

Lateral thinking, not a siloed approach, holds the key to the most creative solutions.

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OT to ICU gurney race

ASEAN has extraordinary hospital facilities, in a few cities. Some could qualify as global benchmarks. The reputations of these hospitals are further reinforced when they have won their country's Performance Excellence Award.

In order to win a Performance Excellence Award, an organisation should have matured to a level where problem solving requires creative thinking.

A winner hospital in the ASEAN region has state-of-the-art infrastructure. It attracts the best physicians, surgeons, nurses, lab technicians, and hospital management staff. Also, patients come from all five continents.

Some years ago, this hospital experienced an unwelcome problem. Several patients in the ICU had an infection. This problem persisted for three weeks causing an alarm at the hospital and in society.

A high-power cross-functional team was appointed by the trustees of the hospital to remedy the situation. Each member of the team rescheduled his or her daily responsibilities. With single-minded commitment, they commenced diagnosing the problem.

The OT was perfect. The ICU was perfect.

So where was the hatchery for infection?

On further diagnosis, the team realised that the distance from the OT to the ICU was way too long. The journey on a gurney was thrice as long than what it should have been. It is on this

journey that some patients were contracting infection. Particularly the elderly.

This problem could not be solved by the traditional continual quality improvement approach. It required out-of-the-box thinking.

The team believed that the OT to ICU gurney race had similar characteristics to that of Formula One pit stops.

So, the team benchmarked the Formula One Pit Stop practices. As is well known, pit stops are one of the most tense and exciting features of a Grand Prix or other Formula One auto race. In fact, auto races are frequently won and lost because of the pit stops and pit crews. In just a few seconds, a huge number of actions are carried out by a Formula One pit crew.

The team adapted the Formula One Pit Stop practices for the OT to ICU gurney race. They designed innovative solutions. As a result, the team accomplished significant but not sufficient reduction in journey time.


In addition, the team realised that the gurney was much smaller than a Formula One car, and therefore movement was restricted. That was the key factor that had limited their success.

Then came a spark from further creative thinking by the team.

Why not benchmark the movements of a ballerina?

Problem solved! In one week!!

Lessons learned

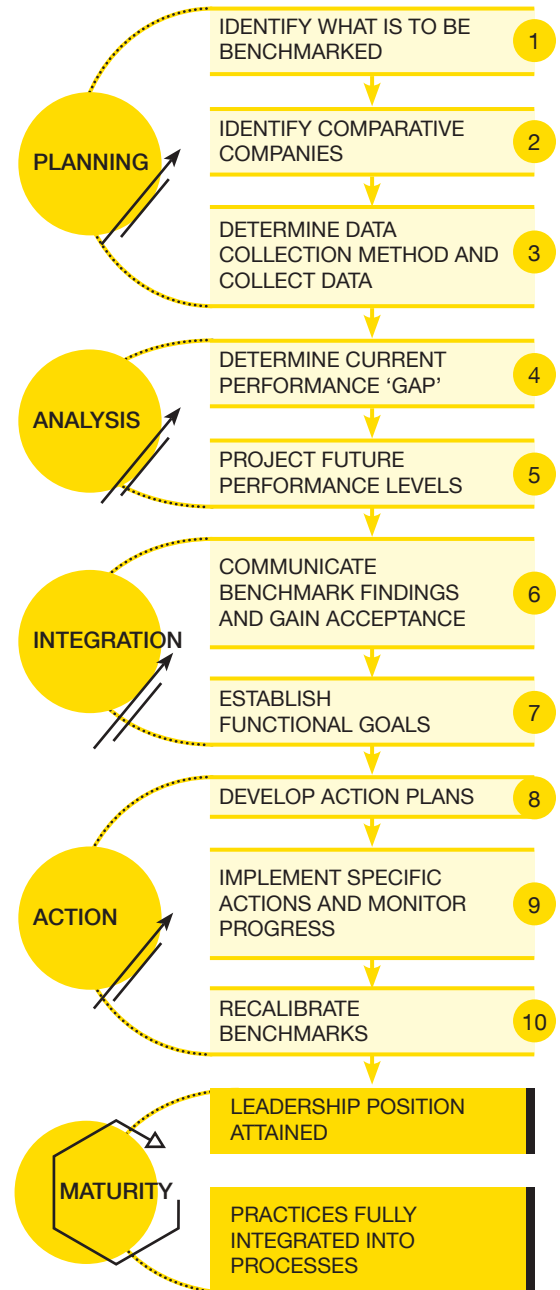
- It is not enough to make a habit of continual quality improvement
- Problem selects the team
- Get a commitment from each team member to diagnose the problem, and remedy the cause
- Great infrastructure must be supported with great processes
- In a hospital, reliability of processes is critical because human life is at stake
- Innovative solutions are born from cross-industry benchmarking
- Problem-solving using creative thinking crashes the elapsed time for remedial action 



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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BENCHMARKING PROCESS STEPS



Source: Benchmarking - The Search for Industry Best Practices that Lead to Superior Performance, Robert C. Camp Quality Press American Society for Quality Control, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Quality Resources A Division of Kraus-Thomson Organization Ltd., White Plains, New York