BENCHMARKING IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES - BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Albu Cristina[1], Cristian Adriana[2] and Valter Narcisa[3]

[1] Associate Professor PhD, Manager Library, University „Politehnica" of Bucharest, e-mail: cristina.albu@upb.com
[2] PhD Eng., Central Library, University „Politehnica" of Bucharest, e-mail: adriana_elena_cristian@yahoo.com
[3] Associate Professor PhD, Department "Engineering Graphics and Industrial Design"
University „Politehnica" of Bucharest, e-mail: narcisa.valter@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The paper is in line with the concerns (nationally) expressed by both specialists and organizations that address issues regarding benchmarking tools and techniques specific to the university library. At the same time, it provides a (useful, clear, concise) theoretical basis for conducting a benchmarking project in the university library. For a better understanding of the case study, the beginning of the paper overviews some topic related issues. Namely: the concept of benchmarking, principles in a benchmarking project, the usefulness of applying benchmarking, benchmarking techniques and tools, the possibility of extending the use of benchmarking in the university library.

KEYWORDS: benchmarking, university library, user, assessment, performance.

Motto: "When the wind of change blows, some people build walls, others build windmills"-Chinese proverb

1. INTRODUCTION

In Romania, benchmarking is still little known as it is in its infancy. There is no experience in applying benchmarking techniques. Literature provides theoretical explanations on the concept of benchmarking, working principles and the usefulness of its techniques and tools.
The concept of benchmarking can be used by any organization open to change that promotes flexibility as a management tool. The aim is to obtain performance.
It can be also applied to user centred library services, thereby improving service quality and consequently meeting the users'information needs. The practice of benchmarking in a university library is tantamount to adopting the best existing methods to reach the "target".
Philip Kotler noted that "benchmarking remains one of the most powerful tools for improving quality and performance".

2. THE CONCEPT OF BENCHMARKING IN THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Rank Xerox has defined benchmarking as: "the continuous process of measuring products, services, and practices against the toughest competitors or those companies recognized as powerful".
When applied to a university library, benchmarking may be defined as: *a continuous process of assessing its services as compared to other competitors (libraries recognized as leaders in the field)* or:
a powerful tool likely to assist libraries in improving the quality of user centred services and its performance.
The option for a particular type of benchmarking out of the existing ones (internal, external, competitive, functional (generic), international, etc.) available for library use, when properly

applied, can contribute to success and increased efficiency. Benchmarking, if correctly chosen, designed and implemented, can also provide important advantages to the library.

At the same time, benchmarking can also provide unlimited opportunities for implementation whether as part of the quality management system and/or as a tool for continuous improvement.

The concept of benchmarking (**BM**) involves four phases: planning, data collection (research), analysis and adaptation (implementation). Figure 1 shows the steps involved in conducting a benchmarking project. [1], [2]
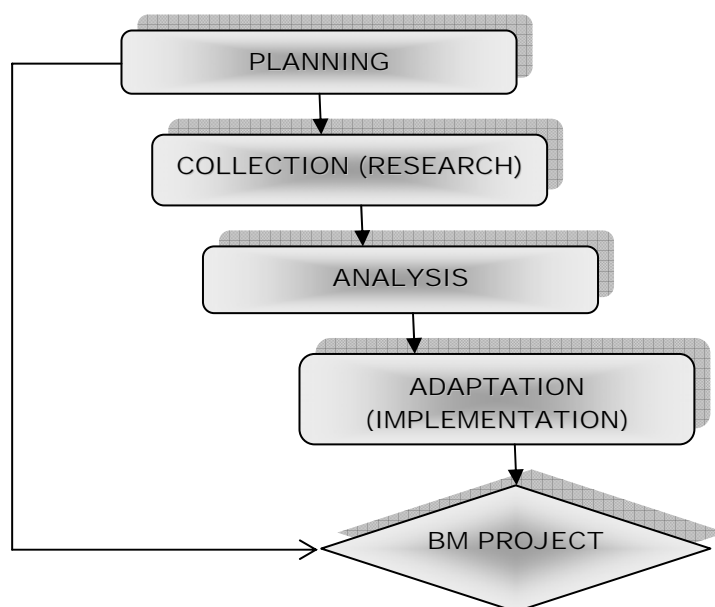
Figure 1. Phases covered in a benchmarking project

There is a wide range of models for dealing with benchmarking. Nevertheless, its application in the university library makes it imperative to observe certain action rules:
1. understanding in-house processes with respect to service provision;
2. analysis of successful services delivered by other library services;
3. comparison of in-house services to services delivered by the libraries taken as a point of reference;
4. implementation of measures to eliminate disparities;
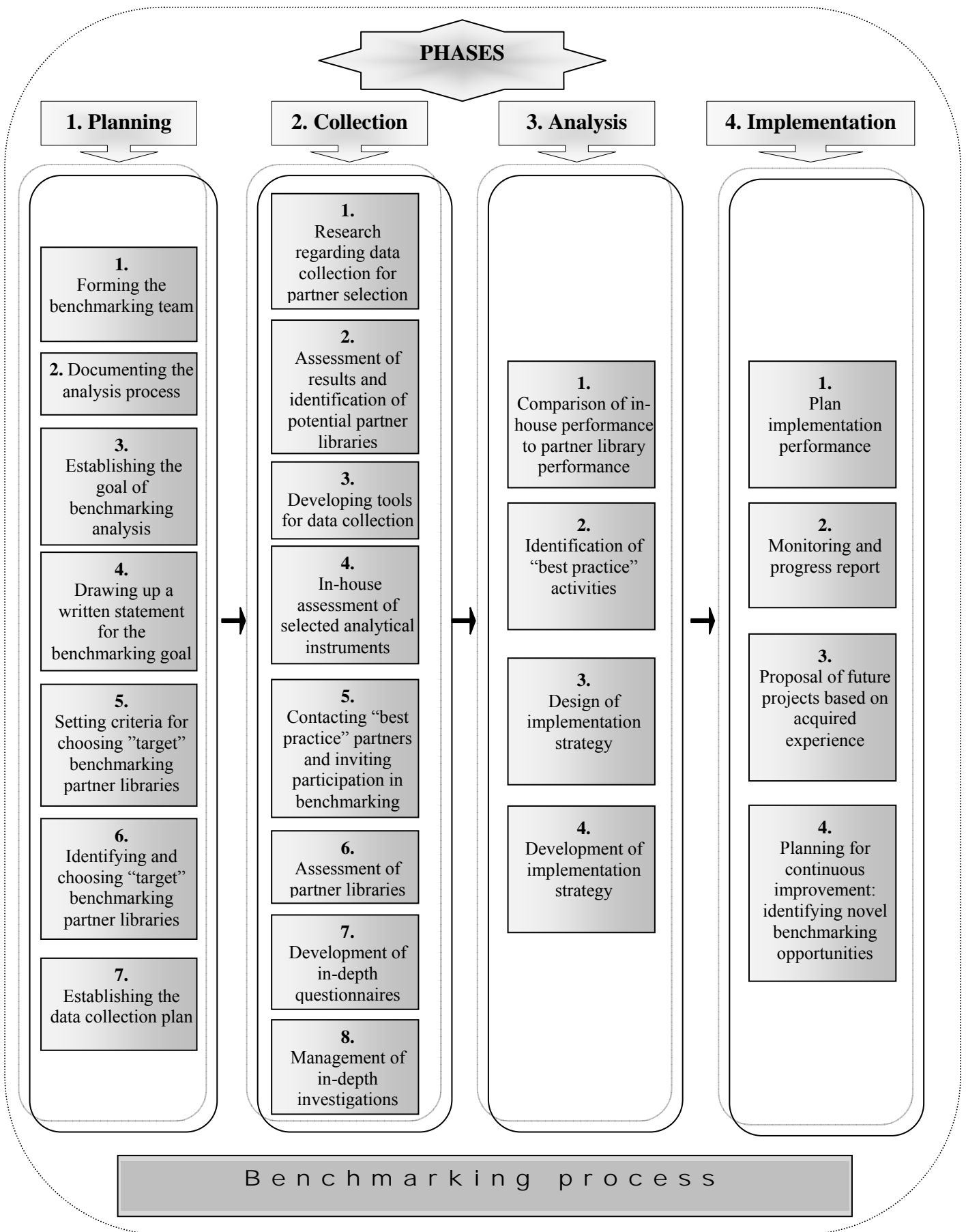5. feed-back.

When conducting a BM project, one should not overlook a series of principles that might be useful in achieving our goal. The European Organization for Quality (EOQ) has put forth four principles:
- Reciprocity (good service deserves a worthy response).
- Analogy (services of library partners must be compatible).
- Measuring systems (which measurement system should be used?).
- Fairness (information subject to exchange be guaranteed).

The "target" questions to be answered in a benchmarking project may be summarized as follows:
- What do we want to measure?
- What is the partner of choice?
- What is the service performance resulting from the adoption of a BM project?
- How good is the performance of the library whose experience we want to assimilate?

The implementation of a BM project (phases and sub-phases of a BM process) is shown in an appropriate, clear and concise way in Figure 2. [1], [2], [3]

PHASES

1. Planning	2. Collection	3. Analysis	4. Implementation

1. Planning

1. Forming the benchmarking team

2. Documenting the analysis process

3. Establishing the goal of benchmarking analysis

4. Drawing up a written statement for the benchmarking goal

5. Setting criteria for choosing "target" benchmarking partner libraries

6. Identifying and choosing "target" benchmarking partner libraries

7. Establishing the data collection plan

2. Collection

1. Research regarding data collection for partner selection

2. Assessment of results and identification of potential partner libraries

3. Developing tools for data collection

4. In-house assessment of selected analytical instruments

5. Contacting "best practice" partners and inviting participation in benchmarking

6. Assessment of partner libraries

7. Development of in-depth questionnaires

8. Management of in-depth investigations

3. Analysis

1. Comparison of in-house performance to partner library performance

2. Identification of "best practice" activities

3. Design of implementation strategy

4. Development of implementation strategy

4. Implementation

1. Plan implementation performance

2. Monitoring and progress report

3. Proposal of future projects based on acquired experience

4. Planning for continuous improvement: identifying novel benchmarking opportunities

B e n c h m a r k i n g   p r o c e s s

Figure 2. Flow-chart of a BM project

423

The objective of any BM process is to induce changes. Nevertheless, one often finds that project outcomes yield only recommendations. That happens because the actual study has been disregarded.

3. TECHINIQUES AND TOOLS REQUIRED

In conducting the benchmarking process one can make use of *techniques* and *tools* specific to quality management.

Benchmarking techniques cover all working *methods* and *procedures* by which we can go through the working phases and sub-phases (those shown in Figure 2). The benchmarking *tools* cover the *means* employed in the benchmarking process.

Table 1 exemplifies the most frequently used techniques and tools (in all the four benchmarking phases of). [3] [4]

Table 1. Benchmarking techniques and tools

Phase	Techniques	Tools
Planning	Brainstorming Objective weighting method	Cause–effect diagrama (Ishikawa) Matrix chart Pareto chart
Collection	Surveys Statistical-mathematical methods	Data collection file Questionnaires Reference guide
Analysis	Critical road map method P.E.R.T. method Decision making tree	Cost analysis Graph represenations
Adaptation	Management by obiectives Statistical research techniques	Histograms

4. PROPOSAL FOR CASE STUDY

This chapter focuses on a proposal for implementing external benchmarking at the Central Library of the Bucharest "Politehnica" University involving reputed leaders in the field of librarianship. The aim is improved service for loan users. The steps to be followed in conducting the BM process are the steps referred to in chapter 2 (Figure 2).

All phases and sub-phases shown in Figure 2 have to be covered.

As the process is extremely meticulous, the present study will only illustrate a choice lot of techniques and tools used in the development of sub-phases in the planning and collection phases (code: **1.5**, **1.6**, **2.1** according to Figure 2, chapter 2).

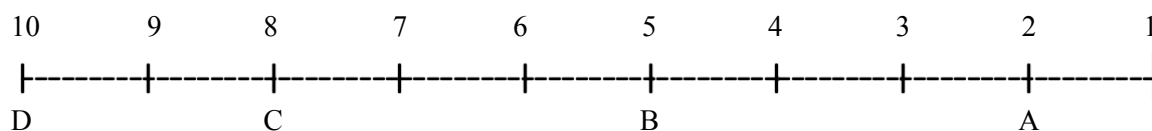4.1. Setting criteria for choosing "target" benchmarking partner libraries (code **1.5**)

One has used the "method of weighting objectives" where objectives have been replaced by criteria (A, B, C, D): A-size of BM partners; B-notoriety of BM partners; C-closeness to UPB Central Library field of activity; D-enrollment of readership/academic year. A matrix of these criteria is made up as follows: one compares systematically pairs of criteria so that the resulting sum be "1". In Table 2: "1" is assigned if the first criterion in the pair under comparison is considered more important, while "0" is assigned if the first criterion in the pair under comparison is considered less important.

Table 2. Matrix of criteria

Criterion	A	B	C	D	Total row
A	-	0	0	0	0
B	1	-	0	0	1
C	1	1	-	0	2
D	1	1	1	-	3

According to Table 2 the criteria ranking is D-C-B-A.
The criteria are then placed on a scale of values from 1 to 10 in order to identify and choose benchmarking "target" partners according to Figure 3.

```
10        9        8        7        6        5        4        3        2        1
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
D                 C                          B                          A
```

Figura 3. Scale of values

4.2. Identifying and choosing "target" benchmarking partner libraries (code **1.6**)

4.2.1 Identifying potential partners

One has to draw up an initial list of possible partners as in Table 3.

Table 3. Potential partners

Reference	Potential partners
Central University Library „Carol I" București	1. Central University Library „Mihai Eminescu", Iași
	2. Central University Library „Lucian Blaga", Cluj
	3. Library of „Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University, Iași
	4. Central Library of „Politehnica" University ,Timişoara
	5. Central Library of the Craiova University
	6. Library of „Dunărea de Jos" University, Galați
	7. Library of „Transilvania" University, Braşov

4.2.2. Choice of "target" partners based on weighted criteria

The choice of "target" partners is based on the criteria of choosing partner libraries (Section 4.1). This early survey of potential partners is preliminary, given the limited amount of information. One chooses a three tier rating scale. Table 4 provides a ranking of potential BM partners based on assessment points awarded and the scale of value in Figure 3. One can choose in this way the top partners.

Table 4. Identification and choice of BM target partners

Crt. Nr	BM Potential Partners	Criterion				Weighted Total	%
		A	B	C	D		
1	Central University Library „Mihai Eminescu", Iași	3	2	3	2	60	17,5
2	Central University Library „Lucian Blaga", Cluj	3	3	3	3	75	21,9
3	Library of „Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University, Iași	2	3	2	1	45	13,1
4	Central Library of „Politehnica" University ,Timişoara	2	2	3	1	48	14
5	Central Library of the Craiova University	2	2	2	1	40	11,7
6	Library of „Dunărea de Jos" University, Galați	1	1	2	1	33	9,6
7	Library of „Transilvania" University, Braşov	3	2	2	1	42	12,2
	Criterion weighting	2	5	8	10	-	-
	Total					343	100

According to Table 4, the five four libraries selected have been:
Central University Library "Lucian Blaga", Cluj; Central University Library „Mihai Eminescu", Iași; Central Library of „Politehnica" University, Timişoara; Library of „Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University, Iași; Library of „Transilvania" University, Braşov.

4.3. Research on data collection regarding partner selection (code **2.1**)

BM researchers must select sources of information for documenting processes in partner libraries and use appropriate data collection methods. The collection of data about partner selection can be done according to the reference guide for identifying information sources (Table 5).

Table 5. Reference guide of resources

Internal information	Market Research
	Experts
	Managers
	Meetings of benchmarking specialists
	Information from benchmarking network of
	In-house library studies
Public infomation	Specialism Books
	Articles in Periodicals
	Documents available electronically
	Association of professional studies
	Previous research on topic
Private research	Questionnaires
	Visits
	Meetings of benchmarking partners

Table 5 lists the most significant sources. The sources are diverse: some can lead to data and information directly, others can lead to alternative sources of information.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The acquisition and application of the concept of benchmarking can benefit the library if adopted and implemented correctly and if supported by flexible management.

In conducting a benchmarking process, the people involved must have relevant expertise, extensive experience and be creative. Experience is necessary but not sufficient. It should be complemented by a well-organized methodological basis and adapted to the library particulars.

The questions that we must ask ourselves, in a benchmarking project are:

• What do we want to find out?
• Why?
• What do we intend to do with the results?

The factors with an impact upon "best practices" are:

• computerization;
• staff training;
• inter-library cooperation agreements.

The present paper is meant to provide a limited contribution to implementing the concept of benchmarking in the university library.

6. REFERENCES

1. Balm, G., *Evaluer et ameliorer ses performances: le benchmarking,* AFNOR, (1994).
2. Anand, G., Kodali, R., Benchmarking the benchmarking models, *Benchmarking: An International Journal,* Vol 15, No. 3, pp. 257-291, (2008).
3. Mitu, Ş., Neagu, M., Frumuşanu, G., *Benchmarking,* Editura Fundaţiei Universitare Dunărea de Jos, Galaţi, (2000).
4. Michaels, J., Wood, P. W., *Design to Cost*, Editors John Wiley and Sons, New York, (1989).
5. www.benchmarking-in europe.com