Benchmarking to Identify Best Practices

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Learning goals for workshop

- What is benchmarking
- Reasons for benchmarking
- Examples of potential studies
- Steps to conducting a study
- Projects you could initiate
- Where to go for more information

What is benchmarking?

- Benchmarking is an approach for departments to measure and compare themselves with higher-performing departments with the goal of identifying work processes, products, services, or strategies that will lead to improvement.

Benefits of benchmarking

- Identify best practices that increase student satisfaction.
- Achieve efficiencies and increase productivity.
- Helpful during times of budget growth and reduction.
- Broaden perspectives and overcome resistance change.
- Demonstrate the quality and efficiency of your programs and services.

Origins of benchmarking

- Emerged in 1980s as a survival tool for Xerox.
- In 1990, first university benchmark study conducted by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.
- In 1992, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) conducted a national benchmark study on administrative services.
- Since 1992, hundreds of schools have participated in NACUBO's benchmark studies on topics ranging from admissions to purchasing.
- Today many higher education associations conduct benchmark studies.

Opportunities for benchmarking in higher education

- Admissions – process of reviewing of applications
- Registrar – processing transcript requests
- Center for Student Involvement – processing the registration of student organizations
- Student Health Services – scheduling doctor appointments
- Campus Recreation – signing students up for recreation classes
- Career Services – registering employers in job fairs
- Crafts Center – registering students in workshops
- Human Resources – processing timesheets and payroll
- Transportation Services – arranging for special event parking services
- Police – computer-aided dispatch services
- Facilities Design – project design review process

Five steps to benchmarking

1. Planning
2. Identifying target organizations
3. Data collection
4. Analysis
5. Implementation

Step 1. Planning

- Limit the study to what is vital to the performance of your department.
- Consider highly-regarded practices or services that can be made even better.
- Look into practices or services that students and staff regard as "broken".
  - labor-intensive, time-consuming processes with suspected waste
  - Services or processes that generate dissatisfaction with students.
  - Processes that affect other key processes in your department or other departments.
  - Processes with poorly defined objectives or frequent errors requiring corrections.

Prioritizing your benchmarking projects

- Potential for improvement in student satisfaction or staff productivity,

- Extent to which the process or service is broken,

- Feasibility of re-engineering the service or product.

Selecting benchmark study team

- Involve staff members who are most familiar with the processes or services.
- If processes or services extend to other departments, involve their staff as well.
- Include a staff member who can successfully recruit the target organizations to participate in the study.

Step 2. Identifying target organizations

- Identify recognized leaders based on:
  - awards, conference presentations, articles in association publications, and leaders in your field.
- Target organizations can be departments:
  - internal to the university that perform similar processes or offer similar services.
  - with similar processes or services at other universities.
  - outside of higher education with similar functions, products, or services.

Step 2. Identifying target organizations

- To ease the recruiting the process look for institutions that affiliate with one another in some manner.
  - They still need to be top performers!
- Secure their cooperation by:
  - Ensuring confidentiality of the results.
  - Making their participation easy by minimizing their investment of time in the study.
  - Promising to share the results.

Step 3. Data collection

- The objective of data collection is to:
  - examine processes or services,
  - resources devoted to processes or services, and
  - measure performance.

Step 3. Data collection

Use methods such as:

telephone interviews,

on-line surveys,

collection of department information (e.g., organizational charts, procedure manuals)

detailed flowcharts of internal processes

interviews during meetings at conference,

interviews and observation during site visits

Step 3. Data collection

- Measuring performance involves developing metrics such as:
- QUALITY
  - student satisfaction surveys,
- EFFICIENCY
  - number of transactions completed per departmental FTE, or
  - departmental cost per transaction processed.

Examples of metrics

- Benchmarking study of custodial services in Student Centers
- QUALITY
    - Staff and student ratings of the appearance of various spaces in the facility (e.g.,bathrooms, dining spaces, meeting spaces, lounge spaces).
- EFFICIENCY
    - Number of FTE dedicated to custodial services divided by facility square footage
    - Number of FTE dedicated to custodial services divided by the number of people who visit the facility each day
    - Amount of supplies and expenses budgeted to custodial services divided by the number of people who visit the facility each day.

Step 4. Analysis

- Your analysis may focus on:
- Differences in quality and efficiency levels.
- Factors that contribute to the differences in quality and efficiency including:
  - Organizational structure,
  - Leadership and mission
  - Organizational stability and staff experience,
  - Policies,
  - Work flows and internal processes,
  - Use of technology such as the web, email, phone
  - Staffing levels,
  - Training of staff,
  - Division of job responsibilities,
  - Funding,
  - Use of assessment to receive student feedback

Step 5. Implementation

- Analysis phase culminates in a documented action plan and recommendations
- Identify strengths and weaknesses relative to benchmark partners,
- Recommendation may include changing:
  - processes,
  - job responsibilities,
  - staff involved,
  - use of technology and development of software tools.

Resources

- American Society for Quality http://www.asq.org

- Student Voice http://www.studentvoice.com

- Educational Benchmarking Inc. http://www.webebi.com

  – Has national benchmark studies on first-year experience, housing, Greek life, student centers, student organization leaders.

- International Benchmarking Clearinghouse http://www.apqc.org