

Benchlearning - A learning-format for best practice and knowledge sharing

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INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, industry and market entry barriers are vanishing (e.g.: in the automotive industry Google and Apple are about to enter the market). Moreover, due to the fierce global competition, companies are forced to come up with innovative (often also more complex) products. The digitalization even is about to rapidly transform also the business models of companies. Under those ever-changing market environments, the need for stronger cross-departmental, company-wide and even cross-company collaboration and also knowledge sharing becomes essential to cope with the mentioned challenges. Internal social media tools serve as the communication infrastructure for this needed knowledge sharing. Additionally, social media values transform the company culture.

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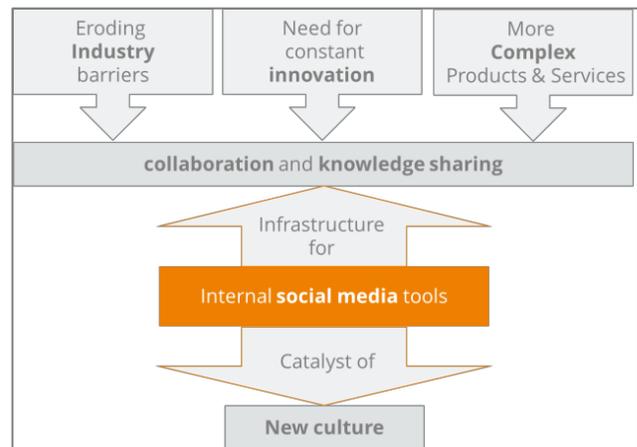


Figure 1: Internal social media - infrastructure and catalyst

In recent years, innovative companies have thus implemented those social media tools within the boundaries of the firm. Although names for these vary e.g. (Social Intranet, Corporate Social Network, Social Business, Enterprise 2.0) the challenges companies face when adopting these tools, especially after the technical implementation, are quite similar.

In 2011, we worked closely with a couple of customers in our region, e.g. adidas and Schaeffler. In our projects with them, we discovered that they were facing similar challenges regarding knowledge sharing efforts. Accordingly we discussed the idea of a cross-company learning format regarding knowledge sharing efforts. We chose Benchlearning as a format.

1. THE FORMAT OF BENCHLEARNING

Benchlearning differs from Benchmarking in four main aspects that are described in the following table:

	Benchmarking	Benchlearning
Knowledge	Comparing best-in-class KPIs with other participants (quantitative comparison)	Learning from participants and creating new knowledge and insights together (qualitative comparison and learning)
Duration	Punctual comparison	Ongoing knowledge sharing over a longer period of time
People	Focus is on comparing numbers. People involved might not have direct contact in physical conversations.	Connecting people via physical events and creating trust to share deep experiences are key points in Benchlearning.
Time	Comparison on numbers that describe past events.	Constant sharing from past and present experiences. Additionally also the creation of new knowledge and comparison of future initiatives.

Figure 2: Benchmarking vs. Benchlearning

From these elements of Benchlearning we derived the main characteristics a project should exhibit in order to incorporate those elements.

First, the knowledge sharing effort needs to be framed. Hence an overall topic, as well as more specific sub topics needs to be defined right in the beginning of the project.

Second, the number of events and the overall time frame should be defined. Are there also activities between physical events?

Third, the project size needs to be established. How many organizations should take part? How many representatives from the organizations should be invited? How many project members should be there at a maximum?

In general each Benchlearning Project consisted of five physical events and additional virtual collaboration between the events. During a Kick-off participants were defining sub-topics to be discussed during the following three main events. Each main event was corresponding with one sub-topic. The three main were hosted by the participating companies. In the fourth and last event feedback was given, next steps were planned and the public Benchlearning Report was finalized. Figure 3 illustrates the characteristics of our Benchlearning projects 2012, 2015 and 2016.

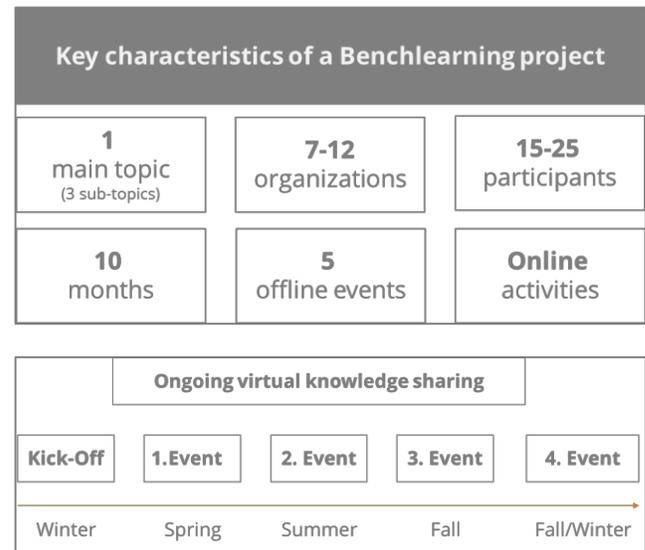


Figure 3: Structure of a Benchlearning Project

2. BENCHLEARNING PROJECTS

The conversation between our customers Adidas, Schaeffler and us to share knowledge company-spanning was the start of our first Benchlearning Project in 2012 about the topic "Social Intranet". In our second Benchlearning Project in 2015 participants were sharing experiences regarding "Internal Community Management". In the Benchlearning Projects 2016 we continue knowledge sharing with more or less the same participants from 2015. This year we take a look at more aspects of "Internal Community Management".

Prior to each Benchlearning Project, we invited up to 12 companies to take part in our project. We also tried to get participants from different departments from a company onboard to create a more interdisciplinary knowledge sharing.

3. BENCHLEARNING PROJECT 2012



Figure 4: Participants 2012

In 2012 participating companies were sharing good practices around the sub-topics “Adoption of Social Intranets”, “Motivating employees in Social Intranets” and “Searching and finding information in Social Intranets”.



Figure 5: Participants 2012

The main results of the events were also published in the public Benchlearning Report 2012 (wiki.cogneon.de/blp12). The main events took place in Herzogenaurach (adidas and Schaeffler), Munich (google and Siemens) and Frankfurt (Deutsche Bank).

4. BENCHLEARNING PROJECT 2015



Figure 6: Participants 2015

“Internal Community Management” was the chosen topic in the 2015 Benchlearning Project. During the Kick-off we defined the sub-topics “Community approach”, “Community KPIs and success measurement” and “Change management and cultural development”. The three main events took place in Wolfsburg (Volkswagen), Stuttgart (Bosch) and Bonn (Deutsche Telekom).



Figure 7: Participants 2015

Also in 2015, we published the main results in the public Benchlearning Report (wiki.cogneon.de/blp15). Additionally we also presented the project at the Knowtech (conference) in Frankfurt in October 2015. Besides the ongoing virtual collaboration in IBM Connections we also conducted an extensive literature review on the various defined sub-topics. These are listed in the Benchlearning Report.

5. BENCHLEARNING PROJECT 2016



Figure 8: Participants 2016

In 2016 we continued with our 2015 project topic of “Internal Community Management”. This year we defined the sub-topics “Create a movement”, “Digital Leadership” and “Intercultural Community Management”.



Figure 9: Participants 2016

The main events took and will take place in Bonn (Deutsche Telekom), Ingolstadt (Audi) and Esslingen (Festo). I Benchlearning Project will be available in Winter 2016. For more information about the current project please visit wiki.cogneon.de/blp16

6. TOP-5 ASPECTS TO ENSURE WHEN CONDUCTING A BENCHLEARNING PROJECT

1. Make sure that you invite people from organizations who have a similar experience regarding the topic. This allows for a balanced and mutual knowledge sharing on the same level. Otherwise single participants would benefit while others only contribute.
2. Don't only rely on sharing within the project group. If possible also invite external experts to the topic and bring new perspectives into the project.
3. Find a balance of open discussions / storytelling and working slots, where participants create new knowledge in group work. This was also reflected by the participants – they wanted to have both.
4. Include Informal settings to create trustful relationships. This can be done for instance by bringing the participants together already in the evening before an actual Benchlearning event. Moreover you can create longer break-out sessions during the day to allow also for One-to-One conversations.
5. Trigger actions between events and claim input. A Benchlearning Manager needs a project manager who takes care of all the administrative work to be done. Even more important he or she needs to actively reach out to the participants throughout the project and claim information and participation in online activities. This does not happen naturally.

7. CONCLUSION

What makes Benchlearning as a learning format interesting is especially its focus on ongoing knowledge sharing. This enables participants to create trust among each other – a necessary prerequisite for honest and deep knowledge sharing. The focus on people and story-telling allows for a deep mutual understanding. For the Benchlearning projects 2012 and 2015 we already published reports, from which you can retrieve the project's results.

- <http://de.slideshare.net/cogneon/benchlearning-berichtsocalintranet2012>
- <http://de.slideshare.net/cogneon/benchlearning-bericht-internes-community-management-blp15>