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1998

Introduction to benchmarking: industrial tourism or a tool for continuuos improvement

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Publication Details

This conference paper was originally published as Denny, L, Jantti, M and Rice, T, Benchmarking: industrial tourism or a tool for continuous improvement?, in Adelaide '98 Pathways to Knowledge, ALIA Conference, October 1998, Adelaide.

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Abstract
The University of Wollongong library Acquisitions Team has established an ideal model for best practice in relation to the acquisition and provision of prescribed texts and recommended readings for library clients through benchmarking with three other Australian academic libraries. The approaches integral to our focus on texts and recommended readings were examined in detail, with opportunities for our own continuous improvement defined. Our major aim was improvement of collection relevance and development concerning acquisition of University of Wollongong curriculum texts and recommended readings through benchmarking. In practical terms this meant redesigning the texts and recommended readings process from selection to shelf ready access for our clients. Specifically, we examined components such as: approach taken; selection; ordering; accessioning, copy cataloguing and end processing; access provided for clients; and funds used.

Disciplines
Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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This conference paper is available at Research Online: http://ro.uow.edu.au/asdpapers/113

INTRODUCTION TO BENCHMARKING: INDUSTRIAL TOURISM OR A TOOL FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

LORRAINE DENNY, MARGIE JANTTI AND TRACI RICE, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

Workshop objectives

- Understand the concepts involved in the benchmarking process
- Identify major types of benchmarking
- Identify the steps involved in benchmarking
- Lessons learnt from our experience with benchmarking

Workshop outline

Through the use of case studies, discuss

- what is benchmarking
- types of benchmarking
- why benchmark?
- benchmarking model
- benchmarking ethics
- avoiding benchmarking mistakes
- lessons learnt from benchmarking

Case study 1
Ideal model for best practice in relation to the acquisition and provision of prescribed texts and recommended readings for library clients

This case study is derived from the final report (June 1998) of the benchmarking project at the University of Wollongong Library funding under an Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services Acquisitions Subcommittee study grant.

Executive summary

The University of Wollongong Library Acquisitions Team has established an ideal model for best practice in relation to the acquisition and provision of prescribed texts and recommended readings for library clients through benchmarking with three other Australian academic libraries. The approaches integral to our focus on texts and recommended readings were examined in detail, with opportunities for our own continuous improvement defined.

Our major aim was improvement of collection relevance and development concerning acquisition of University of Wollongong curriculum texts and recommended readings through benchmarking.

In practical terms this meant redesigning the texts and recommended readings process from selection to shelf ready access for our clients. Specifically, we examined components such as: approach taken; selection; ordering; accessioning, copy cataloguing and end processing; access provided for clients; and funds used.

> Most academic libraries will see the undergraduate requirements as a legitimate need for the library to meet. Differences will be apparent in the importance placed on this in the library strategic plan, and the corresponding method of response and allocation of resources. Meeting the need for high demand materials for large numbers is but one aspect of undergraduate requirements of an academic library (Jane 1997: 55).

It can also be said that too much reliance on texts and recommended reading limits students' exposure to other sources, seriously hindering the best use and provision of library materials (Jane 1997: 55). Therefore, our research also relates to addressing whether

- a high proportion of multiple copies of texts or recommended readings should be supported at the expense of available supplementary sources
- usage of short term loan facilities be applied to maximise access for clients to current text and recommended reading holdings rather than purchasing a high proportion of multiple copies
- most students are expected to buy their prescribed texts
- most students are encouraged to purchase a proportion of their recommended reading;
- most students are encouraged to research widely and show evidence of such.

Why benchmark?

- to provide a reference point for our current approaches
- to ensure that the standards we aim for are set at an appropriate level
- to convince us we can do better
- to assist as a mechanism for measuring performance and ensuring improvement
- to counteract our tendency to be internally focused, by adding perspective and objectivity
- to assist in identifying best practice
- to improve processes.

Our experience of benchmarking focused more on methods of approach to a process, rather than only measurement of the process itself. It is important to note that the scope for benefits from benchmarking can be far reaching. To limit a benchmarking project to just measurement of a process for anticipated incremental improvement, may be to the detriment of the possible gains of the exercise by not looking at where the process lies within the broader context of the organisation. For our study, obtaining background information and observing the whole process across the relevant teams, helped us to understand the impact of the process on each team involved, and where major improvements could be made.

The benchmarking partners that participated in the 1997-1998 twelve month project were the Northern Territory University Library, the University of New South Wales Library, the University of Sydney Library and the University of Wollongong Library.

A number of circumstances may dictate the way in which an organisation approaches certain processes. For example, considerations like budget, staffing, computer system, or environmental (building or geographic) limitations may impose unavoidable inefficiencies in processes.

All libraries have made improvements to their approach in acquiring and providing access to texts and recommended readings to clients, over a substantial period. Whilst no one library (within the confines of our study) possessed all of the components to setup an ideal model, one library achieved a more efficient and effective approach to a greater extent than the others did. After examining each of the libraries, each had components of their processes that were positive and significant. These aspects were extracted to form the basis of what we see as an ideal working model for our Library and others. It is not meant to be a prescriptive model and not all aspects may suit all libraries. The model does have merit, not only as a whole, but can be dissected and different aspects used for improvement of processes.

Ideal model — best practice

1 *Collection development policy*

- Implementation of policy
- Definition of the role texts and recommended readings have in an academic library
- A realistic ratio of student numbers to text and recommended reading

  copy numbers

  texts -
  - 1 copy: 30 students, to a maximum of 2 copies
  - discretionary combination of Reserve Collection, short term loan and/or open access, to maximise access for client usage

  recommended readings -
  - 1 copy: 30 students, to a maximum of 4 copies
  - discretionary combination of Reserve Collection, short term loan and/or open access, to maximise access for client usage

2 *Supplier relationship*

- Establish supplier terms of trade
- Form partnership including agreed expectations of both Acquisitions and supplier
- Acquisitions staff monitor supplier performance and monograph budget expenditure to ensure Acquisitions expectations are adhered to
- Outsource bibliographic checking and verification, and ordering of texts and recommended readings to campus bookshop
- Calculation of copies required carried out by campus bookshop, verifying library holdings by consulting library catalogue
- Campus bookshop staff have a strategic relationship with academic staff, in particular Library Liaison Officers
- Campus bookshop staff keep Acquisitions staff informed on core material required (to monitor supplier performance)

3 *Selection (outsourced)*

- Selection by academic staff
- Maximised utilisation of campus bookshop

- Bookshop liaises directly with academic staff to ascertain texts and recommended readings required to stock prior to commencement of each session (including student numbers, lecturers, etc)

4 *Ordering (outsourced)*
- Maximised utilisation of campus bookshop eradicates the need for Acquisitions staff to place a purchase order request with a supplier, as this is performed by the campus bookshop
- Bibliographic checking and verification performed by the campus bookshop
- Constant orders placed with publishers and suppliers on our behalf by the campus bookshop

5 *Reporting and claiming (outsourced)*
- Maximised utilisation of campus bookshop eradicates the need for Acquisitions to administer reporting or claiming functions
- Performed by the campus bookshop

6 *Processing (accessioning, copy cataloguing, end processing)*
- Campus bookshop supplies items with invoice to Acquisitions
- Items delivered on a daily basis
- Individual item purchase order raised on receipt
- Combine accessioning, copy cataloguing and end processing (receive the item to shelf ready in one process). Conducted by same Acquisitions staff member (including spine label generated from dedicated spine label printers).
- ABN bibliographic record available for immediate use

7 *End processing treatment*
- Streamlined approach with minimal treatment required (majority of texts and recommended readings being monographs)
    - 1 x ownership stamp on outside cut edge
    - 1 x tattletape
    - spine label (call number)
    - barcode
    - no date due slip (receipt issued from printer at borrowing stage)

8 *Short term loan*
- Integrated library management system function which automatically monitors usage and changes borrowing period of heavily used items (eg 2 weeks to 3 day loan)
- No manual intervention required for processing or deprocessing such as loan period, date due, or spine label
- Client's responsibility to be aware of possible changes to loan period

From this model, the University of Wollongong Library Acquisitions Team have made recommendations for improvement to our Library regarding our approach to texts and recommended readings. Some of the recommendations include

1 Approach our campus bookshop regarding the possibility of implementing the supplier relationship ideal model
2 Change accessioning, copy cataloguing and end processing procedures to take advantage of a system whereby one person completes the process, reducing double handling and delays
3 Devise a collection development policy with involvement from all necessary parties (eg library staff, academics, suppliers)
4 Revise budget spent on texts and recommended readings to broaden the scope of our collection, by purchasing other supporting material for teaching and research purposes
5 Make best possible use of titles held by improving short term loan procedures
6 Rationalise end processing practices to further reduce unnecessary treatments
7 Implement the use of dedicated spine label printers to automate this process

Once the improvements to our operations are implemented and normalised, they will be measured for expected benefits by comparison to our original process benchmark data. We may not be able to implement all of our suggestions for improvement in the short term, however they will become goals for the future in our pursuit of best practice. We will continue to seek improved methods relating to texts and recommended readings in order to provide the best possible service, policies and procedures to our clients, stakeholders and staff.

Case study 2
Leading and managing improvement and change

Introduction

The Australian Quality Council established a benchmarking network *Leading and managing improvement and change* in 1997 to provide organisations with the opportunity to learn how other organisations establish and sustain a climate that facilitates continuous improvement and change to maximise their competitive advantage. This case study has been prepared to share results and findings with the participants of this workshop.

The results of the benchmarking study indicate the Library's performance strengths in change management and leadership include

- encouraging employees to be involved in improvement teams
- making sufficient time available to allow staff and managers to take part in improvement
- staff receive sufficient training to enable improvement of the job they do
- incorporation of continuous improvement into the Library's plans, goals and strategies.

Opportunities for improvement include

- clear and open communication regarding improvement in all directions
- management and employees cooperating and working towards common goals.

Examination of the results and findings from site visits to participating organisations suggest our approach to continuous improvement and change management has increasingly become embedded in day to day work operations and is less reliant on cross functional work teams. An outcome of the integration of the *Quality and service excellence program* is the communication of improvement activities and results has become less overt.

This report has been prepared to share results and findings with the participants of the network. The report examines the comparative performance of the Library with other members of the network and identifies the Library's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

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The scope of the project was to identify how leading organisations

1. Identify, adapt and deploy new tools, processes and techniques for improvement
2. Ensure improvement is communicated throughout the entire organisation
3. Involve management in understanding their role and ensuring improvement is sustained
4. Measure, report, act on and sustain value added results and improvement initiatives
5. Design structures and strategies to deploy, maintain and improve process improvement.

Major aims of the project

A list of key aims was identified by the Australian Quality Council and their benefits to the patrticipating organisations are listed below.

Each organisation will

- gain a comparative understanding of current performance and perceived gaps
- gain ideas on potential improvements and understand critical areas to focus upon
- share innovative practices at a conference for national partners
- develop a support network
- make recommendations and implement improvements
- review results

Why did the University of Wollongong Library participate in the network?

The Library's formal quality program, *Quality and service excellence*, introduced in 1994, provides a framework for the critical and regular review of key processes and services central to the success of the Library. Continuous improvement activities have established internal benchmarks for the Library's key processes and service areas, and ongoing improvement activities are measured against these benchmarks.

Participation in the *Leading and managing improvement and change* network is an opportunity to: measure our performance against other organisations; review the integrity of our internal assessment activities; identify performance gaps and opportunities for improvement and learn new techniques and approaches to continuous improvement issues common to a broad range of organisations.

Data collection

Survey tools

Surveys were developed to obtain data on the approach and deployment of strategies to facilitate change and to identify the role of leadership in change management and continuous improvement. Two separate surveys were distributed to members of the organisations; a managers' survey and a staff survey. Both surveys contained similar elements to monitor the congruence of performance perceptions between managers and staff. Minor modifications were made to the survey to reflect the language and terminology used within the Library. (see appendices 1 and 2) Additional organisational data and information was also supplied to supplement the completed surveys.

Key staff were interviewed as a part of the data collection process. In addition, managers who provided a score of 5 or above (rating scale 1 to 6) for performance received follow up interviews to articulate their perceived evidence of performance. The surveys and supplementary organisational information was forwarded to the Australian Quality Council for analysis and interpretation in September 1997.

Survey results

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted independently by the Australian Quality Council. A comprehensive report was prepared detailing participants' responses to the survey questionnaire and supporting evidence for performance rated at 5 or above on the rating scale of 1 to 6 to further supplement the collated data.

Software developed by the Quality Council enabled participants to display their own results and with permission from the other participants, obtain comparative performance data.

Gap score data highlighted strengths in performance as well as opportunities for improvement. The results for the Library indicated congruence in staff and managers' perceptions of performance across most of the areas examined. (see appendix 3)

Coordination of improvement opportunities at the University of Wollongong Library

The benchmarking methodology developed by the Australian Quality Council recommended the formation of a Quality Improvement Team to examine the results and participate in site visits to establish recommendations for improvement. During the period of the benchmarking study, several projects were already underway in the Library and due to the limited number of staff available, a decision was made to delegate the responsibilities for the site visits and improvement recommendations to members of the Quality Steering Committee.

The Quality Coordinator and representatives from the Steering Committee attended site visits and where possible, other Library staff also attended. Members of the Steering Committee, for example the Staff Development Officer, incorporated internal assessment activities with the results of the benchmarking survey to develop recommendations for improvement.

Regular updates of the project were provided to staff by the Library's Communication document, staff meetings and informal Quality Talks.

Conclusion

Participation in the *Leading and managing improvement and change* network provided the Library with the opportunity to learn and adapt findings from other organisations, a number of which have been formally recognised by the Australian Quality Awards foundation. The Library's involvement with the network not only identified opportunities for improvement, but also reaffirmed that our performance in leading and managing change was positive in a number of areas and that there was a strong degree of congruence in perceptions of performance between staff and management.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the results of the project is that the Library needs to explicitly communicate improvement activities and results. As continuous improvement has become embedded in the Library's culture and there is less reliance on cross functional improvement teams, care must be taken to ensure that knowledge of improvement is not simply implied, but is communicated by the appropriate medium or forum.

The survey results also indicated a need to improve the alignment of goals and objectives to facilitate commitment by staff and managers in the achievement of common goals. Although the process had undergone internal refinement, models identified on site visits assisted in clarifying the relationship between organisational goals, key strategies and team actions.

Despite the diversity of organisations participating in the network, common management issues are shared by all. This represented an important learning for Library staff visiting the network organisations. Participation in the network reaffirmed the

need for performance indicators, continuous improvement strategies and the deployment of regular assessment activities regardless of the nature of the business. Staff participating in the network also recognised how much has been accomplished by the Library since adopting its *Quality and service excellence* program and how the quality framework has become embedded in our day to day work and long term planning activities.

Lorraine Denny is currently employed as the Staff Development Officer at the University of Wollongong Library. In this role Lorraine has prepared and presented a number of training programs including client service skills, team building, communication skills, total quality management, benchmarking and job application writing. Since 1996 she has presented Client Service Skills workshops to academic and public libraries within NSW. Lorraine is currently researching the currency, usefulness and content of job descriptions as part of the ALIA Dunn and Wilson Scholarship awarded to her in 1997. The result of this research will be presented at the next Library technicians Conference. Lorraine's qualifications include: Library Practices Certificate; Bachelor of Arts (Psychology); Associate Diploma of Business (Human Resource Development) and Creative Training Techniques Program Certificate.

Traci Rice is currently employed as the Acquisitions Coordinator at the University of Wollongong Library. In this role Traci is responsible for coordinating the functions and staff of the Acquisitions Team. She first became involved in benchmarking when the Library developed an in-house Introduction to benchmarking workshop for Library management and staff. She was also the successful recipient of the 1997 ACLIS Acquisition Research Grant. This grant enabled the University of Wollongong Library Acquisitions Team to benchmark an acquisition core process with three other libraries. Traci has an Associate Diploma of Arts (Library Practice) and is currently enroled in a Bachelor of Commerce.

Margie Jantti is Quality Coordinator University of Wollongong Library. An interest in quality management began while employed in the local government sector when she became one of the original members of the library quality steering committee. More recently, quality management has become a more formal role in her current position of Quality Coordinator at the University of Wollongong Library. Since 1996, she has conducted several organisational self assessment activities, participated in and facilitated Quality Improvement Teams, represented the Library in a benchmarking project and has conducted a number of workshops for Library staff in the use of quality tools, basic statistics and the development of Key Performance Indicators. This year she facilitated the application process for the 1998 Australian Quality Awards on behalf of the University of Wollongong Library. Margie has a Bachelor of Arts (Library and Information Science).

Traci, Margie and Lorraine are all members of the University of Wollongong Library Quality Steering Committee.