2015

Benchmarking as an Assessment Tool for Cataloging

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Recommended Citation

License

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Keywords

Abstract. The authors conducted a survey on the topic of benchmarking as a tool for assessment in cataloging. While assessment is popular in libraries, little research has been done on benchmarking in cataloging, a gap that this study attempts to fill. The authors developed a survey that gauged the respondents' use of benchmarking, their goals for benchmarking and how they applied what they learned to make improvements. The survey was administered on the AUTOCAT electronic distribution list in May 2013. There were 92 completed surveys, with 20 libraries reporting that they had used benchmarking as an assessment tool.

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Benchmarking as an Assessment Tool for Cataloging

Benchmarking is an assessment tool that can be used to improve an organization's performance. It is frequently used in manufacturing or other settings where employee productivity and production quality is of significant importance to the success of the organization. The term benchmarking has been used not only to refer to statistical measures, but also to the efficiency and effectiveness of processes. Stapenhurst (2009) defines benchmarking in both ways; first, he states that benchmarking is used to:

- quantify performance levels of different participants

- identify the gap between participants, often between the best performer(s) and other participants, in order to:

- quantify the potential gain for each participant to operate at the level of the best performer(s).

He then reports that benchmarking is also used to change practices to improve performance. Dougherty (2008) defines benchmarking as "a process that involves an organization comparing itself against the 'best-in-class' libraries and then using that information [to] improve one's own performance" (p. 181). Niven's (2003) definition of benchmarking is "[t]he comparison of similar processes across organizations and industries to identify best practices, set improvement targets, and measure progress" (p. 293). Zairi (1996) defines a benchmark as:

- Anything taken or used as a point of reference or comparison

- Something that serves as a standard by which others may be served

- Anything or something that is comparatively measurable

- A physiological or biological reference value against which performance is compared (p. 35)

Zairi also states that benchmarking is used for a number of purposes, among which is "[a]s a measurement of business performance against the best of the best through a continuous effort of constantly reviewing processes, practices and methods" (1996, p. 35). Levy and Ronco (2012) report, "implicit in the concept of benchmarking is the use of standards or references by which other objects or actions can be measured, compared or judged" (p. 5). They state further, "[m]odern commercial benchmarking has now come to refer to the process of identifying the best methods, practices, and processes of an organization and implementing them to improve one's own industry, company, or institution" (p. 5).

Clearly, benchmarking can be used to assess not only production quantity but also quality, efficiency, and effectiveness. A review of the library science literature on cataloging reveals that there is significant interest in topics related to cataloging quantity and quality, as well as how to improve or attain efficiencies or effectiveness in cataloging. With this paper, the authors explored the library science benchmarking literature and conducted a survey on the AUTOCAT email distribution list to gauge the use of benchmarking to assess cataloging. It is hoped that the results will inform cataloging managers and other administrators about the application and utility of benchmarking as an assessment tool.

Literature Review

Assessment in Libraries

Libraries are increasingly being asked to demonstrate their value, as illustrated by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) report *The Value of Academic Libraries: A Comprehensive Research Review and Report* (2010). This theme continues in the ACRL

Research Planning and Review Committee's report *2010 Top Ten Trends in Academic Libraries,* which states, "[d]emands for accountability and assessment will increase" (p. 287), and in the same body's 2012 report, which states "[a]cademic libraries must prove the value they provide to the academic enterprise" (p. 311). Although these reports specifically address the needs and trends of academic libraries, the authors believe that all libraries must demonstrate the value they hold for their stakeholders, and one of the ways to demonstrate value is to conduct and report on assessment activities.

Benchmarking in Libraries

The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) published a *SPEC Kit* in 2007 addressing the topic of library assessment (Wright & White, 2007). In this study, the authors reported on their research of assessment practices of 73 academic libraries, all of which were members of ARL. According to their study, 99% of the responding libraries conducted some form of assessment. Of those, 54.4% were currently using benchmarking, 16.2% had used benchmarking in the past, and 29.4% had never used benchmarking. Wright and White's study did not specifically address whether cataloging was assessed using benchmarking. They reported that cataloging was assessed using a number of methods, including surveys (4.8%), qualitative methods (9.7%), statistics collection and analysis (69.3%), usability (1.6%), and "other," the category into which the authors placed benchmarking (14.5%). Fifteen libraries (24.2%) did not assess cataloging. The "other" category included, in addition to benchmarking, methods such as student-learning outcomes evaluations, unit-cost analyses, Balanced Scorecard, and process improvement measurements. It is not clear from this study exactly how much benchmarking was used as an assessment tool for cataloging in these 63 libraries, although it follows that it was used in less than 14.5% of them.

Mugridge (2014) reported the results of a 2012 survey that gathered information about the assessment of technical services activities in Pennsylvania academic libraries. The survey found that 90% of responding libraries conducted some form of assessment of technical services. While the most common form of assessment consisted of the collection and analysis of statistical measures, 19% of the responding library directors reported using benchmarking as an assessment tool.

Reporting on her experiences conducting benchmarking for corporate libraries, Haswell (2012) stated, "one of the most effective management tools librarians can utilize is benchmarking" (p. 13). She reported further, "[b]enchmarking enables information professionals to measure and compare the cost efficiency and overall effectiveness of their library against libraries serving their competitors or peers" (p. 13). According to Haswell, 12 common questions are answered through benchmarking activities. They are:

- Is our budget in line with libraries at other companies?

- Do we have the right level of staff to serve our user base?

- Where can we increase effectiveness or improve efficiency?

- Do we have the right mix of services?

- Where can we make budget cuts with the smallest negative impact?

- Are we funded from the right sources?

- Should we be charging users for services or resources?

- Are we keeping pace with new technologies?

- What, if anything, should we be outsourcing?

- What are the best ways to demonstrate library quality to senior management?

- What best practices are others using that could help our performance if we adopted them?

- What key trends should we be following? (p. 14)

Many of the questions Haskell raised relate directly to the management issues that cataloging units face daily. Issues related to best practices, level of staffing, services offered, outsourcing, demonstrating value to senior management, and others Haskell mentioned are critical to the success of any cataloging department. Benchmarking allows one to conduct a gap analysis, which Haswell defined as "a method used to identify and measure performance differences between one study participant and the other participants in the study" (p. 14). A gap analysis can also be used to compare one's current benchmarking results to those of the past.

Pritchard (1995) considered benchmarking to be "nothing more than a management- or production-oriented way of talking about statistics" (p. 491). She admonished, "just because a process is measurable does not mean that it must be measured! We should be asking who cares about what, why do they care, what do we want to say about it, and therefore which data do we want?" (p. 492). She went on to state, "[i]f we can clearly define our mission and craft measurable goals to help assess progress towards that mission, then we have a start in knowing what benchmarks we need" (p. 492). Nevertheless, many of the definitions and descriptions of benchmarking discussed earlier in this paper address not only statistical benchmarks but also the use of benchmarking to establish best practices or improve processes, demonstrating that benchmarking activities go beyond the collection and comparison of statistical measures.

Benchmarking Cataloging Activities

There have been a number of papers reporting on the use of benchmarking to assess cataloging activities. McCain and Shorten (2002) reported on the results of a survey they

conducted of ARL member libraries on cataloging productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. With 27 completed surveys, their findings included cataloging productivity metrics, size of cataloging backlogs, distribution of tasks across departments, and other measures. They conclude, "Benchmarks should be established by focusing on those libraries that are efficient and effective: those libraries that fully update their catalogs, consistently maintain authority control, and do not have unmanageable backlogs" (p. 29). Using that criteria, they identified six libraries that use what they consider "best practices," against which it would be useful to benchmark (p. 30).

Benchmarking was used to evaluate potential monographs cataloging workflow changes at the Pennsylvania State University Libraries, as reported by Freeborn and Mugridge (2002). The authors selected and interviewed five university libraries of similar size and organization regarding their monographs cataloging processes. The results were used by a task force to make recommendations to redesign the workflow that existed; most of the recommendations were subsequently adopted.

Processing of serial publications was the topic of a North American Serials Interest Group presentation by Slight-Gibney and Grenci, as reported by Blackwell (2004). Slight-Gibney and Grenci reported the results of a University of Oregon Libraries' time/cost study conducted in 2002; data collected included both acquisitions and cataloging time and cost. Benefits of this study "include the ability to update job descriptions and performance standards as well as identify processes to be improved or eliminated" (p. 288).

Charbonneau (2005) reported an Indiana University study to establish benchmarks for cataloging in academic libraries. She provided a thoughtful analysis of the pros and cons of using benchmarking, maintaining that "[i]n the manufacturing world, establishing benchmarks for

evaluating workflows and improving the use of resources is possible because their output is standardized and quantifiable" (p. 47). She concludes, "[a]ttempting to apply a similar measurement standard within service organizations, however, does not appear to work. The product catalogers create is highly specialized and cannot be quantified in a manner analogous to mechanized-based measurements" (p. 47). Conversely, Buschman and Chickering (2007) conducted a study at Rider University, in which they concluded that it is possible to determine benchmarks for copy cataloging.

Academic Library Cataloging Practices Benchmarks (2008) is a publication of Primary Research Group, Inc. and provides data on cataloging benchmarks of academic libraries. It presents the results of a survey of 77 mostly small to mid-sized academic libraries (most in the United States). Issues addressed by the survey are personnel, salary, work-rate completion, technology, outsourcing, conference attendance, and state of cataloging education. The publication consists primarily of tables presenting survey results, with no context provided; therefore, it has little to add to this discussion.

While Charbonneau's (2005) paper questioned the value of benchmarking for setting production goals, Buschman and Chickering (2007) found benchmarking to be useful in assessing some cataloging activities. McCain and Shorten (2002) similarly found that benchmarking can be a useful tool for assessing not just cataloging productivity, but also for identifying best practices. Freeborn and Mugridge (2002) reported on the use of benchmarking to evaluate workflows across technical services units. The study described here was undertaken to fill a gap in library science literature on the use and efficacy of benchmarking as an assessment tool for cataloging. This exploratory study is intended to demonstrate that benchmarking is indeed a valuable method of assessment, despite the challenges it presents.

Research Method

The authors designed a survey to gauge the use of benchmarking as a tool for assessment in all types of libraries. For the purposes of the survey, benchmarking was defined as "the process of comparing one's own policies, procedures, or other factors, e.g., statistics, to other institutions for evaluative purposes or to determine best practices" (Appendix A). The authors designed the survey to elicit information about:

- Whether cataloging managers use benchmarking to assess departmental activities

- What the goals of their benchmarking activities are

- How they select the libraries with which they benchmarked

- How they use the information that they learned from benchmarking

- What they view as the advantages and disadvantages of benchmarking

- How they report the results of benchmarking activities

- What changes they implemented because of what they learned through benchmarking.

The authors chose SurveyMonkey software to develop the 16-question survey. The survey was administered to the AUTOCAT email distribution list, consisting of more than 6,000 catalogers in more than 40 countries. The authors chose AUTOCAT to engage a cross-section of catalogers and cataloging managers from a variety of institution types and sizes. The authors believe that assessment may be conducted by catalogers as well as cataloging managers and did not want to limit the pool of potential respondents. Whereas some large academic and public libraries may have assessment coordinators, most libraries do not; therefore, the authors also did not want to limit the target population to large libraries. (See Appendix A for the email invitation.) The survey was distributed on May 15, 2013, with a deadline of May 31, 2013.

Reminders were sent to the AUTOCAT list on May 23 and May 30 (see Appendix B for the survey.)

There were 114 responses to the survey; the authors eliminated responses from those who did not answer the question, "Have you used benchmarking as a tool for assessment purposes during the past 5 years?" The remaining 92 surveys were analyzed for this paper. They included 20 libraries that responded that they had in fact used benchmarking as an assessment tool within the past 5 years, and 72 who reported that they had not.

Survey Results and Discussion

Demographics

Ninety-two respondents completed the survey on or before the deadline. The first question asked respondents to provide the name of their respective institutions so as to avoid duplicate responses from the same institution. Only 53 respondents (57.6%) volunteered this information; of those, there was no duplication.

Of the respondents, 34 (37%) were from publicly funded academic libraries; 21 (22.8%) from privately funded academic libraries; 18 (19.6%) from public libraries, 2 (2.2%) from school libraries, 2 (2.2%) from government libraries; and one from a corporate library. The nine (9.8%) remaining respondents were from two museum libraries, three vendors, and a law-firm library, a parliamentary library, a genealogy library, and a diocesan library. The authors collected information about library type in order to compare practices across library types. Although the sample size is relatively small, the authors believe that the survey provides useful information about the use of benchmarking across institution types.

Respondents reported an average of 2.44 full-time equivalent (FTE) librarians and 4.7 FTE staff members in their cataloging units, reflecting the relatively small size of the institutions responding to the survey.

Benchmarking

Of the 92 libraries that responded to the survey, twenty (21.7%) reported that they had conducted benchmarking within the past 5 years. Nine academic libraries had conducted benchmarking; of those, 6 were publicly funded, and 3 were privately funded. Respondents from one corporate library and one school library reported that they had performed benchmarking. Two cataloging service vendors had used benchmarking to assess their processes, and one respondent from the governmental libraries had done so. Respondents from 6 of the public libraries had benchmarked their cataloging processes. Table 1 illustrates the respondents who had conducted benchmarking of cataloging within the past 5 years.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Respondents who indicated that they had not performed benchmarking within the past 5 years were directed to the final submission page of the survey. The survey did not explore why they did not use benchmarking; this would be an appropriate topic for further research. Survey results presented from this point forward in this paper are based on the 20 respondents who had used benchmarking within the past 5 years.

Goals of Benchmarking Activities

The survey asked respondents the goals of their benchmarking activities. The question included a set of possible choices, and respondents could select more than one or supply a response in a text box. Of the 18 respondents who answered this question, 13 (72.2%) indicated that their goal was to streamline or improve processes. Eleven respondents (61.1%) chose the

next most frequently selected option, to make better decisions, as a goal of benchmarking. Six respondents (33.3%) cited improving services and reallocating staff or other resources, 4 (22.2%) cited exploring new services and informing strategic planning activities. One respondent selected the goal of evaluating staff performance.

Haswell (2012) stated that the goals of benchmarking might differ depending on a library's specific circumstances. She reported, "[f]or higher performers in benchmarking studies, the results can be used to demonstrate the library's value to senior management; for lower performers, the results can be used to identify gaps and make needed improvements to bring the library back into line" (p. 13). Most of the goals identified in this survey appear to reflect the desire to make improvements to cataloging or other processes, rather than to demonstrate the library or department's value to senior management. Table 2 demonstrates the goals of benchmarking of cataloging activities identified by the survey participants.

[Insert Table 2 here]

Selection of Library with which to Benchmark

The survey asked participants how they selected the libraries with which they benchmarked and required that they enter their response into a text box. Nine respondents answered this question; some provided one criterion, whereas others provided a short list of criteria. Four respondents (36.1%) selected benchmarking peers based on the size of the library, making it the most frequently selected criterion. Three respondents (27.3%) selected peers based on geographic region or proximity. Two respondents (18.2%) used each of the following criteria: being a member of the same consortia or library system, being familiar with the other library, and type of library. Respondents mentioned additional criteria, such as the reputation of the

library, the availability of statistics, and similarities in the library's goals, budget, enrollment, or grade level.

Information Collected through Benchmarking

The next question in the survey asked respondents what information they collected through their benchmarking activities. Respondents could select from a list supplied by the authors, or they could write a response in a text box (see Figure 1). Nine (81.8%) of the 11 respondents indicated they collected information about procedures. Another 8 respondents (72.8%) collected information about statistics. Six respondents (54.5%) collected information about policies and best practices. Another respondent indicated they collected information about the *Resource Description and Access* implementation process.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Use of Information Collected through Benchmarking

Only one of the four respondents from public libraries felt benchmarking had gathered useful information and used it to gauge cataloging knowledge, understanding of local practices, and analytical skills of copy catalogers in the application of cataloging rules. All of the four respondents from publicly funded academic libraries found benchmarking useful for creating performance expectations, setting departmental goals and timelines, and evaluating their implementation of *Resource Description and Access*. One respondent from a public academic library used benchmarking results to manage its processes more efficiently and to validate its experience of the wide variability of statistics. One respondent from a private academic library used benchmarking to create staff standards and streamline processes.

These findings reflect what has been reported in the library literature about the use of information collected through benchmarking activities. Haswell (2012) reported that librarians

use such information in a number of ways. They use it "to manage their libraries more strategically and make senior management aware of areas where they are leading (or lagging) the pack. Among the most frequent uses of benchmarking data are defending budgets or head counts, identifying areas for improvement, eliminating services or resources that don't fulfill a strategic need, keeping up with new technologies and methods, and identifying best practices to adopt" (p. 14).

Pritchard (1995) identified a number of uses for the results of benchmarking activities. These can include local use, national use, and research use. Examples of local use might be "to analyze management, workflow, resource allocation and services" (p. 492). Examples of national use include the contribution of data to surveys or databases; examples of research use include special studies that support either of the other two uses.

Haswell (2012) and Pritchard (1995) touch on key findings from this survey. Librarians use benchmarking to improve processes, to set goals for productivity, to allocate and request additional resources, and to implement or modify services that are offered. Most respondents seemed interested in local applications of benchmarking rather than its use for national comparisons or research.

Reporting the Results of Benchmarking

Respondents reported the results of benchmarking activities in a number of ways (see Table 3). The authors supplied respondents with a list of possible reporting methods; they were able to select more than one or supply a written response. Six of the ten respondents reported their results through an informational report to library administration; three reported results in their annual reports, two reported results in an assessment report, and one shared results through a presentation.

[Insert Table 3 here]

Four libraries supplied responses to this question:

- Results used for internal uses only

- Informal report to the library director

- Expectations document

- Next level up; didn't go further

Given that the goals of benchmarking as reported by survey respondents include improving or streamlining processes, making better decisions, improving services, reallocating staff or other resources, exploring new services, and informing strategic planning activities, it would be advantageous for them to report their assessment results to their respective administrators or other institution leaders. Some respondents report that they are in fact doing so, through their annual reports; other respondents indicate a primarily internal reporting mechanism. Reporting successful results could benefit the library or cataloging unit in the long run. They may be able to advocate for more staff or other resources, and reporting assessment results can also be a marketing vehicle for their units. The question of how cataloging units report the results of their assessment activities merits further research.

Actions Taken as a Result of Benchmarking

With this survey question, the authors provided respondents with a list of actions corresponding to the goals listed in an earlier question. Survey participants were allowed to select more than one response or enter a response in a text box. Seven of the 10 respondents to this question indicated that they had improved or streamlined processes because of their benchmarking activities. Five reported that they made better decisions, and 3 indicated that they had improved services and reallocated staff or other resources as a result of benchmarking. One

respondent explored offering new services, while another reported that they used the results of their benchmarking activities to inform strategic planning. Finally, one respondent wrote in the text box that they were able to increase output. Table 4 compares the goals of benchmarking and the subsequent actions taken.

[Insert Table 4 here]

It is noteworthy that although more respondents answered the goal question than the result question, the percentages were comparable for each goal or result. For example, 13 out of 18 respondents (72.2.%) selected "Improve or streamline processes" as a goal, and 7 out of 10 respondents (70%) selected the same item as a result. It appears that in general, the results of benchmarking activities closely follow the goals set for benchmarking. In these cases, benchmarking is clearly a successful assessment and management activity for the libraries concerned.

Specific Outcomes of Benchmarking

The authors asked for examples of specific outcomes that respondents made to cataloging policies, procedures, or services based on information they learned from their benchmarking activities. This question required survey participants to record their answers in a text box, and garnered only 5 responses, although some of them reported more than one outcome. One respondent made collection development decisions based on the results of their benchmarking activities, including weeding the reference collection and licensing more electronic resources for use in the library, classroom, lab, and home. One respondent used the results of benchmarking to set performance expectations for a librarian. One respondent indicated that they had reallocated staff and reviewed services offered. Three respondents used benchmarking activity results to help them improve processes. Their replies were:

- To skim some time off our processes … we pared down our physical processing.

- We shortened turnaround time for materials.

- We streamlined procedures.

Advantages of Benchmarking

Survey respondents were asked, "Based on your experience using benchmarking as an assessment tool, what do you consider to be the advantages of benchmarking?" This question required the respondents to write in a free-text answer, and 10 participants responded. Two of the 4 respondents from public libraries reported that verifying levels of staff training and validating local practices were advantages of benchmarking. The 3 respondents from public academic libraries found benchmarking offered advantages in providing a source of new ideas, being able to compare one's institution to others, and to use successes at other institutions to promote local success. One respondent also mentioned obtaining data to back up expectations as an advantage. The respondent from the private academic library found benchmarking provided standards upon which to base decisions about local practices. A respondent from a governmental library found an advantage in "the ability to ascertain what others in similar institutions are doing regarding processes around cataloguing."

It is clear that the advantages of benchmarking include the ability to improve performance, assess staff knowledge and skills, assess quality, assess processes, and manage expectations. One respondent cautioned that there are no advantages to benchmarking if it is not well planned. Another respondent indicated that learning about the process of benchmarking was in itself an advantage.

Disadvantages of Benchmarking

Survey respondents were asked, "Based on your experience using benchmarking as an assessment tool, what do you consider to be the disadvantages of benchmarking?" This question required the respondents to write in a free text answer, and 9 participants responded. Those from the 4 public libraries identified several disadvantages, all of which arose from a mandate to perform the benchmarking without sufficient preparation to find a peer group or to compare similar processes. Respondents from public academic libraries also considered the difficulty of finding a peer group and identifying correct comparisons to be disadvantages. One respondent from this group specifically mentioned having to use statistics from larger institutions. A respondent from a private academic library saw the lack of buy-in from the staff as a disadvantage. A respondent from a governmental library reported no disadvantages.

The results of this study confirm what has been stated in the library literature about the benchmarking of technical services activities. Dougherty (2008) stated that while the benefits of benchmarking "could be enormously helpful to libraries that are concerned about the costs and efficiency of their technical services, benchmarking of technical services activities in a meaningful way is difficult because there are so many variables involved" (p. 182). He went on to describe what he views as one of the disadvantages of benchmarking: "libraries rarely define tasks in ways that are comparable" (p. 182). He stated it is not possible to conduct meaningful benchmarking when organizations define their activities differently.

Haswell (2012) reported a number of pitfalls to using benchmarking metrics. She stated, "[m]etrics around processes and services are more useful for making comparisons" (p. 14), because metrics that are focused on resources such as the number of staff "don't translate well across libraries" (p. 14). Pritchard (1995) reported on the challenges of identifying appropriate peers with which to benchmark, which is further complicated when one is trying to benchmark

against aspirational peers rather than literal peers (p. 494). Pritchard identified a number of drawbacks to benchmarking, stating "we do not have a reliable and consistent way of assessing our services, comparing alternative models of information delivery, and demonstrating comparative quality and effectiveness" (p. 495). Two additional weaknesses include the lack of consistency in collecting data and the lack of a local context.

Although there are potential disadvantages to the use of benchmarking as an assessment tool, they might more accurately be characterized as challenges. With a thoughtful approach to selecting a peer group, and ensuring that apples are being compared to apples, benchmarking has many advantages, as described earlier and attested to in case studies in the library science literature. It is possible that benchmarking is more useful in assessing processes and workflows than in assessing production benchmarks, but again, that depends on a careful construction of the benchmarking study.

Additional Information

This question asked respondents to "provide any additional information about your benchmarking activities that might help with the analysis of this survey." Only one participant supplied a substantive response to this question, lamenting that they did not do a good job on their benchmarking project due to their inexperience managing a survey. However, the respondent felt that the information gleaned from the benchmarking survey reinforced their original conceptions. The validation of original impressions or beliefs can in itself be a valuable result of benchmarking.

Likelihood of Using Benchmarking in the Future

Of the 10 participants who responded to the question "Do you anticipate using benchmarking as an assessment tool in the next five years?" 9 responded affirmatively. These

included respondents from 3 public libraries, 4 academic libraries (one of them a private institution, 3 of them public institutions), one school library, and one identified as a library in a government organization.

Conclusion

It is clear that benchmarking can be a useful tool for assessment of cataloging activities and productivity. In spite of the potential disadvantages to benchmarking, respondents indicated they used it to improve processes and make better decisions, and 70% reported that their benchmarking activities did in fact result in achieving their goals. One of the biggest challenges of benchmarking is determining a valid peer group, especially when comparing cataloging productivity. Nevertheless, many respondents reported that benchmarking was useful for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of their processes.

Of the 92 respondents to the survey, 20 (21.7%) reported they had conducted benchmarking of cataloging activities. This number is higher than the one reported in the study of ARL libraries by Wright and White (2007), who reported that less than 14.5% of libraries had conducted benchmarking to assess cataloging activities. This difference may reflect the relatively small size of the respondents' institutions. Cataloging managers at smaller institutions may need to look outside their own institution for more efficient ways to process their materials. The different number of responses may also be due to who completed and submitted responses for this particular ARL survey. It is possible that a cataloging manager used benchmarking as an assessment tool for cataloging, but in an informal way that was not reported to whoever completed the ARL survey that Wright and White conducted. If that were the case, the use of benchmarking might have been underreported in their report. Overall, 90% of the respondents who conducted benchmarking indicated their intention to conduct further benchmarking in the

future; it is clear that they viewed benchmarking as a valuable activity for the assessment of cataloging activities.

Suggestions for Further Research

Use of benchmarking to assess cataloging practices and procedures needs further research. More insights could be gleaned from conducting this survey on a larger scale, garnering a larger pool of responding libraries, especially with more diversity in size among them. Knowing whether the type or size of library affects whether benchmarking is used or found useful for assessment could shape further investigation. Because some libraries reported that there was very little knowledge about how to carry out benchmarking activities when they began, it would be helpful if they had a guide to assessment to help them learn these skills and how they can be applied to cataloging or other technical services activities. Best practices for identifying an appropriate peer group for benchmarking purposes would be especially helpful. As assessment grows in importance in all types of libraries, benchmarking belongs in all cataloging managers' tool kits.

Appendices

Appendix A. Invitation to participate (Email to AUTOCAT)

Benchmarking is a tool that can be used for assessment purposes. We are interested in how benchmarking has been used by catalogers, cataloging managers, technical services managers, or others to assess all aspects of cataloging and metadata production, workflow, and impact. To learn more about this, we have designed a short survey of 16 questions to gauge the extent to which benchmarking is used, the goals of benchmarking, and how the results of benchmarking are reported and used.

For the purposes of this survey, benchmarking is defined as the process of comparing one's own policies, procedures or other factors, e.g., statistics, to other institutions for evaluative purposes or to determine best practices.

Please click on the link below to take the survey. You may quit the survey at any point. All responses will be completely confidential. It should only take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Thank you!

Rebecca Mugridge and Nancy Poehlmann

Appendix B. Survey

Benchmarking as an Assessment Tool for Cataloging: a Survey

1. What is the name of your institution? (optional)

2. Please select what type of library you represent (select one):

    a. Public library

    b. Academic library (Public)

    c. Academic library (Private)

    d. School library

    e. Corporate library

    f. Medical library

    g. Law library

    h. Government (state, national or other government body)

    i. Other (please specify)

3. How many librarians (Full Time Equivalent) work in the cataloging unit? You may answer in fractions, e.g., 4.5 FTE.

4. How many support staff (Full Time Equivalent) work in the cataloging unit? You may answer in fractions, e.g., 4.5 FTE.

5. Have you used benchmarking as a tool for assessment purposes during the past five years?

    a. Yes

    b. No

6. If yes, what were the goals of benchmarking? (select all that apply)

    a. Improve services

    b. Explore offering new services

    c. Improve or streamline processes

    d. Reallocate staff or other resources

    e. Make better decisions

    f. Inform strategic planning activities

    g. Other (please specify)

7. How did you select the libraries with which you benchmarked?

8. What information did you collect in your benchmarking activities? (select all that apply)

    a. Statistics

    b. Procedures

    c. Policies

    d. Staffing levels

    e. "Best practices"

    f. Other (please specify)

9. How did you use the information that you gathered through benchmarking?

10. How did you report the results of benchmarking? (select all that apply)

    a. Informational report to library administration

    b. Library newsletter article

    c. Assessment report

    d. Accreditation report

    e. Annual report

    f. Presentations

    g. Web site

      h. Other (please specify)

11. As a result of your benchmarking activities, did you do any of the following? (select all that apply):

      a. Improve services

      b. Explore offering new services

      c. Improve or streamline processes

      d. Reallocate staff or other resources

      e. Make better decisions

      f. Inform strategic planning activities

      g. Other (please specify)

12. Please provide examples of specific outcomes that you have made to cataloging policies, procedures, or services based on information that you learned from your assessment activities.

13. Based on your experience using benchmarking as an assessment tool, what do you consider to be the advantages of benchmarking?

14. Based on your experience using benchmarking as an assessment tool, what do you consider to be the disadvantages of benchmarking?

15. Please provide any additional information about your benchmarking activities that might help with the analysis of this survey.

16. Do you anticipate using benchmarking as an assessment tool in the next five years?

      a. Yes

      b. No

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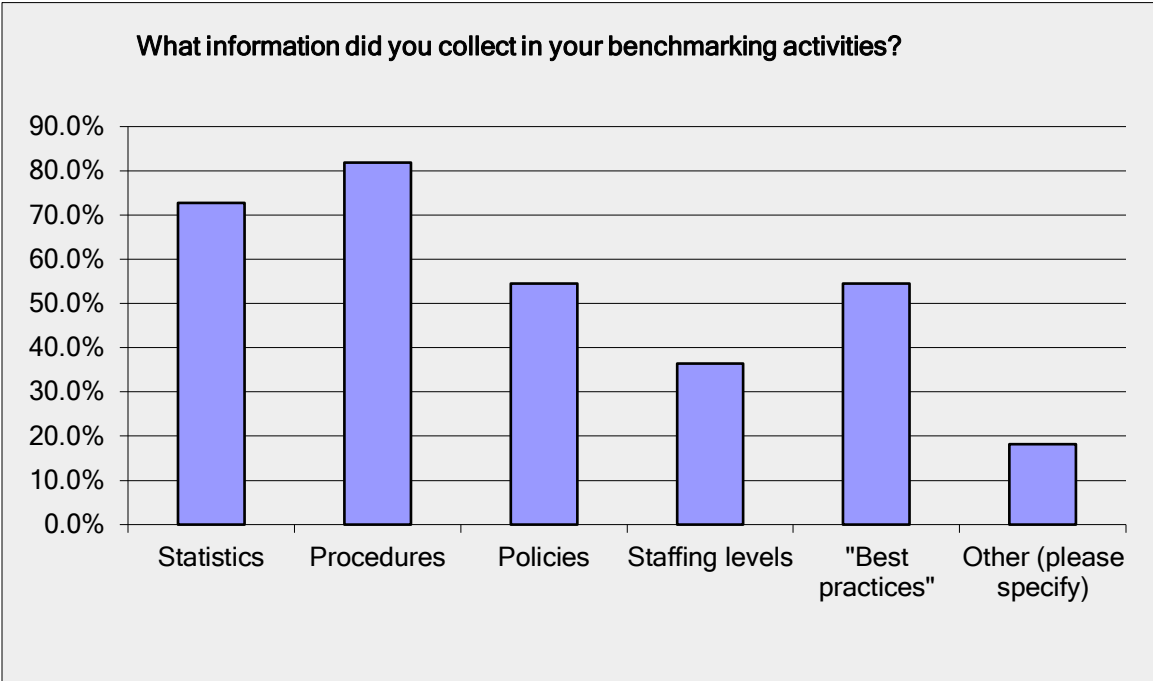
Figure 1. Information Collected through Benchmarking.

What information did you collect in your benchmarking activities?

Table 1. Libraries that Conducted Benchmarking of Cataloging Within the Last Five Years (n=92).

Type of library	Used benchmarking within 5 years	Percentage that used benchmarking	Did not use benchmarking within 5 years	Percentage that did not use benchmarking
Public (n=18)	6	33.3%	12	66.7%
Academic (Public) (n=34)	6	17.6%	28	82.4%
Academic (Private) (n=21)	3	14.3%	18	85.7%
School (n=2)	1	50%	1	50%
Corporate (n=1)	1	100%	0	0%
Medical (n=0)	0	0%	0	0%
Law (n=5)	0	0%	5	100%
Government (n=2)	0	0%	2	100%
Other (n=9)	3	33.3%	6	66.7%
Total (n=92)	**20**	**21.7%**	**72**	**78.3%**

Table 2. Goals of Benchmarking of Cataloging Activities (n=18)

Goal	Libraries that selected this as a goal of benchmarking	Percentage of libraries that selected this as a goal of benchmarking
Improve or streamline processes	13	72.2%
Make better decisions	11	61.1%
Improve services	6	33.3%
Reallocate staff or other resources	6	33.3%
Explore offering new services	4	22.2%
Inform strategic planning activities	4	22.2%

TABLE 3. Reporting the Results of Benchmarking (n=10)

Reporting mechanism	Number of libraries using this method of reporting	Percentage of libraries using this method of reporting
Informational report to library administration	6	60
Library newsletter article	0	0
Assessment report	2	20
Accreditation report 0 0	0	0
Annual report	3	30
Presentations	1	10
Web site	0	0
Other	4	40

Table 4. Goals of Benchmarking and Actions Taken as a Result of Benchmarking

Goal or Result	Libraries that selected this as a goal of benchmarking (n=18)	Libraries that selected this as a result of benchmarking (n=10)
Improve or streamline processes	13 (72.2 percent)	7 (70 %)
Make better decisions	11 (61.1 percent)	5 (50 %)
Improve services	6 (33.3 percent)	3 (30 %)
Reallocate staff or other resources	6 (33.3 percent)	3 (30 %)
Explore offering new services	4 (22.2 percent)	1 (10 %)
Inform strategic planning activities	4 (22.2 percent)	1 (10 %)