
Guest editorial

Introduction to the special issue on benchmarking in total quality management

A world that is changing faster and faster forces companies to reinvent themselves and their capabilities. In this competitive environment total quality management (TQM) tools support organizations in managing strategic quality and decision processes. This is an era of break-through management, which demands creativity and new thinking. The organization competitive advantage is based on the ability to generate and support new ideas quickly and that hinges on the capability to create. Benchmarking can become a tool to sustain this new TQM paradigm, providing a means to increase an organization's competitive performance by a comparison with the best-in-class.

The challenge is driving the change and not being driven. That is why benchmarking in TQM can become the helm to drive the change. Changes can be voluntary or not; may be big or small, but in all cases changes ensure that tomorrow will be different than today. It is not necessary to agree with change or not, as it will happen anyway. The question is do you want to be in the driver's seat, or to be passengers? ... Can benchmarking methodologies be the reply?

This special issue of *Benchmarking: An International Journal* explores some of the latest research on the frontiers of this field. It investigates how benchmarking can provide approaches, methods and techniques for the next TQM challenges we are going to face this century. The papers in this issue were selected based on their new contributions to theory and/or methodology or significant substantive findings, as well as their fit with the organization of the issue. Taken together, these articles provide a valuable collective snapshot of interesting benchmarking progress in recent research.

The announcement for this special was framed in very broad terms. Both theoretical and empirical papers, as well as rigorous case studies, were invited. Cross-functional studies as well as best practices experiences were particularly encouraged. Suggested topics for the special issue included:

- quality, innovation and benchmarking in manufacturing and service organizations;
- theory building and new paradigms in TQM;
- advanced methods for benchmarking in TQM;
- measurement issues in benchmarking quality management;
- benchmarking analysis and strategic quality management; and
- surveying on TQM and benchmarking.

Papers that were submitted for the special issue were subjected to a normal double-blind review process to assess the compatibility of the topic addressed by the paper with the theme and focus of the special issue. Papers that did not pass the screen were, at the author's discretion, forwarded to the editor of *BIJ* to be included in the normal review process for the journal. Of ten papers submitted, six passed the review process.

The first paper is "A benchmarking implementation framework for automotive manufacturing SMEs" by Baba M. Deros, Sha'ri M. Yusof and Azhari M. Salleh. The authors analyze how intense market competition and increasing business competitiveness have led many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to practice benchmarking. The paper provides a conceptual framework for benchmarking implementation in SMEs, taking into consideration the SMEs' strengths, weaknesses and characteristics. The conceptual framework was based on selection of the appropriate key performance measures and benchmarking techniques.

The second paper by Terry R. Collins, Manuel D. Rossetti, Heather L. Nachtmann, James R. Oldham is "The use of multi-attribute utility theory to determine the overall best-in-class performer in a benchmarking study." The authors investigate the application of multi-attribute utility theory to aid in the decision-making process when performing a benchmarking gap analysis. The analysis was performed to determine industry best practices for six main critical warehouse metrics of picking and inventory accuracy, storage speed, inventory and picking tolerance, and order cycle time, within a public sector warehouse.

The third paper is "Role of human factors in TQM – a graph theoretic approach" by S. Grover, V.P. Agrawal, I.A. Khan. The authors focus their attention on human factors in TQM organizations. The paper proposes a preliminary mathematical model of these factors and their interactions using a graph theoretic approach. The methodology supports the impact evaluation of these factors, providing a tool for a self-analysis and comparison of organizations.

The fourth paper is "Tourism services quality (TourServQual) in Egypt: the viewpoints of external and internal customers" by Mohammed I. Eraqi. This paper is application oriented, and in it the author presents an analysis of tourism service quality in Egypt. He analyzes the results of two surveys with the aim of identifying the level of satisfaction of internal customers (employers) and external customers (tourists). The paper addresses issues relating to the creative and innovative organization behavior in TQM practices.

The fifth paper by Prakash J. Singh and Alan Smith is "An empirically validated quality management measurement instrument." This paper proposes an assembled measurement instrument to overcome some quality measurement tool shortcomings. The paper focuses issues relating to quality measurement instruments benchmarking. The authors emphasize that the area of quality management is currently characterized by three competing approaches: standards-based; prize-criteria; and, elemental. These three approaches are analyzed to identify sets of key constructs and associated items.

The final paper "A worldwide analysis of ISO 9000 standard diffusion: considerations and future development" is from Fiorenzo Franceschini, Maurizio Galetto and Paolo Cecconi. This paper presents a deep investigation of ISO 9000 worldwide diffusion. In it the authors benchmarks ISO 9000 standards with TQM strategies. The paper addresses issues relating to possible development directions for quality system certification.

Preparation of this issue would be impossible without the help and support of our colleagues. They have done considerable work deserving a special acknowledgement. We would like to thank the authors of all submitted papers and the referees who found time in their busy schedules to review the contributions.

It is our hope that the six papers in this issue will stimulate new, better, more innovative and relevant benchmarking strategies, measurement and modeling. The fields of benchmarking and TQM can greatly benefit from an infusion of new ideas, methods and researches. Increased attention to these areas by management scientists in academic institutions, industry and services will help their practice and establish it as a valued core cross-disciplinary and global management discipline.

Fiorenzo Franceschini, Maurizio Galetto
Guest Editors
