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Basic measurement units pdf

Under the leadership of Timothy B. Blodgett A way of judging an organization's performance is, of course, to compare it to other units within the company. But these measures often only reinforce complacency or generate not invented excuses here. However, comparisons with foreigners can highlight the best practices of the industry and promote their adoption. This technique is commonly referred to as benchmarking, a term derived from the practice of land surveying, which involves comparing altitudes. When Xerox began using comparative analysis in 1979, management's objective was to analyze unit production costs in manufacturing operations. Uncomfortable aware of the extremely low prices of Japanese regular paper photocopiers, Xerox's manufacturing staff wanted to determine whether the relative costs of their Japanese counterparts were as low as their relative prices. Staff compared the operating capabilities and characteristics of Japanese machines, including those manufactured by Fuji-Xerox, and tore their mechanical components for examination. The survey found that production costs in the United States were much higher. By moving away from their standard budgeting processes, U.S. manufacturing operations have adopted lower Japanese costs as targets for conducting their own business plans. Senior management, satisfied with the results, indicated that all of the company's units and cost centers use benchmarking. But distribution, administration, service and other support functions have struggled to find a practical analog to a product. These non-mother units began to make internal comparisons, including worker productivity in different regional distribution centres and transportation costs per book between regions. Then they looked at the competitors' processes. In the logistics sector, this meant comparing the transportation, warehousing and inventory management of Xerox's distribution function with those of the competition. However, there are problems with comparative analysis with respect to competition. On the one hand, comparisons with competitors may uncover practices unworthy of emulation. On the other hand, while competitive benchmarking can help you achieve the performance of your competitors, it is unlikely to reveal practices to beat them. In addition, it is obviously difficult to obtain information about competitors. Finally, we have observed that people are more receptive to new ideas that come from outside their own industry. Non-competitive comparative analysis is therefore the method of choice. A non-competitive investigation may provide management with best business practices in any industry. These may be unrecognized technological advances in your own industry (such as bar coding, which originated in the grocery industry but has since been widely applied). Adopting these practices can help you gain a competitive advantage. The first step in the process is to determine what will be assessed — expense/income ratios, inventory rotations, service calls, customer satisfaction — regardless of the product of the function is. Then identify areas that need to be improved. Based on Xerox's experience, managers tend to focus first on comparative costs. But as managers become more familiar with benchmarking, they discover that understanding practices, processes and methods is more important because they define the changes needed to achieve baseline costs. In addition, as managers become more confident in benchmarking, they can easily extend it beyond cost reduction to profit-producing factors such as service levels and customer satisfaction. Where do you find well-managed non-competitors for comparison? Annual reports and other readily available publications can uncover raw indicators of operational effectiveness. Universally recognized measures such as THE ROA, revenue per employee, inventory rotations, and percentage expenditures will help identify well-managed businesses. In particular, Xerox relies on specialized journals, consultants, annual reports and other company publications in which proud statements appear, and presentations in professional and other forums. The same well-managed organizations keep coming forward. Getting the cooperation of a non-competitor in the company is usually easier because professionals in a function are eager to compare notes. They want to know how their system stacks up. Indeed, several non-competitors have agreed to share the costs of comparative analysis studies with Xerox. One of Xerox's most valuable comparative analytics experiences, with L.L. Bean, Inc., the outdoor sporting goods retailer and mail-order house, illustrates how these businesses work. It was carried out by the logistics and distribution unit Xerox, which is responsible for inventory management, storage and transport of machinery, parts and supplies. Historically, the productivity increases of the L and D had been 3% to 5% per year. In 1981, it was clear that an improvement was needed to maintain profit margins in the face of industry price declines. The inventory control area had recently installed a new planning system, and the transportation function capitalized on the opportunities offered by deregulation. Storage was the next in line for improvement, and distribution centre managers wanted a change. They identified the pick-up area as the worst bottleneck in the shipping receiving sequence. A technology, automated storage and recovery systems (ASRS) for material handling, had appeared on the scene and was the subject of intense debate in the distribution function of Xerox. The company had just built an ASRS warehouse for raw materials and assembly parts in Webster, New York, in the same complex as a large finished distribution centre. Internal benchmarking assessments conducted by L-D have shown that heavy investments in capital equipment for ASRS cannot be justified by the cost of finished products. They needed another way to stimulate storage and management of material productivity, but what? In 1981 At half-time, A staff member was assigned to find an appropriate non-competitor to establish a benchmark in the areas of storage and material handling. The staff member combed through the trade magazines and met with professional associations and consultants to find the companies with the best reputation in the distribution sector. It then targeted companies with generic product characteristics and service levels similar to Xerox reprographic parts and supplies. In November, the staff member named L.L. Bean as the best candidate for comparative analysis. Bean's warehouse activities were particularly interesting. The staff member summed up his impressions in a note to his boss: I was particularly struck by the design of the L.L. Bean warehouse system. Although extremely manual in nature, the design minimized the content of the work, among other benefits. Nor did the operation lend itself to automation [of handling and picking]. The design was therefore based on very basic handling techniques, but it was carefully thought out and implemented. In addition, the design was chosen with the full participation of the hourly workforce. This was the first warehouse operation designed by quality circles. For the layman, L.L. Bean products may not resemble Xerox's parts and supplies. For the distribution professional, however, the analogy was striking: both companies had to develop storage and distribution systems to process products of varying size, shape and weight. This diversity has prevented the use of ASRS. Three months later, a team from Xerox visited Bean's operations in Freeport, Maine. In addition to the person in charge of the comparative analysis in the L and D, the team consisted of a head office operations manager and a field distribution centre manager. These two individuals represented the line employees who would ultimately make changes. Analysis of the results back to Rochester, New York revealed a wider range of computer-directed activities than Xerox had. These activities included: the organization of materials by speed, i.e. fast movers were stored closest to the pick-up route. Store incoming materials at random to maximize the use of warehouse space and minimize the travel distance of forklifts. Sort and release incoming commands throughout the day to minimize the distance the pickers travel (known as short-range planning). Base incentives on productivity offset by error rates. Automation of outbound carriers that manifest themselves by calculating transportation costs in advance. Plans for the implementation of automated data capture by bar coding. Exposure I compares the forward-looking performance of Xerox's most efficient warehouse then planned with L.L. Bean's performance in February 1982. Due to the nature of its operations, Xerox often chose several parts per order, so that Xerox had a higher figure for man-day parts. But L.L. Bean could pick nearly three times as many lines per man-day. (A line, which represents the travel distance of pickers for a trip is the crucial measure of productivity.) Exhibit I Comparison of Key Performance Criteria in Two Distribution Centres The report documenting the results generated a great deal of interest within Xerox's L and D organization, particularly because Bean's was a labour-intensive system that could be adapted fairly easily to Xerox's objectives. As a result, L.D. has incorporated some of L.L. Bean's practices into a program to modernize Xerox's warehouses. These practices included the location of the materials arranged by the speed, to accelerate the flow of materials and minimize the distance of the pickers' movement, as well as the improvement of the computer's participation in the collection operation. Xerox is in the process of setting up a fully computer-managed warehouse. Experienced comparative analysis has become a common practice at Xerox Logistics and Distribution. The requirement to continue the procedure was pushed down from the organization to individual operations, which now do their own comparative analysis rather than having a specialist perform it. Because the process is well understood and because the people who undertake it are the ones who implement the results, comparative analysis is now much easier to achieve than before. The non-competitive approach to comparative analysis has been adopted several times. Exhibit II shows some of the practices that Xerox discovered using this method. Exhibits II Practices Discovered through Non-Competitive Benchmarking As a result of these efforts, the company has significantly increased its productivity. Prior to the benchmarking, the organization was making annual productivity gains of 3% to 5%; it is now striving to improve and achieved, by 10%. Of this figure, approximately 3% to 5% come from L.L. Bean surveys, using competitors and non-competitors. In addition, those involved in the comparative analysis process often find that the work expands and promotes their professional growth. They become more useful to the organization. L.L. Bean, by the way, benefited too. After seeing Xerox's success, the company adopted benchmarking as part of its own planning process. A version of this article appeared in the January 1987 issue of the Harvard Business Review. Review.

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