

# Benchmarking the Document Management Process

Roy Edwards, James D. McGuire, and Shirley A. Hancock

*The Bank of Canada manages the public debt as fiscal agent for the Federal Government. As a public service organization, it is committed to deliver quality services to its clients in a cost effective and efficient manner.*

*Recognizing that a fundamental role of documentation is to provide continuity within a changing environment, the Public Debt Department (PDD) piloted best practices benchmarking of its internal documentation unit with partners identified as having best-in-class processes. This panel will present its experiences from both an internal (PDD) and external (FedEx) perspective. Discussion will highlight the methodology used, the findings, the lessons learned, and a resultant composite profile for a best-in-class documentation unit.*

## BEST PRACTICES BENCHMARKING

Best practices benchmarking is a systematic process to learning from the best in order to gain significant improvement in your own operations. It applies a structured methodology to seeking out, partnering with, comparing against, and learning from organizations recognized as employing best practices. Performance gaps are eliminated through the transfer of knowledge with the focus on the underlying activities which lead to superior performance (also known as enablers). Benefits of best practices benchmarking include an increased self-awareness, the minimization of risk and uncertainty typically associated with significant change, and an increased likelihood of a successful transition. Effective best practices benchmarking depends upon selecting the appropriate partners at the outset and by attaining the required degree of improvement by replicating, emulating, innovating, etc. as appropriate.

## Why Did We Pursue Best Practices Benchmarking and Why Was DSU Selected As the Pilot?

As a public service organization, the Public Debt Department (PDD) commits to delivering quality services to its clients in a cost effective and efficient manner, and undertakes to improve wherever possible. In the process, PDD also contends with external factors which lead to even more changes to its business environment. For example, at the outset of the study, PDD faced rapid technological change, a major workforce adjustment initiative, and a serious threat to its continued survival under “new ownership”. One of the solutions rested with

bringing each of its core processes up to world-class standards. Since a fundamental role of documentation is to provide continuity within a changing environment, superior documentation and documentation management practices were recognized as critical success factors to ensuring consistency in replicating best business practices. Hence, the Documentation Services Unit (DSU) was an ideal candidate for the department to gain an initiation into benchmarking. The manager’s interest in participating solidified the decision.

## How Did We Go About It?

We completed benchmarking training, conducted extensive research, and in the end developed our own methodology to meet our needs. We also employed the services of an experienced consultant to validate our approach and transfer knowledge to the Benchmarking Team. Market demand analysis at the outset solidified the need for internal documentation services and provided future direction for the unit. Processes targeted for external benchmarking were identified based on existing performance capabilities vis-à-vis our own expectations and published information on external organizations. Organizations recognized as employing best practices in the field of documentation creation and document management were then identified and approached to participate in our study. Survey questionnaires were distributed to partners. Performance gap analysis conducted in order to identify best practices. A summary report was distributed to our partner organizations and an implementation plan was developed.

## Findings

The benchmarking partners shared concerns similar to DSU. For example, all partners struggled with demonstrating value added, and the few metrics collected on a regular basis pertained mostly to effectiveness issues such as, did documentation exist? and if so, was it delivered on time? Efficiency of internal operations appeared to place a distant second in terms of attention.

Somewhat to our disappointment, while some elements of excellence were identified in each of the partner organizations, a complete picture of best practices was not clearly identified. As a result, we did not obtain the

information necessary for providing DSU with clear direction for gaining significant improvement. However, the Benchmarking Team used the survey results to create what it believes to be a composite profile of best practices (see Table 1). We are currently seeking validation of the model by the benchmarking partners and hope to obtain additional feedback during the annual conference in May 1997. Meanwhile, DSU is aligning itself with the model and developing relevant performance metrics.

**Table 1: Profile of a Best-in-Class Documentation Unit**

<p><b>The high performing, best-in-class documentation unit:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses solely on its core business – documentation, but may broker for non-core services (e.g., translation, printing, and distribution),</li> <li>• involves the client in all aspects of the documentation process,</li> <li>• emphasizes continual improvement in its efficient business processes while providing an effective product,</li> <li>• documents and audits its guidelines, procedures and roles and responsibilities for all stages of production and for all staff and clients,</li> <li>• assumes accountability and responsibility for establishing and controlling adherence to documentation standards, and for controlling access to document content,</li> <li>• promotes a minimalist approach to documentation,</li> <li>• provides a flexible product range tailored to meet the evolving needs of the client,</li> <li>• develops the necessary skills and core competency base of its staff in order to better serve the needs of clients in the changing business environment,</li> <li>• employs usability testing appropriately throughout the document development process,</li> <li>• employs a well-defined communication system for receiving and disseminating client and staff feedback,,</li> <li>• employs a well-defined performance measurement system to regularly collect and act upon metrics,</li> <li>• employs a useful information system to acquire, maintain and disseminate information on operational and financial performance, resourcing (inputs), outputs, etc.,</li> <li>• employs a production control methodology to develop, track and report upon progress,</li> <li>• actively markets its services to attract new or repeat business and to demonstrate the value added to the organization.</li> </ul>
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**DSU -AN INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE**

I must admit that we had some reservations about benchmarking our documentation unit at the outset. However, benchmarking was viewed as an excellent opportunity to solidify our position within the organization as well as to learn about ourselves vis-à-vis some of the best practices documentation organizations in North America.

As the documentation process manager, I was involved throughout the entire study. Major involvement included a role in the internal assessment exercise, initiating communication and acting as the principal contact with each of the nine external partner organizations, and I was left to implement the improvements identified. Unexpectedly, early in the study our organization initiated a major program review combined with a workforce adjustment program. The impact on the study was profound. Not only were there no guarantees that our documentation unit would remain following the program review, the workforce adjustment program ravaged the unit as five (or 50%) of our staff members possessing approximately 40 years of documentation experience left the organization. Morale hit an all-time low as the stress of uncertainty took its toll.

**So What Did We Learn From the Benchmarking Process?**

Well, we learned a lot! First, from the internal benchmarking assessment, we learned how well we were doing, what our customers really wanted from us and what they really thought of our ability to meet their needs. Second, we learned that our document management process was fairly consistent with the partner organizations. Responses to the questionnaire – and our ongoing conversations with each process manager – confirmed that many of us had similar questions and concerns in the same areas. For example, how we measured value-added to the organization, as well as writer productivity, and where we were heading with online documentation. Although the study findings confirmed that we collected more metrics, most organizations had started or were planning to keep similar metrics in the near future. Finally, from a project management perspective, it became evident very early on that we all underestimated the magnitude of the study with respect to staffing demands. It also became very apparent that management support is critical to meeting associated target dates, thus ensuring successful implementation.

## So Where Are We Today?

Well, we have educated ourselves, our clients and our management on our business. We now have an expanded, yet more focused, mission and mandate within the new organization. Although we are leaner in terms of numbers, we have an increased budget allocated for staff training and development as well as more challenges for staff including an online documentation environment. We also now have some practical experience for continuing the future efforts of benchmarking without external assistance. However, the continuous improvement efforts do not end here. We recognize the need to fully implement the best-practices model (Table 1) in our unit and to continue to compare with other best-practices organizations.

So would we do it again, given our lessons learned?  
– Definitely!

## FEDEX - AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

As one of DSU's nine partners, I found my Systems and Operations Department's interests in this benchmarking study to be remarkably similar to DSU's. The greater FedEx Publishing Department, made up of six individual departments, is firmly rooted in continuous improvement strategies. Our departments were especially interested in ways other organizations measure their technical communicators' productivity, cost-per-page, document management, online documentation, and customer satisfaction to identify process enhancements.

The 16-page, 8.5" x 14" questionnaire proved to be exhaustive in its coverage of:

- Organizational Structure and Staffing
- Products and Services
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Operating Guidelines/Procedures
- Scheduling/Tracking
- Writing and Revising
- Editing
- Testing
- Value Added
- Online Documentation (General)
- Transition to Online
- Post Transition

While we got confirmation, from the resulting summary report, of the solidity of our overall document management process, we anticipated getting more financial information (cost-per-page and ROI, for example), as well as metrics on productivity and customer satisfaction. We were likewise hoping to identify groups doing, leading edge activities. Within my group, I can increasingly see the strength of a technical communicator having some programming skills, for example, as we use Java Script and Visual Basic. I'm also curious about the various uses departments are finding for multimedia. Now, we're hoping to get more information on these areas from attendees at this session who read this overview and hopefully bring some of their department's metrics for discussion. We're also looking forward to phase II activities with those benchmarking partners who wish to continue working with DSU.

In the meantime, we have reviewed some areas of our processes and made changes. We've also redefined productivity to include additional indices that focus on customer satisfaction (team-member support as well as end user satisfaction).

So would we do the benchmarking again, given our lessons learned? – Definitely!

## PANELISTS

Roy Edwards  
Senior Business Consultant, Quality Management  
Bank of Canada  
234 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G9 Canada  
(613) 782-8790  
redwards@bank-banque-canada.ca

Roy Edwards is a Senior Business Consultant with over 15 years consulting experience at the Bank of Canada. He received an Honours Bachelor of Arts (Econ.& Math) in 1981 followed by a Master of Arts (Econ.) in 1982 from the University of Windsor. He has been concentrating on Quality Management issues for the last two years.

Jim McGuire  
Business Consultant, Business Communications Team  
Bank of Canada  
234 Wellington Street  
Ottawa Ontario K1A 0G9 Canada  
(613) 782-7504  
jmcguire@bank-banque-canada.ca

Jim McGuire is a member of the Eastern Ontario Chapter of STC. He has managed an internal documentation group for the past 6 years and is currently concentrating on benchmarking and implementing best-practices for the Business Communications Team.

Shirley A. Hancock  
Manager, Publications  
Federal Express Corporation  
3350 Miac Cove, PO Box 727  
Memphis, Tennessee 38 118-0916  
(901) 360-5260  
shancock@magibox.net

An STC Fellow and AP for Professional Interest Committees  
Shirley is a member of the Mid-South Chapter of STC. At Federal Express, Shirley currently manages a technical publications team in the Air Operations Department and has been in management for 11 years. She has a Master of Philosophy (ABD) in English from the University of Kansas.