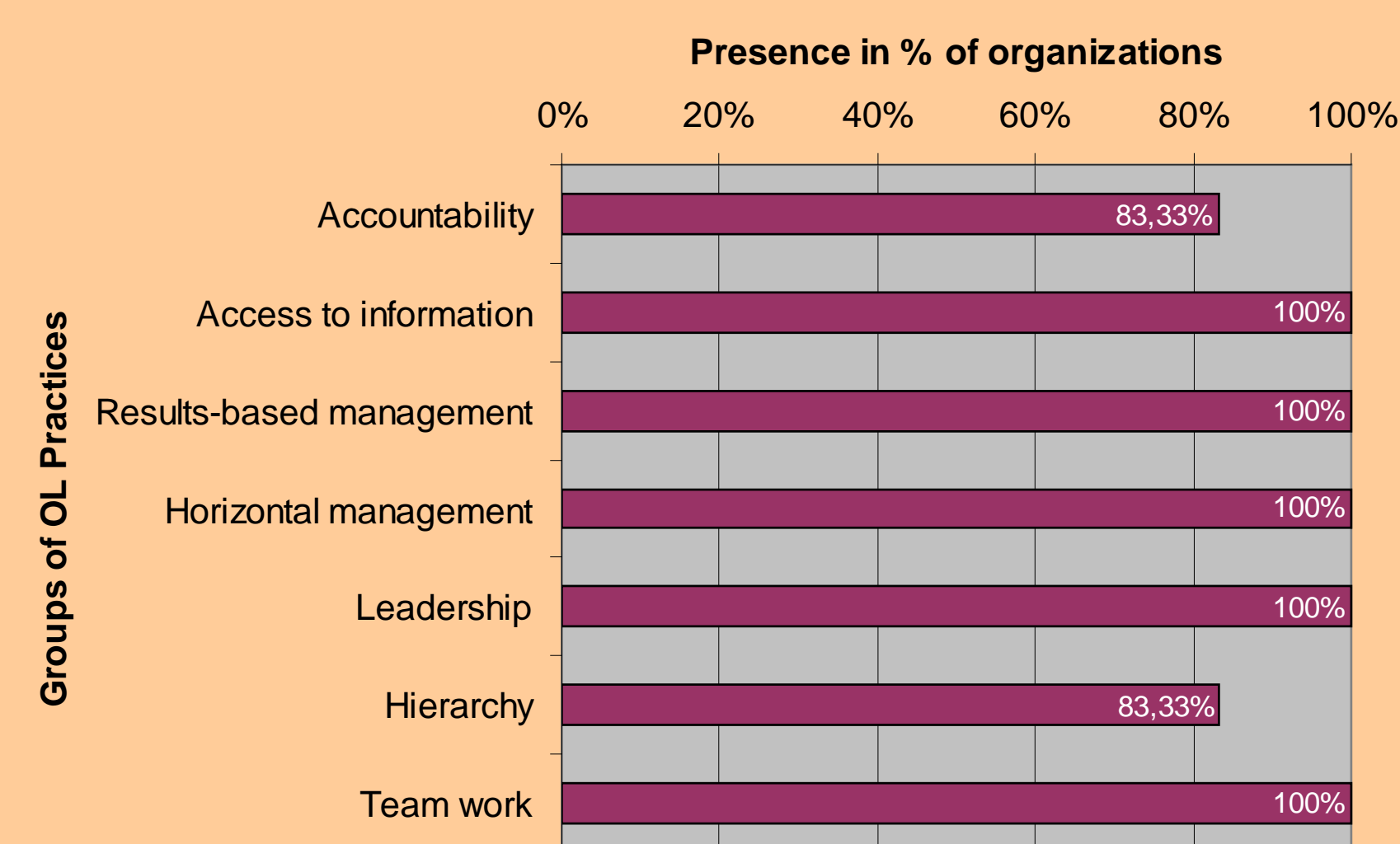
Main Results

- Groups of practices identified in the literature are very largely present in the observed organizations;
- Groups of practices identified in the literature are very largely perceived as contributions to OL in principle;
- Groups of practices identified in the literature are largely perceived as contributions to OL in practice;
- Practitioners validate 86% (75 out of 87) of the specific practices identified in empirical literature.

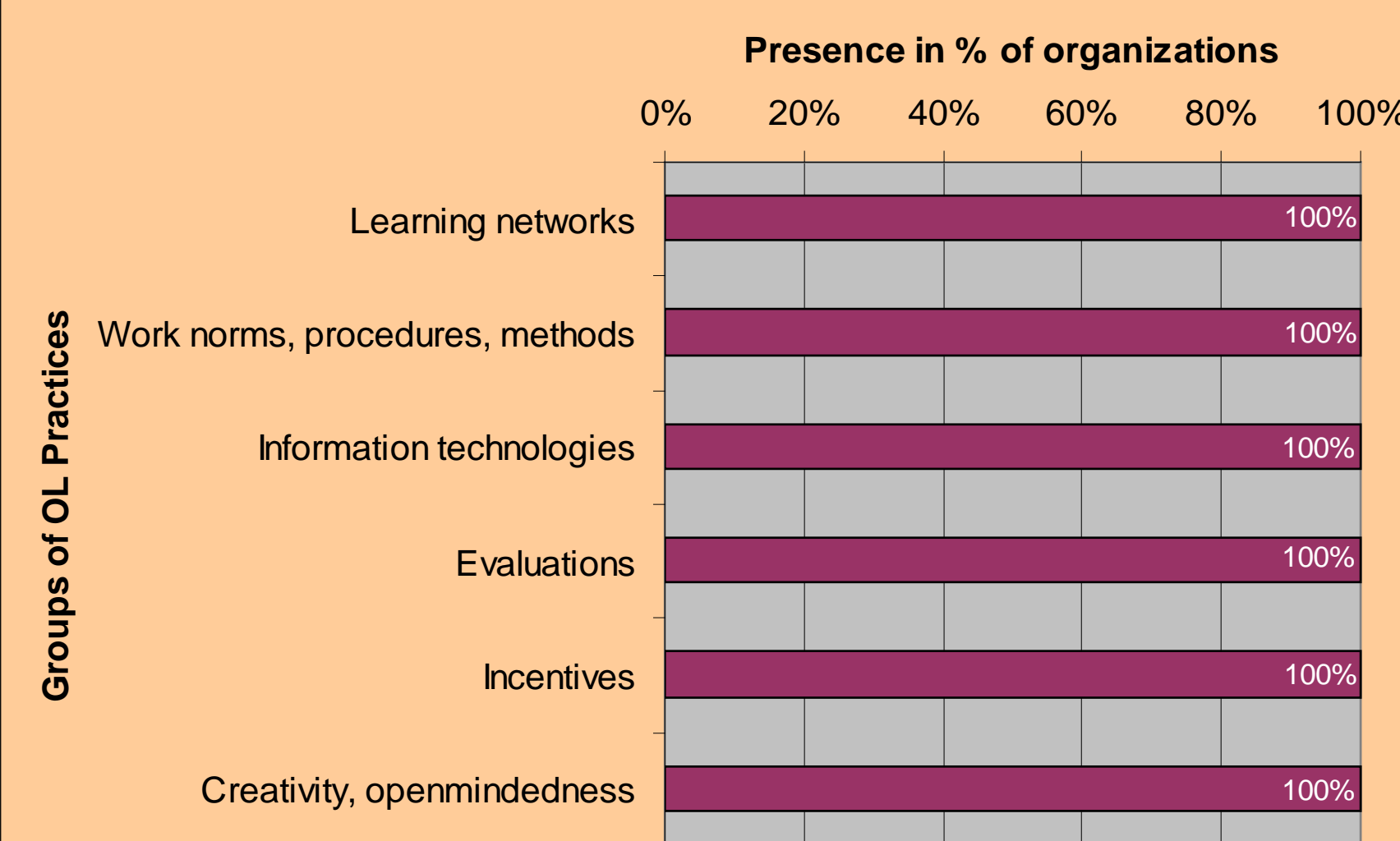
Other Results

- 75% of participants consider OL is useful only if it brings higher individual or collective performance;
- Although no question about politics was asked, 75% of interviewees mentioned politics as a major, generally negative influence on the implementation of OL;
- Only 31% of OL practices in the considered organizations are both systematic and formal;
- The manner an OL practice is implemented is as important to its effectiveness as the practice itself.

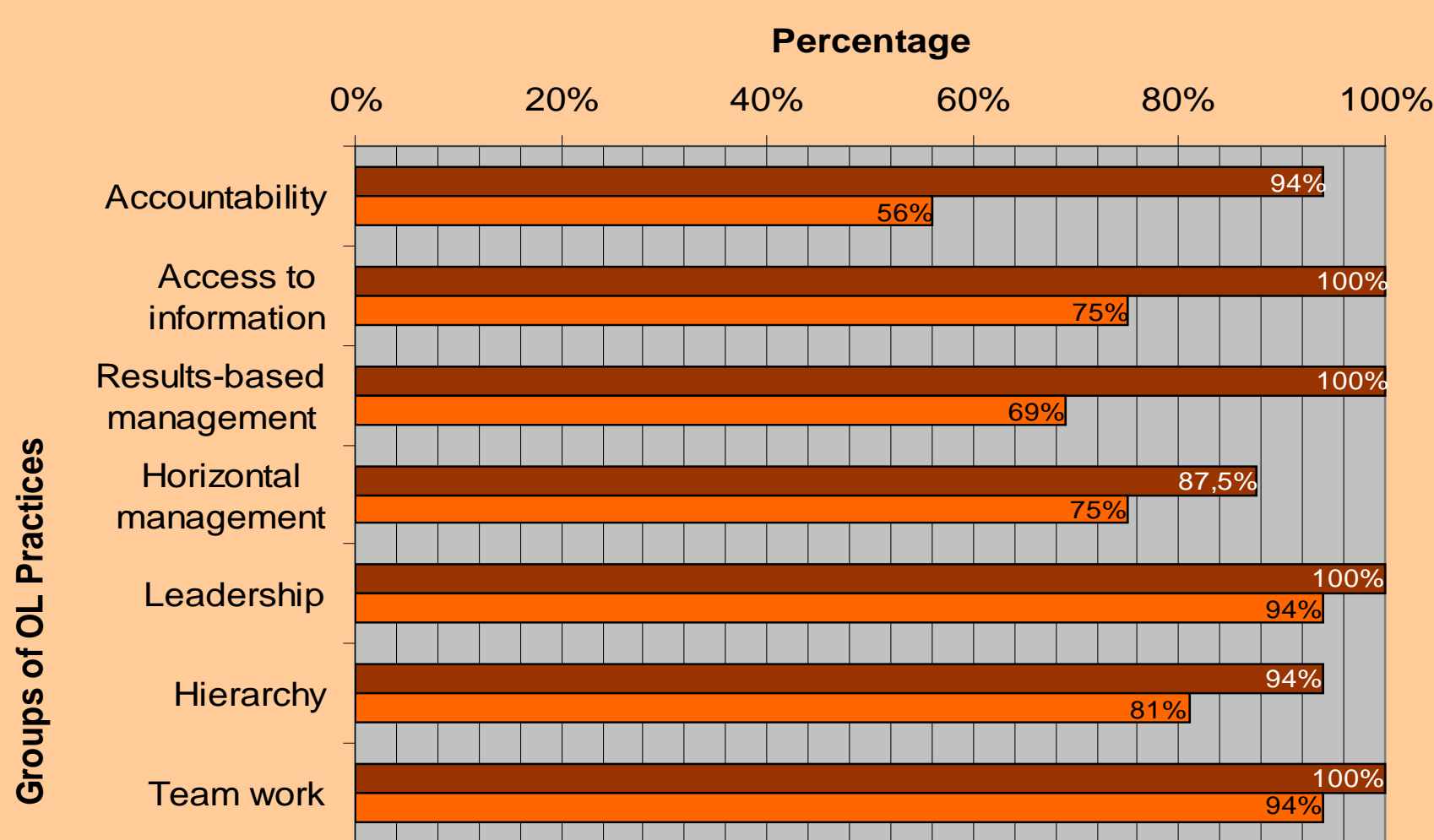
OL Practice Groups' Presence Within Considered Organizations



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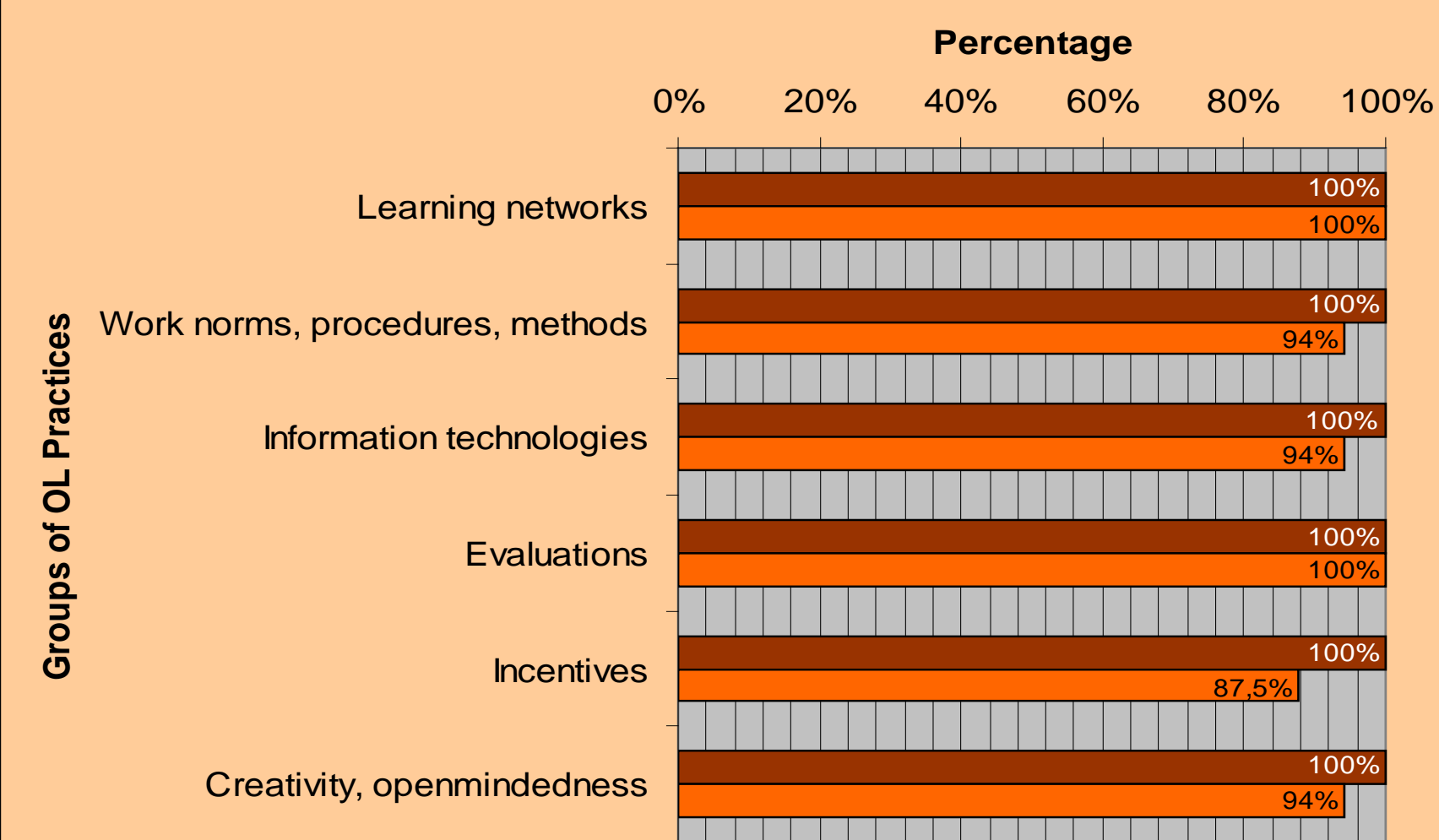


OL Practices Validation Through Interviews



How do I read this chart? Ex.: 94% of interviewees think OL practices related to accountability contribute to OL in principle. 56% do so in practice.

OL Practices Validation Through Interviews



How do I read this chart? Ex.: 100% of interviewees think OL practices related to incentives contribute to OL in principle. 87,5% do so in practice.

Conclusion - Discussion

- Groups of practices identified in the literature are very largely present in the observed organizations;
- Groups of practices identified in the literature are very largely perceived as contributions to OL in principle;
- Groups of practices identified in the literature are largely perceived as contributions to OL in practice;
- Practitioners validate 86% (75 out of 87) of the specific practices identified in empirical literature.
- There is a contradiction between the time and resources constraints, and the implementation of OL practices;
- In practice, OL is justified only if it serves performance;
- One can then ask whether there is a threshold beyond which OL is detrimental to performance;
- Is it possible to situate this threshold and precisely determine an optimal OL level?

