

## **MATURING THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MARITIME UNIVERSITIES (IAMU) USING BENCHMARKING**

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**Abstract:** From the perspective of organizational theory, groups within the nonprofit/NGO sector have a unique and distinct form, but structure is key to their strategy nonetheless [1]. Furthermore, methods of collaboration and communication often form the vehicle by which the strategy is implemented. In its second decade of existence, the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) is an example of a nonprofit/NGO that is seeking more mature practices to advance from stage 3 (competent) to stage 4 (proficient) [2]. Performance measurement system design principles developed for the private and public sectors are applicable to the nonprofit/NGO sector [3]. This paper will outline a standard benchmarking analysis methodology to evaluate IAMU against comparative and aspirant organizations [4]. By examining the practices of other organizations using this standard benchmark process, a set of performance levels and targets will eventually be established for structure, collaboration, and communication. This work may form the foundation for noteworthy improvements to the global MET enterprise.

**Keywords:** MET, Benchmark, NGO, Nonprofit, Communication, Collaboration, Organization

## **Introduction**

Benchmarking has played a prominent role in management as a tool for continuous improvement [5], [6], [7]. There are many definitions of benchmarking [4], [8], [9], but the key concepts include: measurement, comparison, identification of best practices, implementation, and improvement. All organizations, including and especially non-profits or NGOs, constantly seek improvement, and therefore engage in benchmarking. Many organizations use maturity models to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of their processes and practices. For example, one such framework specific to non-profits and NGO's [2] uses the following five stages of development: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert – each with increasing levels of sophistication and detail. In its second decade of existence, the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) is an example of a nonprofit/NGO that is seeking more mature practices to advance from stage 3 (competent) to stage 4 (proficient) [2]. Therefore, IAMU would benefit from a benchmarking study.

## **Materials and Methods (Benchmarking Process)**

In order to properly benchmark, organizations should consider the internal aspects of their organization to be benchmarked as well as the external comparisons to be made [10]. Given the basic agreement of the IAMU and its goals, a *process* or *functional* benchmarking model would be of most benefit. Upon evaluating a comprehensive review of hundreds of benchmarking models [11], it was determined that the “traditional, most widely used” Xerox benchmarking model was most appropriate for the IAMU proposes based upon its longevity, ubiquity, and practicality.

The so-called Xerox model [4], includes four principle phases: planning (of benchmark study), analysis (of comparison organizations to identify gaps), integration (where

results are prioritized and communicated), and finally action (where results are implemented). The Xerox model for benchmarking is included as Figure 1. These phases correspond to traditional quality management four-step processes and would be easily understandable by a wide audience.

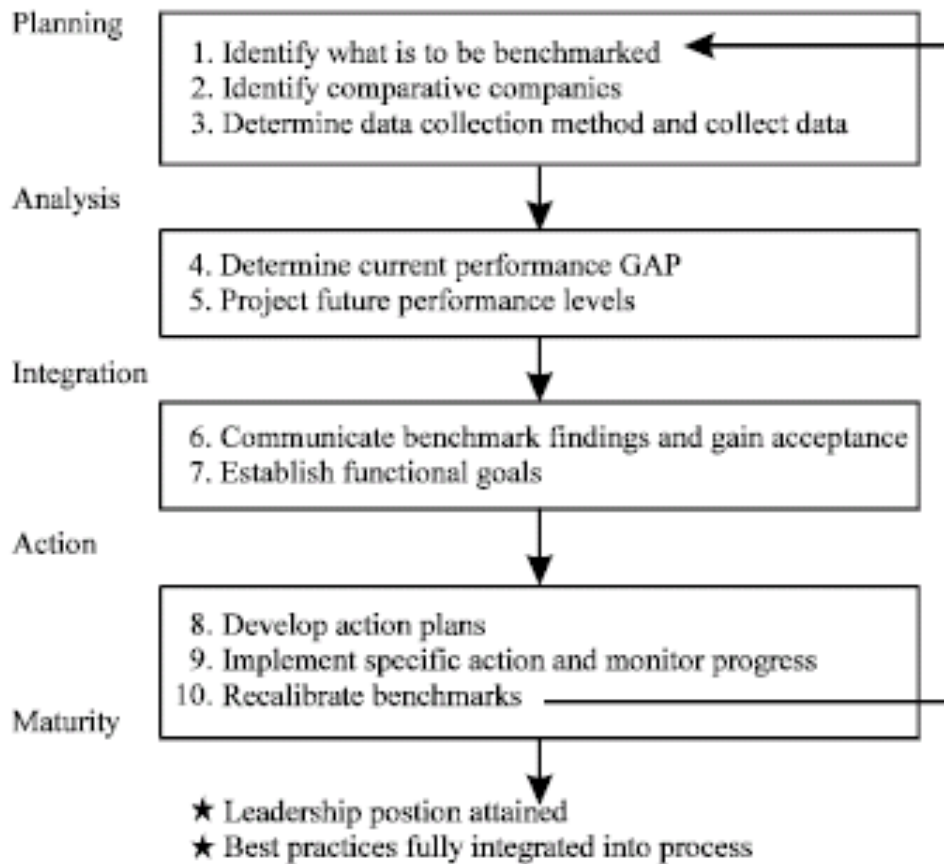


Figure 1: Xerox Model of Benchmarking [4]

### Proposed Case Study (IAMU Benchmark Study)

According to the IAMU Tasmanian Statement [12], communication, collaboration, and structure would seem to be prime candidate areas for benchmarking analysis. Specifically, objective 4 calls for functional and regional cooperation within the IAMU organization and sets out two actions to accomplish this. However, it is unclear if these two actions would accomplish the desired objective. As such, a benchmarking study that focused on a few process or functional areas and identified competitive gaps by comparing outwardly

to other similar, segment-leading non-profit organizations would likely yield actionable information that would have a higher probability of achieving success.

Using such a benchmarking orientation, a development project could be undertaken to achieve specific objectives, such as:

- Identify which organizational structure is most appropriate (e.g., regional, functional, or mirror of IMO subcommittees)
- Identify the best means of collaborating within this structure is necessary to achieve organizational goals
- Identify the best means of communicating within this structure to enable the collaboration drivers.

The following is a general process by which the Xerox benchmarking model could be applied to IAMU as a development project in an effort to enhance collaboration and relevance.

***Planning:***

1. The study will benchmark organizational structure, collaboration methods, and means of communication.
2. In consultation with members of the IEB, the project team will identify several global organizations (including several aspirant organizations). One key organization for comparison would be the IMO; it is imagined that one form of organizational collaboration would be functional rather than regional and might mirror parts of the IMO subcommittee structure (e.g., SSE, HTW, NCSR, PPR, etc.).
3. A standard and common method of data collection would be used.

***Analysis:***

4. Using the data collected, the team would compare IAMU to the comparison organizations and identify the gaps between the current state and a desired future state

as identified by best practices in the comparison organizations: for organizational structure, for collaborative methods, for means of communication and flow of information.

5. Performance levels will then be identified.

***Integration:***

6. The team will compile the results of the analysis and recommend a set of practices around organizational structure, collaboration methods, and means of communications. The study will also include a communications plan for IAMU to share the results with its membership.
7. In addition to the communications plan, the study will provide a timeline for implementation and functional goals.

***Action:***

- 8-10. The action necessary to implement the recommendations proposed in such a study would not be within the scope of the study. Action plans would be recommended, but the IAMU leadership and membership would be responsible for enacting the results of the development project. Alternatively, this could be considered phase 2 of this development project and could be submitted for approval next year.

As may be evident from the benchmarking process, a systematic method for goal achievement can be obtained in efforts to maintain and sustain competitive advantage. Additionally, other process improvements (e.g., fund raising) could be endeavored using a similar benchmarking process. As the process of comparison became used repeatedly to adopt and incorporate segment best-practices, IAMU would continue to become more proficient (stage 4) and mature as an organization.

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