

Get Involved: AME/APQC Benchmarking Community of Practice (CoP)

What has a billion eyes and ears and continually finds something new to share about benchmarking? It's as good a definition as any for the new AME/APQC Benchmarking Community of Practice (CoP). And the nifty thing about being in one is that you're gonna learn more about ways to improve your organization's performance from folks who are already making it happen and who offer their take on ways to get started in benchmarking.

Following are comments and ideas shared by several participants in the AME/APQC Benchmarking CoP meeting in San Diego, CA.

"Two of the biggest barriers to an organization starting their benchmarking journey to excellence are: 1) finding a group of individuals who are interested in benchmarking to act as their peers, and 2) actually starting the process. Many organizations don't know where to start with their benchmarking activities, how to discuss potential projects within their company, or where to focus their efforts," according to Ron Webb, executive director, membership, APQC (American Productivity & Quality Center) and a founding member of the AME/APQC Benchmarking CoP. Once they've tackled that barrier and they get others in their organization ready to benchmark, they don't have a built-in network of individuals they trust to participate in their benchmarking activity." He offered suggestions for addressing concerns about getting off to a good start in benchmarking.

This CoP is supported by AME and APQC, and through that relationship, members of AME will have access, free of charge, to the OSBC research projects. The CoP is using the OSBC Manufacturing project and Survey as a starting point to help BCoP members begin their journey into benchmarking. We've provided a resource page for BCoP members at www.apqc.org/bmk-cop." Webb was among the presenters during the BCoP session during the AME regional conference in San Diego.

Power in Community-Benchmarking offers value in strategic, performance, and process applications, according to William "Bill" Sacherek of Boeing. "It crosses process and product life cycles," he said. "The power of community as you participate in these efforts is worth a lot to you and your suppliers and customers." Strategic benchmarking, for example, helps you to identify commonality across an organization. Shared commonalities can be recognized and information about process improvements can be more effectively shared. By reaching out to other functions and groups within an organization, and showing them how shared information can provide specific benefits, you'll gain more converts to benchmarking efforts.

Human Capital-One of the applications for benchmarking studies is in human capital management. "The goal of human resource management is to help an organization meet strategic goals by attracting and maintaining employees and also to manage them effectively," said Bill Baker of Speed To Excellence, AME's Target Editorial, and a member of the benchmarking CoP founding board. He noted that benchmarking practitioners can effectively use available resources to find ways for creating a better "fit" between employees and organizational goals. For example, resources can be tapped on skills management, training and development, personnel cost planning, performance appraisal, and other areas. "Everyone says, 'People are our most important asset,' but no one knows how to treat them that way," said Baker. "The BCoP shares best practices to do this."

Basics of Benchmarking-Basic tenets of benchmarking were shared by Glenn Marshall, also a member of the benchmarking CoP. Marshall and others in the CoP counseled that you'll get better benchmarking results – and process improvements, in turn – by being selective, clear, and consistent in your process improvement and benchmarking efforts.

Cut out the unnecessary, Marshall said. Look at reports you receive on a regular basis, invite colleagues and peers to evaluate them, note the customers of the report or data, and invite them into the discussion to determine how useful the information is to them. Make sure that you do not have contradictory measurements, and review them regularly.

Define your measures, including your current state, and goals. If you get a request from senior management to improve results by some percentage, clarify and restate the goals with them. Challenge the goals and measures early in the game to get the most benefit from your improvement and benchmarking activities.

If you lack a formal benchmarking process, and you aren't sure how to get started benchmarking a selected issue, there are various solutions. Get on the phone and start asking people in your organization, in trade associations, and other groups (like the Benchmarking CoP); do general Internet searches on the topic; and align yourself with organizations that offer benchmarking communities. When you are searching for contacts and information, keep in mind your organization's culture.

Supply Chain Benchmarking-Mark Palla of Raytheon, a member of the benchmarking CoP, offered ideas for benchmarking in the supply chain arena. Consider assessments/audits, annual goals, metrics, people, leadership team/steering committee topics. Learn more about benchmarking through networking, Google searches, internal sources, standard metrics, universities, and professional organizations. Cross-functional and kaizen/lean/continuous improvement initiatives will yield "lessons learned" for benchmarking.

More to Come-"What I see in the AME/APQC Benchmarking CoP is that it's going to help us get what we want a lot quicker. It offers contacts we need about where to go for information about making improvements," said Jim Anderson, continuous improvement specialist for Parker Hannifin's Aerospace group in Irvine.

Lea A.P. Tonkin, lives in Woodstock, IL.

If you'd like to learn more about benchmarking and the BCoP, contact Jerriane Strohmeyer of AME (jestrohmeyer@ame.org).