

Employment and Social Affairs Platform Meeting of the Public Employment Services

A conceptual framework for Benchlearning

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Idea of Benchlearning and underlying rationale

Benchlearning (BL): The process of

- creating a **systematic and integrated link** between benchmarking and mutual learning activities that
- consists of identifying good/best performances through **indicator based benchmarking systems**

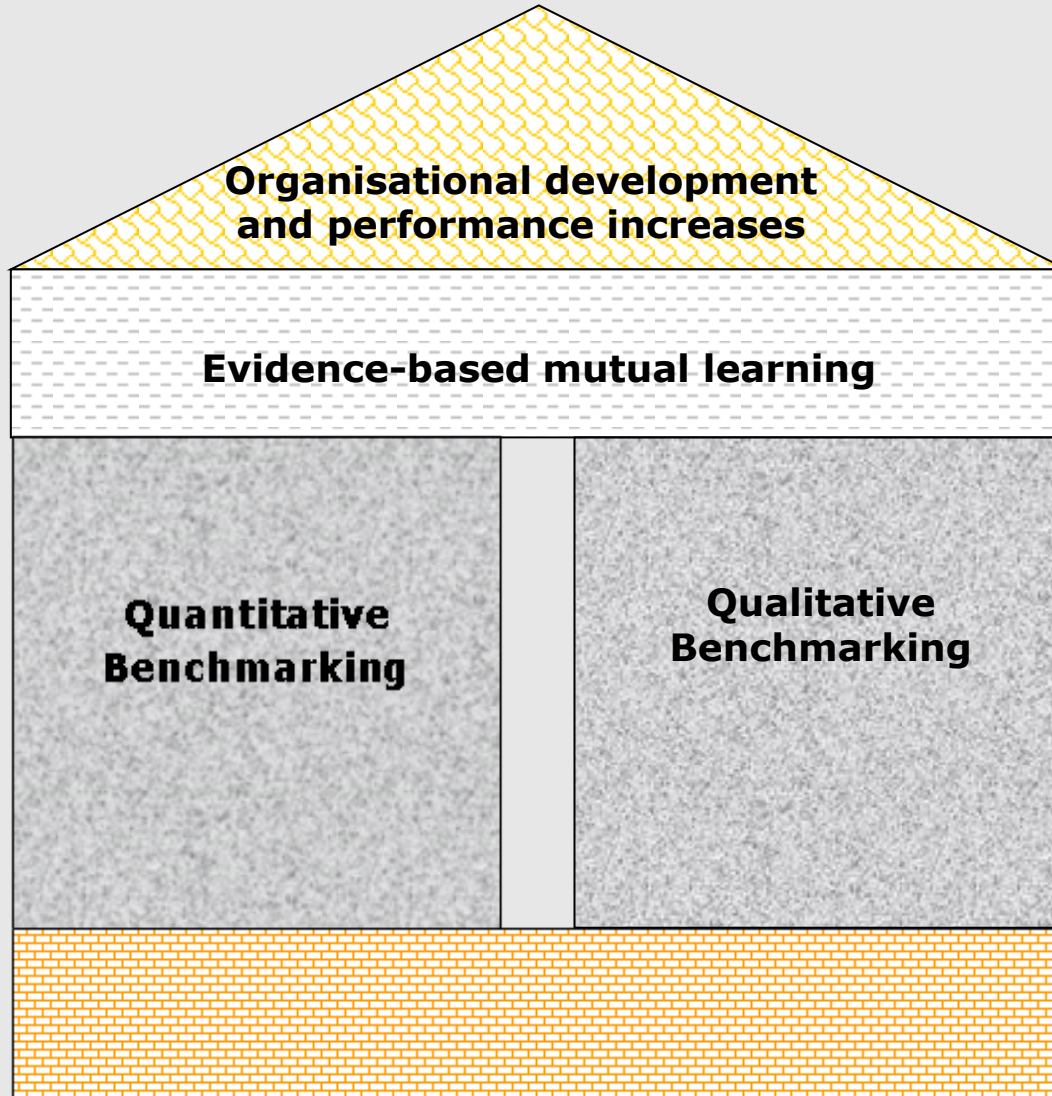
Ultimate aim of BL: Support each PES

- to improve its own performance through
- a **structured and systematic reflection** on its own performance and how this has been achieved

Performance: Measurable achievements which can be attributed to the efforts/activities of a PES (and **not** to external factors)

Implication: Benchlearning offers a structured methodology which can be applied to support the **complete** process of organisational development/change in PES → recurring process

Idea of Benchlearning and underlying rationale



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To put this into practice:

- A **construction plan** is necessary which ensures the statics of the house, i.e. ensures that all parts of the house **fit together** and are **firmly interconnected**
- Prerequisite to make the house **storm-proof**
- This can be reinforced if the house is **not isolated** but closely connected to a second house

Recommendation:

- The BL house of the Western Balkan PES should form an **organic ensemble** with the BL house of the EU PES to fully exploit the learning and organisational development potentials
- Do **not** build a perfect copy of the EU PES house but provide for **several doors** between both houses

The details of the construction plan – Pillar 1: Quantitative benchmarking

Tasks: Measure and compare performance of PES to **identify good performance**

Necessary decisions to be taken:

1. Definition of performance dimensions (objectives of involved PES)
2. Translation of objectives into targets
3. Translation of targets into performance indicators
4. Collection of data on performance indicators

Recommendations:

- Include **all** customers (jobseekers, employers, employed)
- Focus on **results/outcomes**, not on inputs or throughputs → exclude from set of objectives
 - Disbursement of benefits
 - Participation in ALMP-measures
 - Employment on secondary labour market
 - Process targets (e.g. the number of visited employers, time until first interview etc.)

The details of the construction plan – Pillar 1: Quantitative benchmarking

Recommendations (continued):

- Determine **specific groups** to be addressed specifically (e.g. LTU, youth)
- Think about **transversal indicators** like customer satisfaction
- Choose indicators on which a PES has as much **direct influence** as possible (e.g. transitions into employment on the primary labour market instead of the unemployment rate)
- Define the **requirements for data delivery** from PES **strictly** to ensure as much comparability as possible (specifically, do not rely on national definitions of “unemployment” or “employment”)
- Collect data for **as many years** as possible

Important point:

- The data collected from PES administrative records will **not** be genuinely comparable in its original form
- But: It can be **made** comparable using statistical/econometric techniques
- This will, however, only work if all differences in the data between PES are **fully transparent** and as many data points as possible are available (**long time-series**)

The details of the construction plan – Pillar 1: Quantitative benchmarking

Consequences:

- The indicators collected from PES are only **potential** performance indicators at first
- They have to be **thoroughly validated and analysed** to make them genuinely comparable
- Only genuinely comparable, i.e. **valid** performance indicators, should be used for quantitative benchmarking
- Most essential point: Adjustment for the (economic and institutional) **context** in which PES operate using statistical/econometric methods

The generation of **context-adjusted valid performance indicators** is the **1st milestone** of BL

The details of the construction plan – Pillar 2: Qualitative benchmarking

Tasks: Measure and compare the **drivers** of PES performance

Necessary decisions to be taken:

- Define **manipulable** drivers of performance (**performance enablers**)
- These comprises **organisational solutions** (in a wider sense) which can be **influenced** by the PES itself, like
 - **General strategic decisions** (performance management, employer strategy, strategy for building partnerships etc.)
 - **Overarching management issues** (human resource management, IT-support etc.)
 - **Process designs** (profiling, jobseeker segmentation, matching of vacancies and jobseekers etc.)
- Translate performance enablers into a **measurement framework**
- Implement this framework into practice, i.e. **assessment** of performance enablers in all PES

The details of the construction plan – Pillar 2: Qualitative benchmarking

Recommendations:

- The first round of qualitative assessment should be as **comprehensive** as possible (“stock taking”)
- For a truly “structured and systematic reflection” it is necessary to define **standards** for all performance enablers → **avoid** a purely **descriptive exercise**; push people to think/reflect about their own doing
- Involve the **organisation as a whole** in this assessment → **self-assessments** are a very useful tool to exploit the innovative potential and creativity of all employees
- Provide an **external validation** of the self-assessment → feedback from interested, informed and well-intended “outsiders” (peer PES and scientific experts) is an extremely useful **“helping hand”**
- In general: The **tailor-made CAF-model** (Common Assessment Framework) for PES used in the EU PES BL project can serve as a reference point

The collection of **information on performance enablers** is the **2nd milestone** of BL

The details of the construction plan – Central load-bearing beam: Evidence-based mutual learning

The **3rd milestone** of BL is the generation of **evidence on good practices**

Good practices:

- Organisational solutions (i.e. performance enablers) which exhibit a **systematic relationship** with (at least) one context-adjusted valid performance indicator
- This needs to be identified using appropriate **empirical methodology** (hard evidence, not introspection)

Evidence-based good practices are the subject of **Mutual Learning**

- Can be organised in **different formats** (conferences, workshops, seminars etc.)
- Needs to be **intimately connected** to the results of both benchmarking exercises

Recommendation: ML events should start **after** the evidence on good practices is available

The details of the construction plan – Roof: Organisational development and performance increases

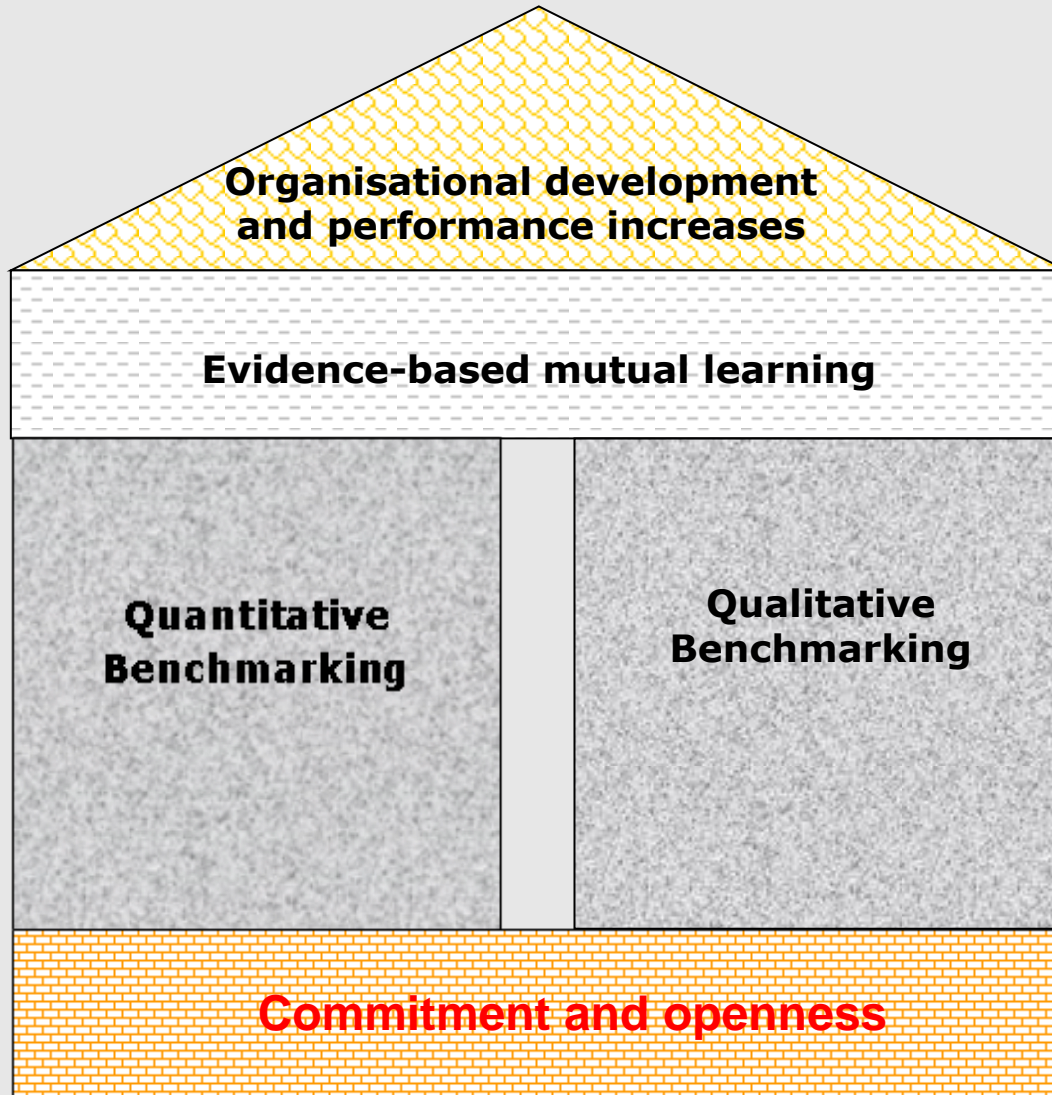
For Benchlearning to support the organisational development of PES, it is necessary to implement a **recurring process**

Long-term objective: Measurable performance increases

Possible set-up:

- **1st year:** Construct the two pillars and the load-bearing beam, i.e. work off all steps to reach milestones 1-3
- **2nd year:** Implement Mutual Learning events (ideally, in cooperation with EU PES)
- **3rd year:** Repeat the exercises for milestones 1-3
- **Ongoing:** Collection of data on performance outcomes and data analyses

The fundament of Benchlearning



The costs and gains of Benchlearning

Costs: Both benchmarking exercises require some efforts (primarily manpower)

- For the **extraction of data** on performance indicators from IT-systems
- For the implementation of the **self-assessment** on performance enablers
- For the preparation and implementation of the **external assessment**

Gains: Participating PES can expect

- **PES staff training** to arrange self-assessment and to act as external assessors for peer PES
- A **systematic and comprehensive analysis** of performance and its drivers (PES-specific as well as comparative)
- The unleashing of the **creativity and innovative** capacity of staff members via self-assessment
- Useful and practicable **suggestions** for improvements from external assessment (e.g. in a PES-specific feedback report)
- **Partners** for organisational learning and development
- An **interface** to PES in the EU and, thus, more partners for exchange

Benchlearning in a nutshell

Benchlearning is

- **Not** a beauty contest!
- **Not** an exam!
- **Not** a purely academic exercise, although it involves some scientific work!
- **Not** a comparison for the pure sake of comparing something!
- **Not** a blaming and shaming exercise!

Hence, Benchlearning is **nothing** to be afraid of.

On the contrary, Benchlearning is a **helping hand** for participating organisations and a **unique opportunity** to build a house (and even a small village) together.

Clearly, there is no house without work. However, it is definitely worth the effort!