

Applications of Benchmarking for Analysis Projects

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Introduction

This type of Benchmarking is very Tour & Interview oriented, and is a good way to get new Ideas and identify Best Practices. It's usually part of a larger ISE-type Analysis Project.

What is benchmarking for analysis?

This type of benchmarking differs somewhat from traditional benchmarking, which is usually performed at a high level such as a total company comparison or a large system comparison. Benchmarking for analysis is used during an ISE-type investigation and tends to be part of a larger analysis project. It usually is more focused on specific problems for comparison and looks at similar and dissimilar activities. It tends to be more Tour and Interview focused and usually tries to answer specific questions.

What are some typical applications for benchmarking?

Some ISE-related Analysis Projects that might utilize benchmarking might include: Material Handling methods comparisons, Production scheduling methods, Inventory Control & Warehousing comparisons, and Maintenance procedures comparisons. You can benchmark within a large company with multiple sites, or benchmark different companies within an industry, or benchmark in different industries.

What are typical results?

It should answer your baseline questions and give you an opportunity to see a lot of new ideas that can be folded into your project's recommendations. It should provide some real examples of what others have tried and implemented.

When do you do it?

Whenever you need comparisons and have time in your project's plan. Whenever you need to provide detailed Implementation information. Usually you can start after you fully understand your own organization, but not too late in your Project Plan, so you can use the findings from the Benchmarking activity.

What do you focus on?

You should focus on specific items that you want to compare and are curious about, as well as any areas that you know are your organization's weakness or the benchmark organization's strength. Try to consistently cover your basic questions (and data requests) at each place visited.

How do you structure it?

Start with what you would like your deliverables to look like, and then structure your interview questions. Determine who you think would be a good benchmark

comparison and then call to find a good contact at each place (maybe send them your list of questions and the information you seek). Give yourself plenty of time to schedule the tours/meetings and leave enough time between tours to write up your notes, and to not over-schedule too much travel at any one time. But don't spread the benchmarking sessions out over too long a period, either.

How do you do the work?

Start with good interview questions. Try to take some of your customers along on the tours and at the start of each tour/interview re-state what you are hoping to see and why you are there. Be as open and receptive as possible, as you see and hear what each visited organization has done. Ask follow-up questions and keep your tour guide/host focused. Write up each tour's notes and discuss the tour findings as a group, immediately after the tour. Summarize your results as a separate write-up. Later do any follow-up tours on areas of particular interest.

How do you analyze the results?

Summarize each tour/interview as nothing but observed facts, initially. Discuss as a group everything you observed & heard and try to reach consensus among your team. Organize your findings & observations into several logical categories. Identify the best practices, where they occurred, and any items that seem to be the most applicable to your organization. Identify the steps they used to get to their best practices, if known (including things they tried but later abandoned). Also identify worst practices, where they occurred, and compare them to problems in your organization. Put any comparison figures into a summary table or chart. Determine the best items for application and write down the steps required to introduce the change. Write a separate Benchmarking section for your Project's Final Report that integrates into your Final Recommendations.