

## **Reorganising Networks... through Benchmarking**

From network to information flow

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### **Networking**

What is coming after having installed networks in my country? And do people use the network in an efficient way? Where are the obstacles which makes it difficult for new users to start with networking?

These are just some questions which are coming up when thinking about networks and networking. What are the needs now and how they will look like in the future?

### **Benchmarking**

is a business tool which gives you the opportunity to look over the fence of your own network in order to get fresh inspirations. For example: What kind of products and services other Networks offer to their academic society? As a result you will get a portfolio of activities and you can check your own position. The benchmarking methodology is structured and systematic. It starts with a precise topic or goal and the first focus is on understanding the own process. As an example an analysis of users could be helpful:

Types of users:

- Level 1: Users are informed about network and services.
- Level 2: Users try to use the services.
- Level 3: Users use services from time to time.
- Level 4: Users use services in permanent way.
- Level 5: Users use services and create new ideas/make proposals.

After the step: analysis of core processes you are able to focus on main questions and ask them in the right order to benchmarking partners. Summarising the effects of a systematic benchmarking process you will get:

- Better understanding of your activities
- Ideas for your network
- Partnership with other networks
- Initiative for discussion points.

## Benchmarking in seven steps:

### Step 1: Selecting topic

Put together goals and weak points. Discuss those points with different people so that you get different perspectives. Focus on the most important questions. Criteria could be the development of process, the importance of process and the view of users.

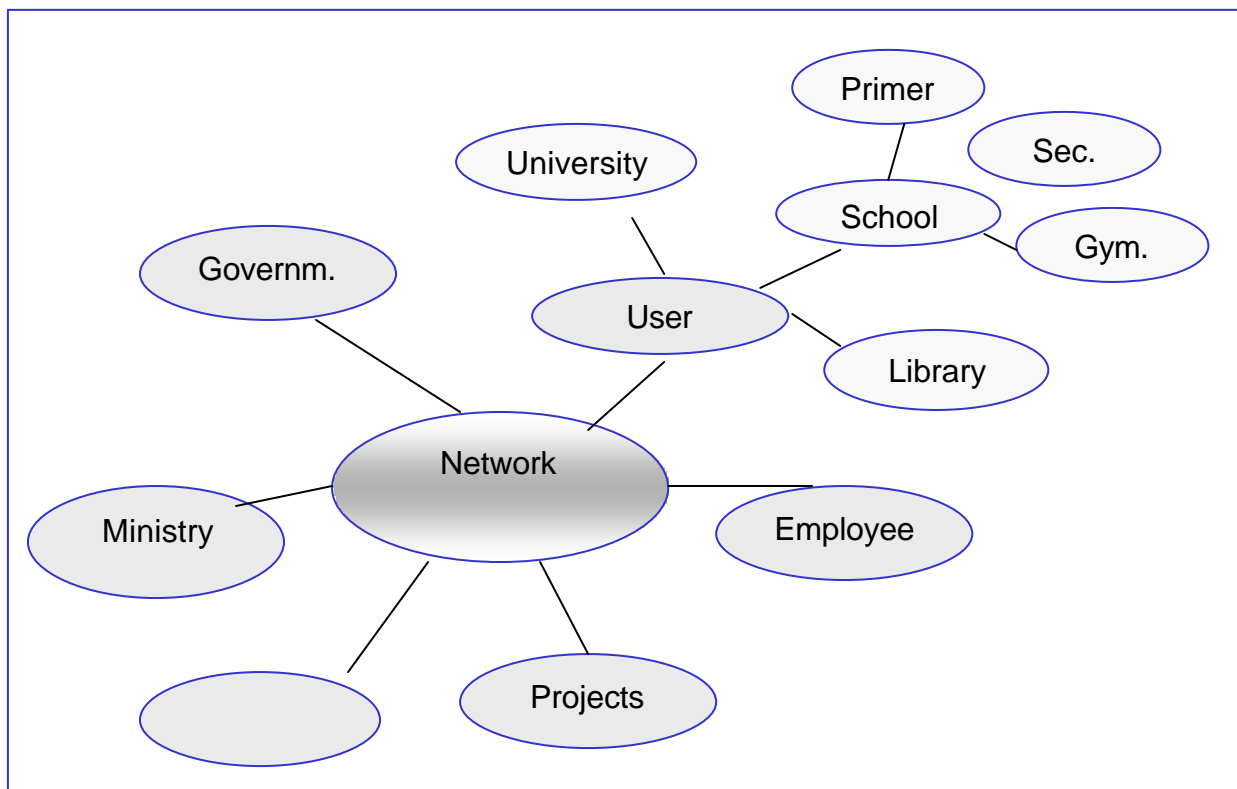
### Step 2: Team building

Select people for the benchmarking team. Team members must belong to the main topic. Their expertise and experiences are important for the whole project. Looking to your network organisation a mixture of administration, trainer, technician and marketing could be a good choice.

### 3: Analysing your process

This analysis should be done in pictures, in flow charts or with data. It is important also to have the big picture of the whole process in mind. Ask people around you and customers about their opinion. Make a portfolio about your users. Check whether expected answers will help you in getting new ideas for your process.

For NETWORK organisation you can paint a mind map of “interest groups”.



### 4. Choosing, selecting and visiting partners

Send questions to potential partners. Analyse their answers and identify the “best-for-you” partners. Build a network with them and start visiting them. Another alternative is to arrange a round table for selected benchmarking partners.

### 5. Evaluation of visits and ideas

Take the fresh inspiration of visits and create ideas for the improvement of your activities. In this part of the benchmarking process the visualisation is very important. Take a break of your daily work and select a creative place for work. Use big papers and cards to write down all your ideas.

For the topic of networking it could be a matrix like that. On the left side you put together data of organisation and process. On the top of matrix you name the different network organisations.

	A	B	C	D	E
Employees total	45	22	6	3	18
Technicians	14	20	6	3	15
Usage of Network	56%	76%	88%	34%	89%
Products for...					
Universities	11	3	8	5	4
Libraries	2	6	4	7	5
Gymnasium	0	0	0	2	5
Primary school	1	5	0	0	0
Government	0	0	0	3	5
Hospital	1	1	1	0	0
Cultural support	2	0	0	0	0
Train-the-trainer	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Help-desk	yes	yes	no	no	no

## 6. Implementation of results

After discussing the main results of the benchmarking process you should focus on three to five main points. For each of these main points you have to develop steps of improvements. Take ideas from other networks. Combine ideas in different ways or develop something new for your network. To make sure that the transfer is successful we recommend to design a roadmap for the process of improvement. Fix some check-points and milestones and add names to tasks so that you have clear responsibilities.

## 7. Monitoring

Look back to your project and ask for feedback from team members. Identify next steps to go and make sure that your first benchmarking activity is coming to a continuous process of improvement.

### **From network to information flow**

Key-factor for efficient research departments is the availability and the speed of information. And in addition information should be used and visualised in the best way. For these requests you need an expert who is making the link between the situation of research departments and the innovative offer of products which are based on networks.

Users do expect from network organisation a network and the offer of products which are helpful for daily work. Sometimes it is not easy to use technical products. Translation and assimilation is necessary. This is the job for experts within network organisation. They have to translate innovative products to user's mind and language to achieve the flow of information. More and more their job profile is moving to the direction of consultant. This expertise make sure that researchers will get the right product for the right problem.

In this case the vision of creating an information society will become reality. Benchmarking offers the opportunity to identify "best-in-class" examples and to learn from and with other.