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Abstract:
How to make benchmarking a
success in your organisation

INTRODUCTION

NHSBT has been benchmarking itself against fellow blood services for almost 15 years. It was a founding member of the UK and Ireland Business Information Committee and EBA Benchmarking group. This paper describes some of the key learnings from that journey.

SETTING THE RIGHT TONE

Establishing the right philosophy at the beginning is an important factor in the success of benchmarking. NHSBT's approach can be encapsulated by the following statement: Benchmarking is about being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and being wise enough to try and learn how to match and even surpass them at it

NHSBT BENCHMARKING TIMELINE

- Late 1990's** - We stated our aim to be "World Class"
- Early 2000's** - Start to informally measure performance
- 2002** - UK Blood Services form a "Benchmarking Club" UK & Ireland Business Information Committee
- 2005** - European Blood Alliance forms a benchmarking group
- 2005/7** - Data gathering/ analysing
- 2008** - First visits to EBA best performers
- 2009** - First EBA workshops to examine in detail what "best" looks like
- 2010** - First learning partnerships established
- 2011/12** - Second round of workshops - reviewing lessons learnt. EBA "Flying Squad" concept trialled in Malta & Estonia.
- 2012/13** - Further focussed visits

WHAT AREAS WERE BENCHMARKED?

Supply Chain Efficiency - From donors invited to products shipped using KPIs such as invite success, deferrals, process losses, outdated *Input Costs* - *Consumable baskets* (avoiding confidentiality concerns)
Labour Productivity - *Collection, Processing and Collection*

KEY LESSON #1

DEFINITIONS

Establishing accurate definitions is the keystone to successful benchmarking.

Enough time needs to be spent making sure they are accurate enough for meaningful comparison to be undertaken but you should not spend so much time that you never begin - accuracy not precision.
It can be important to involve operational experts in this process which increases the likelihood that they will be accurate and the level of engagement once they are implemented will be higher. The definitions should be shared widely and often t increase awareness and acceptance

KEY LESSON #2

DECIDING WHERE TO FOCUS

Select areas where differences have the biggest impact for your organisation. Larger gaps are often easier to analyse and will get more attention from your operational staff Try to select area where you have a high level of confidence you will be comparing on a like for like basis - egg processes subject to the same regulatory jurisdiction

KEY LESSON #3

GETTING THE NUMBERS ACCEPTED

Recognise that initial reactions may range from incredulity to anger. It is important that you work closely with people to overcome their concerns. Explain why you are measuring performance and what you hope to achieve.

It can be helpful to put the comparisons in context - for example it may not be realistic to compare a very large blood centre with a very small one. Having said that scale of operations is not always correlated to higher performance levels.

KEY LESSON #4

GO BEYOND THE NUMBERS

The numbers can only point you in the right direction. To really understand what they mean and to encourage people to accept them you need to conduct further analysis and investigation. A powerful technique is to allow people to see for themselves how others operate. Exchange visits, workshops and learning partnerships are examples of how to do this.

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KEY LESSON #5

CELEBRATE SUCCESS

To re-enforce progress and a culture of continuous improvement celebrate success on regular basis and in a high profile manner. This can be done in many ways:

- Enter National Awards
- Shop floor staff invited to participate in workshops
- Company newsletters frequently refer to success
- Reporting emphasises progress made
- Employees nominated for awards
- Employees have regular opportunities to meet the CEO
- Senior management team conduct Gemba walks

CREATING A BURNING PLATFORM

Unless people feel that change is important and necessary they will be less willing to make that change. Benchmarking will be more successful if you can create a compelling case for change. Each organisation will be different of course but those responsible for benchmarking should try and create a burning platform from which to encourage people to move. The following generic examples may prove useful :

- The demanding customer/funding body
- Sufficiency – enough donors, blood, finance
- Public perception (especially Patients/ Donors) – can the blood service demonstrate its providing value for money, providing safe products and services and making the most of every donation?
- Self driven – “because we can, because we should”
- Competition

SUMMARY

- Benchmarking is harder than you think and requires real determination
- The psychology of benchmarking is almost as important as the numbers
- You'll need to take care, be organised and have lots of patience but the results can be truly spectacular