

# **Key Success Factors for co-ordinated benchmarking projects using the TRADE Benchmarking Model: Lessons from Dubai.**

*Prof Dotun Adebajo (d.adebanjo@greenwich.ac.uk)  
Business School  
University of Greenwich  
Greenwich, London  
SE10 9LS*

*Ahmed Abbas,  
Centre for Organisational Excellence Research  
Massey University  
Palmerston North, New Zealand.*

*Dr Zeyad Mohammad El Kahlout  
Dubai Government Excellence Program  
Office of the Executive Council  
Dubai, UAE*

*Dr. Ahmad Abdullah Al Nuseirat  
Dubai Government Excellence Program  
Office of the Executive Council  
Dubai, UAE*

*Dr Robin Mann.  
Centre for Organisational Excellence Research  
Massey University  
Palmerston North, New Zealand.*

## **Abstract**

This study investigates the process for co-ordinated benchmarking projects and identifies the key success factors that facilitate such initiatives. It is based on the case of the ‘Dubai – We Learn’ initiative which comprised 13 co-ordinated benchmarking projects in different government departments. The study collected and analysed data on the 13 projects as well as perceptions of individuals that participated in the initiative. The study identified and classified the key success factors into five groups – leadership, documentation, teamwork, skills and operations. Furthermore, the success factors were

differentiated by the stages of the TRADE Benchmarking Methodology for which they were most relevant.

**Keywords:** Benchmarking, Organisational Excellence, Dubai

## Introduction

The Dubai Government Excellence Programme (DGEP), in an effort to improve the operations and performance of different aspects of government departments, launched the ‘Dubai – We Learn’ (DWL) initiative in 2015. The initiative was intended as a one-year programme of co-ordinated benchmarking projects which would also act as a facilitator for the government departments to learn new skills and acquire new tools and techniques that would enable them to continue to deploy benchmarking as an improvement initiative. A total of 36 projects were considered for participation in the DWL initiative and 13 were approved for participation. The projects were selected based on their potential benefits to the government department, the government and the residents of Dubai Emirate.

## Literature Review

Benchmarking is an important business improvement tool that has been applied in different organisations throughout the world (Taschner and Taschner, 2016; Chen, 2002). There is evidence from the academic literature that the technique has been applied in a variety of sectors including tourism, telecommunication and the public sector (Rendon, 2015; Simpson and Kondouli, 2000). However, most of the published studies on benchmarking refer to its application in singular organisations. This study investigates the co-ordinated, simultaneous application of benchmarking in 13 public sector organisations based in Dubai. The study is based on ‘Dubai We Learn’ initiative which was jointly organised by the Dubai Government Excellence Program (DGEP) and the Centre for Organisational Excellence Research (COER). Table 1 shows details of the participating organisations and their projects.

*Table 1. Details of the 13 organisations and projects involved in the benchmarking initiative*

<b>Government Entity</b>	<b>Project title</b>	<b>Aim of the project</b>
Dubai Corporation for Ambulance Services	Development of Emirati Paramedic’s Leaders	To identify and implement best practices in Paramedic training and practices to reduce patient mortality/morbidity rates, increase recovery rates, and reduce the reliance on hospital intervention by 2020.
Dubai Courts	Personal Status Smart Certifications Services	To transform Personal Status Certification issuing services (such as civil transactions like marriage and divorce) from traditional counter services to smart services (providing an integrated technology-based solution) whilst

<b>Government Entity</b>	<b>Project title</b>	<b>Aim of the project</b>
		achieving superior levels of customer satisfaction.
Dubai Culture	Developing National Human Resources for Museums	To provide the growing sector of museums in Dubai, with professional human resources in the different fields of museology and to improve the current performance of National human resources to world class standards.
Dubai Electricity & Water Authority	Shams Dubai Initiative - Increasing customer awareness and engagement	To increase customer awareness and engagement with Shams Dubai initiative, improve marketing efforts, build effective conversations, create brand advocates and increase Dubai based customer uptake of solar projects.
Dubai Land Department	Towards Happy employees	To identify and implement best practices that result in world-class employee happiness levels with a particular emphasis in reducing employee turnover and increasing employee engagement.
Dubai Municipality	Improving Purchase Procedures and Channels	To identify and implement best practices in purchasing to increase purchase requisitions processed within a target of 20 days from 74% to 85% with an emphasis on increasing “bids awarded in time”.
Dubai Police	Integrated Knowledge Management	To move the concept of Knowledge-dissemination into a constant and comprehensive practice according to clearly defined metrics.
Dubai Statistics Center (DSC)	Innovative Statistics	To identify best practices in Innovation to enable DSC to develop and implement a strategy for innovation to improve its process and services.
General Directorate of Residency & Foreigners Affairs Dubai	Developing a World-Class Customer Service Design Process	To develop and pilot a world-class customer service design process that is rapid, inclusive of all stakeholder needs, and delivers customer delight. <i>(The customer service design process is required for services such as issuing/renewing Visas, Passports, Residencies; monitoring and reaching departing travellers)</i>

<b>Government Entity</b>	<b>Project title</b>	<b>Aim of the project</b>
Knowledge & Human Development Authority	People Happiness	To identify and implement best practices related to people happiness to increase their happiness, work-life balance and well-being. <i>(KHDA are currently in the top 15% of organisations for employee happiness based on an independent international measure and aim to be in top 10%)</i>
Mohamed Bin Rashid Enterprise for Housing	Improving Customer Experience	To reduce the number of service counter visits by customers at MRHE by providing attractive alternative methods to serve customers (such as through Smart Applications, Smart Channels) and reducing the need for repeat visits.
Public Prosecution	Judicial Knowledge Management	To identify and implement best practices in the transfer of Judicial Knowledge to all prosecutors, relevant staff and stakeholders.
Road and Transport Authority	RTA's Knowledge Repository Gateway	To identify and implement best practices in Knowledge Management and how to encourage knowledge sharing among related stakeholders; employees, partners in addition to vendors and suppliers that will enhance /enrich the organization memory and learning process.

There are several examples of benchmarking projects that have been carried out in the public sector. These studies have been carried out in a variety of sectors including the healthcare sector (van Veen-Berkx et al. 2016;) and procurement (Holt & Graves, 2001). However, the studies that have been published to date primarily focus on how the benchmarking process has occurred in single organisations or on single projects. This study is based on the simultaneous deployment of several benchmarking projects in different organisations and focussing on different issues. This multiplicity of factors was achieved within the context of a centralised and co-ordinated framework. The closest initiative to this are when networks of organisations have developed to provide assistance and mutual support with respect to best practice sharing, and comparison of performance (e.g. Mann & Grigg, 2004 and van Veen-Berkx et al. 2016). However, such networks did not involve centralisation and co-ordination of the benchmarking projects. The study presented in this paper overcame this shortcoming since the decision to implement benchmarking in the government departments in Dubai was taken by central government.

### **The TRADE Benchmarking Methodology**

The successful deployment of benchmarking has been attributed, in part, to the application of a suitable and robust model (Jarrar and Zairi, 2001). This study adopts the TRADE Benchmarking Methodology as a result of its prescriptive approach and its

incorporation of a project management system to guide users through the various stages and steps. The TRADE Benchmarking Methodology was developed in the early 2000s by Dr Robin Mann. The methodology enables a clear and detailed focus for benchmarking project teams by guiding through each step of the benchmarking journey. The TRADE Methodology consists of 5 stages which are summarised below. Furthermore, each stage is made up of between 4 and 9 steps. The five main stages of the TRADE methodology (Mann, 2017) are:

*Terms of Reference – plan the project:* The first stage is to plan the project. This stage involves selecting the aim of the project, forming a project team and developing the Terms of Reference (TOR). The Terms of Reference provide the foundation for a successful project and should include a clear scope, expected benefits, resources required, expected time-line and identification of stakeholders who will be impacted by the project to ensure that their needs are considered.

*Research current state:* The second stage involves researching the extent of the current problem/issue and what practices are currently in place. This stage ensures that the project team has a thorough understanding of its own organisation's systems, processes and performance before learning from other organisations and helps to identify precisely the areas for which best practices will be sought.

*Acquire best practices:* This stage involves identifying which organisations are likely to have superior practices and finding out what they do differently. Various methods can be used for learning from other organisations such as internet research, surveys and site visits.

*Deploy – communicate and implement best practices:* This stage involves communicating the best practice findings from the Acquire Stage to the relevant stakeholders, deciding what should be changed with the current practice/process and implementing the changes. This stage involves adapting the best practices to fit the organisation's profile and may involve piloting the change before full deployment.

*Evaluate – evaluate the benchmarking process and outcomes:* This stage is designed to make sure the project has delivered the expected benefits that were outlined in the Terms of Reference. It involves undertaking a cost and benefits analysis and a general review of how well the process is performing. If the expected benefits are not being realised an investigation needs to occur to find out why not and may require further learning from the benchmarking partners. A project is usually only closed once the aim and objectives of the project have been achieved.

## **Research Aims**

The research aims to provide a better understanding of how co-ordinated benchmarking projects can be deployed. In particular, the research would identify the key success factors for co-ordinated benchmarking projects in multiple organisations. Furthermore, the research seeks to provide evidence that within the context of a co-ordinated benchmarking

process, individual participating organisations can achieve successes on their particular projects.

**Methodology**

A case study methodology was adopted for this research. Data collection was carried out over a one-year period as the 13 organisations applied the TRADE model. The approaches to data collection were:

- Each benchmarking team submitted progress reports every two months detailing their activities.
- Three progress sharing days were held at which each organisation gave presentations of their projects.
- Members of the research team met with each benchmarking team days before or after each progress sharing day. These two-hour meetings enabled more in-depth understanding of the activities of the benchmarking teams.
- At the end of the project, each team submitted a comprehensive report with details of actions implemented and results achieved, project benefits, strengths and weaknesses of the project and the positive experiences and challenges faced.
- At the end of the project, each team gave a final presentation and this event was attended by members of the research team.

Data collected from these sources of information were analysed to identify convergent themes. The study took place between September 2015 and October 2016.

**Results**

The findings indicated that all 13 teams successfully deployed benchmarking within the 12-month period. For example, RTA has implemented an internal Knowledge Management facility that has 8000 registered users while GDRFA has developed a new passenger pre-clearance system at Dubai Airport that reduces processing times for travellers. Dubai Police has developed a new Knowledge Management plan incorporating 33 projects and resulting in savings to date of US\$250,000. DCAS has launched an Advanced Paramedic Training Course which will reduce mortality rates for cardiac arrests by 16%. The Dubai Courts project will result in annual savings in excess of \$1,000,000. DEWA successfully increased the number of solar installation projects from 29 to 487 while Dubai culture’s project increased the skills level of the staff at Dubai museum. The project at Dubai Land has led to reduced employee turnover and absenteeism.

**Success Factors for the DWL co-ordinated benchmarking projects**

With respect to the key success factors for co-ordinated benchmarking projects, table 2 presents the findings and identifies the success factors associated with each stage of the TRADE benchmarking model.

*Table 2 - Key Success Factors from the Dubai Benchmarking projects*

<b>Leadership</b>
Leaders need to show strong sponsorship support (T,D)
Ensure strong stakeholder engagement with key executives to gain commitment to implement improvement ideas (D)

Performance measures and targets should be developed and agreed with senior executives (T,D,E)
Provide the support to implement many significant changes in a short timeframe within the organisation where indicated by the benchmarking project (D)
<b>Documentation</b>
Define projects clearly and ensure that they fit within overall organisational strategy (T)
Provide detailed breakdown of objectives of the project (T,R,D)
Provide excellent overall design and continual refinement of the TOR as the project develops (T,R,A,D)
Document detailed analysis of project benefits including financial benefits (D,E)
Provide excellent description of the use of the analysis tools and the findings (R)
Provide excellent description of actions taken including their impact (D,E)
Use standardised forms for the capture and sharing of information from site visits (A)
<b>Teamwork</b>
Involve your stakeholders throughout the project and make sure that they are fully informed and engaged. (T,R,A,D,E)
Identify the need for the project as a means of gaining the commitment of the various parties (T,D)
Clear identification of stakeholders and how they will benefit from the project (T,A,D)
Involve other staff to conduct benchmarking interviews on the team's behalf when opportunities arise. (A)
Select appropriate project team (T,D)
<b>Skills</b>
Strong lessons learned should be applied to new projects (R,A,D)
Key components of the training required for staff should be identified (T, R,A,D)
Share experience with other government entities and particularly in the use of analytical tools. (D)
Learning/growth of the benchmarking team with respect to how to conduct a benchmarking project (E)
<b>Operations</b>
Plan more benchmarking projects at the end and link them to future strategy/operations of the organisation (E)
Carry out thorough desktop research as a complement to site visits (A)
Improvement ideas that are accepted should be incorporated in organisational action plans (D)
Determine timeframe within which to implement improvement ideas (D,E)
Have a clear understanding of the needs of the organisation (T,A,D)
Have a good understanding of the issues facing the organisation before beginning this project (T)

## Conclusion

The study has examined the deployment of co-ordinated benchmarking projects based on the experience of 13 government organisations in Dubai. The benchmarking projects were

based on the TRADE Benchmarking Methodology and the research has identified the key success factors that underpin such co-ordinated projects. The research has also confirmed that the 13 organisations all achieved successes in their individual projects. Based on the success achieved and the effectiveness of the co-ordination process, the Dubai Government supported the delivery of a second round of co-ordinated benchmarking projects which took place between April 2017 and April 2018. The next phase of this research will investigate and compare the second round of projects to the first round.

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