



## 2011 Report

### Middle Management as Business Software Influencers



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## Introduction

Middle managers are not typical decision makers in selection of business software. The most software vendors try to reach with their offers CEO and CIO who are perceived as a "strategic power" and "technical power" respectively. Because of the recent technology changes like broad access to internet, growing applications quality and easy to use, basic computer education and Cloud Computing perception of business software is also changing. There are growing number of application which are not "strategic" (they are just good enough to do something) and "technical" (they can be hosted outside company premises and doesn't require changes in company IT infrastructure).

The purpose of this report based on survey conducted between middle managers is to check their approach to business software. Do they have influence on software they use? What they need? Do business software vendors pay enough attention to them?

## Key Findings

Our research conducted among the US middle managers shows that **42%** of them actively act during enterprise software selection process. They want to talk with software vendors, gather knowledge about software and participate in software project teams. **21%** of middle managers want to introduce their own software initiatives and present them to management.

However 24% respondents expect that IT people can be against their software initiatives and 23% expect that management will not be interested. Only **21%** middle managers are convinced their own suggestions about software will be welcome within company.

Middle managers think that their influence on software selection would be more effective when software vendors put more attention to them, especially:

- provide clear, easy to understand description of what software does (45% respondents asked for it!)
- prepare educational/training materials about software dedicated to business professionals
- make possible to easily find software related to particular job

**Middle managers play important role during enterprise software selection. It is huge, influential group. They require from software vendors different sales service than CEO and CIO: more practical, clear and directly related to their jobs.**

From the other side, business software is important element of middle managers workplace. They understand that active involvement in software related issues is in their own interest and it helps them to deliver better business results.

## Middle Managers at Organizations

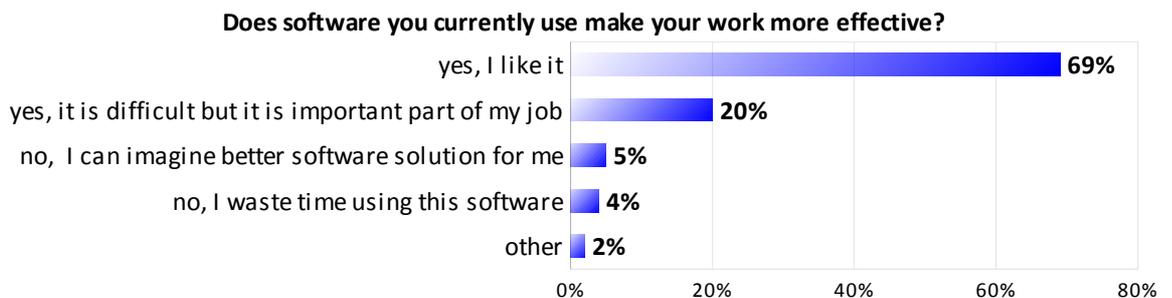
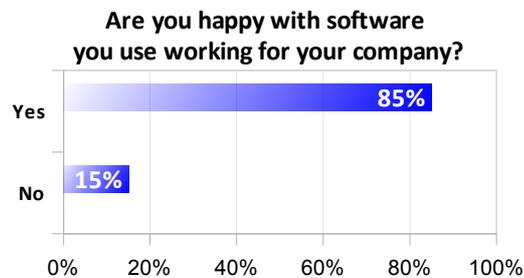
Middle management in recent times has changed its definition. Predictions that because of modern technology, computer systems and communication tools multilayered structures evolve to flatten organizations were true. But it does not mean that middle management became redundant. Middle managers today are not just supervisors. They don't just manage, they also perform a job function, doing actual work in their areas. Having better business understanding and experience they still are a crucial element in company structure: they are able to turn company mission, strategies and goals to performance and results. Typically having great communication skills and being close to employees and customers, middle managers often have a better overview of an organization's strengths and weaknesses than top executives do.

Modern middle managers:

- exactly know what is going on in the field: what problems and challenges employees and customer face, what processes are running smoothly and what and how could be improved,
- have clear defined goals and business objectives,
- often own budget to address current issues,
- have visibility from high level managers and their opinions and suggestions can be influential,
- have high communication skills as a part of their job: it is easy for them to talk both with employees and managers,
- play important role during new technologies implementation: their contribution is crucial to fast and successful implementation.

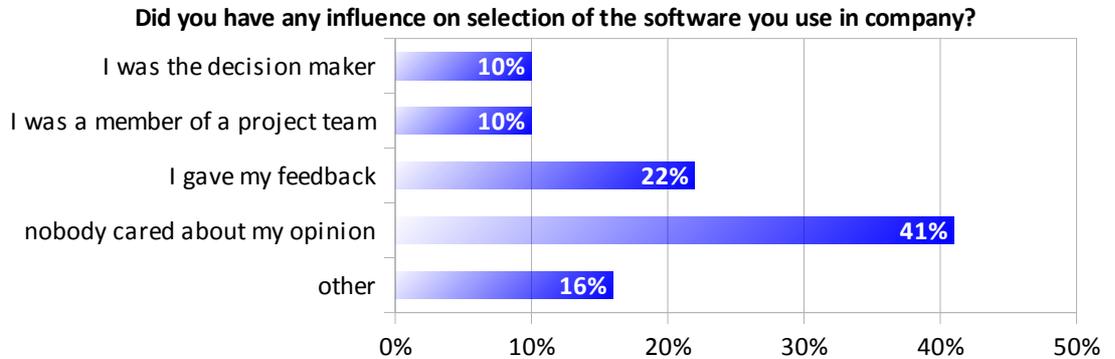
## Business Software Perception

Are middle managers frustrated because of software they use at work? Not at all. Software is perceived as a integral part of work environment. Sometimes software usage is painful, but people understand its importance and use it. However according to our survey we can estimate that 15% of installed software is not accepted (outdated, not suitable for particular job, too difficult).



## Influence on Software Selection

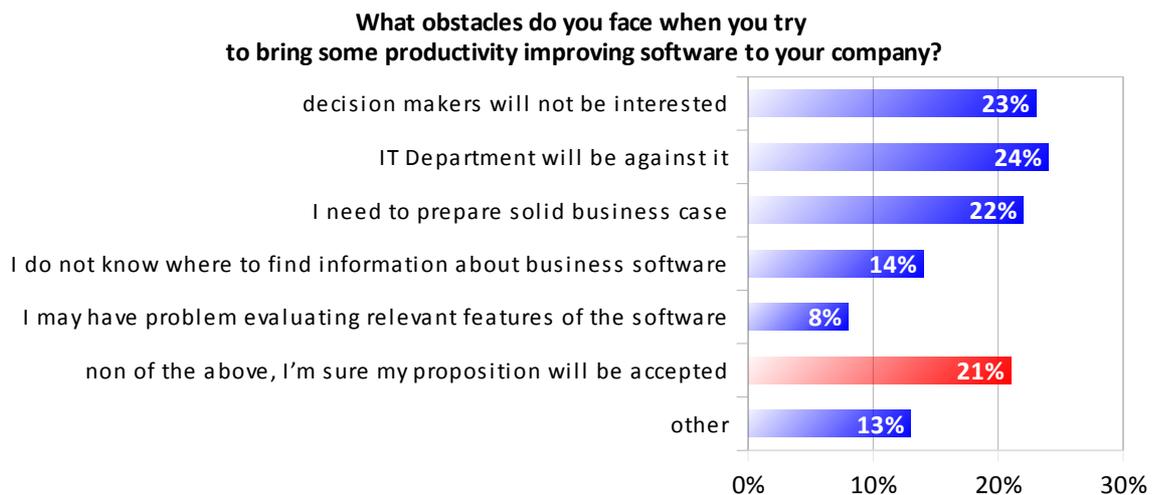
Survey shows 10% of middle managers act as decision makers. 42% are team members involved in software selection process. 41% stated that they had no influence on software selection.



It is interesting how this situation will develop in the coming years, as more and more people discover and install applications on their smart phones and tablets. Inevitably they will start comparing the software they use on their private devices to corporate tools. Also, they will see that selection of software applications is not rocket science and may start demanding more influence on selection of software in their companies.

## Obstacles to Be Influential

Main concerns are related to standard perception of middle managers as not decision maker in software area. Software acquisition is often reserved for CEO and CIO and only active, ambitious and important middle managers can be included into decision making process.



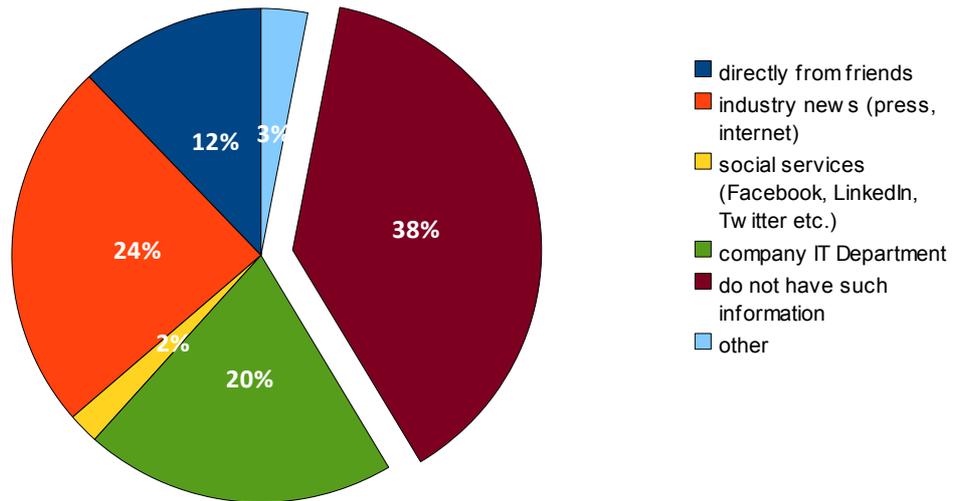
Answers from our respondents indicate that what middle managers may need to strengthen their role in software acquisition process is access to information on what software is available to their role, how it can be used, what benefits it can bring and what are technical requirements for its implementation.

All these information are necessary to prepare a strong business case that would convince higher management that bringing new tools to the organization is desired, and show IT what needs to be done to implement them. It is worth to mention that increasing number of SaaS / cloud solutions require less and less work at the IT side.

## Sources of Software Knowledge

38% of middle managers do not know what software their peers are using. They also do not treat social services as a medium to exchange thoughts about software.

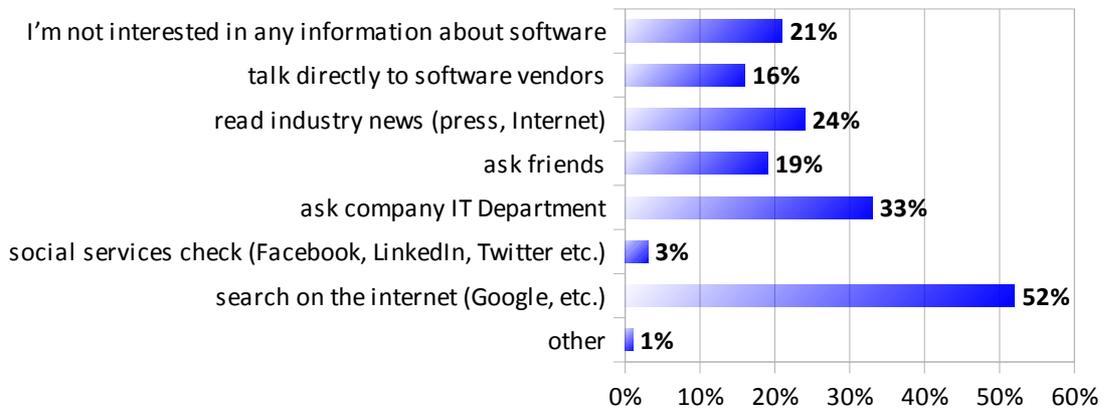
**How do you primarily collect information's about what software is used by people doing similar job in other companies?**



Search engines are still perceived as the main source of information. However as we know the vast majority of content presented by search engines is created by companies to get their websites listed at the top of search results and in consequences it does not bring real value. Second source of software information are IT people.

The interesting is that 16% of respondents are getting information about software directly from software vendors. It means they are able to directly manage vendors in terms of their business software needs not being typical business software decision makers.

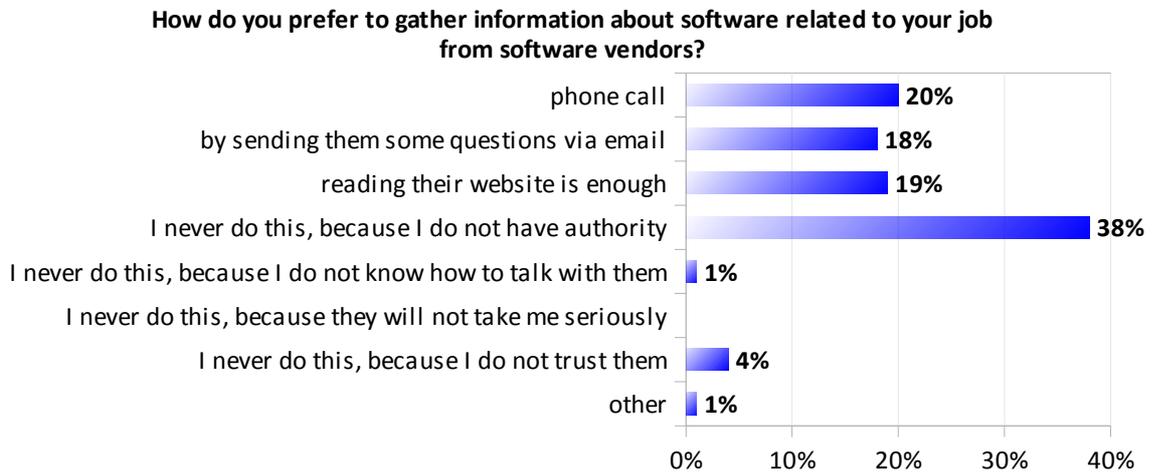
**When you want to get some knowledge about software what do you do?**



Even that only minority of our respondents (20%) were directly involved in acquisition of business software, the majority of them (79%) is looking for information about business applications. They have various ways of collecting such information, with internet remaining the dominant resource.

## Communication with Software Vendors

38% of middle managers are ready to communicate directly with software vendors (phone, emails). 19% only read web pages. Another 38% of respondents think that direct contact with software vendors is outside of their area of authority.



Clearly a significant part of respondents feels that searching for software tools for their companies is a serious task that requires getting authorization from either higher management or IT. It stands in contrast to a larger number of surveyed middle managers who seem to actively seek for information about available software tools and engage vendors in discussion about them.

## How to Overcome Obstacles?

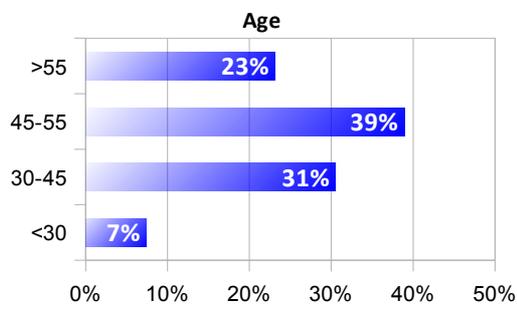
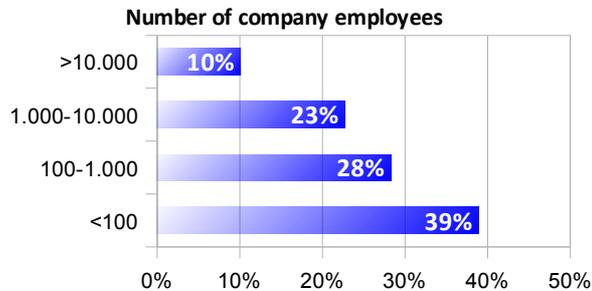
To make middle managers more effective and active in business software area more relevant, accurate and valuable information's should be provided to them. They want to have possibility to find software related to their jobs, read its clear description, check how their peers using software. Having such knowledge they are ready to talk with software vendors about their detailed needs and act as software innovators within their companies.



## Appendix

The present survey garnered responses from 210 middle managers across a range of industries and functional areas in US. Survey were conducted by [Zoomerang](#) in December 2010.

### Sample demographics



## References

[Vince Thompson, Ignited: Managers! Light Up Your Company and Career for More Power More Purpose and More Success \(preview\)](#)

[Talents, Clouds and Freedom, inlevel blog](#)

[Help valuable middle managers bring out the best in your business](#)

[Keystone of Lean Six Sigma: Strong Middle Management](#)

[Why Middle Management Should Fear Social Media](#)

[Why We Desperately Need a New \(and Better\) Google](#)

## About inlevel

inlevel is Internet company developing an online platform connecting users and vendors of business software.

inlevel idea is to create one place where business professionals can find software solutions for most of their business problems using business language.

Instead of going through all the marketing babbling and technical specifications, one may find business software based on business benefit she or he expects, what industry she or he is in, what business process needs improvement etc.

inlevel provides a novel way of shaping relations with software vendors to assure you get what you expected.

Founded in 2010, inlevel is an Internet platform linking business software users and software vendors around business concepts such as benefits, processes, performance measurements in context of industries and business functions.

For more information and news from inlevel, please visit [www.inlevel.com](http://www.inlevel.com). For additional assistance you may contact inlevel at [info@inlevel.com](mailto:info@inlevel.com).



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