

Benchmarking and effective strategic communications: ways to implement in public administration

- **Iryna, Izhutova**, Chief of Training Section, Education and Research Centre for Strategic Communications in Security and Defence Sector, The National Defense University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskyi, Ukraine, *e-mail*: perevod_vu@ukr.net

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The current information environment is being extremely fast developed mixing up and joining public administration and commercial (private) sector. The article discusses benchmarking, including a proposal to implement benchmarking as measurement of effectiveness of realization of the strategic communications in public administration.

Keywords: benchmarking, strategic communications, target audiences, public administration.

Introduction

Benchmarking as a flexible, dynamic, and simple process is widely used in the commercial sector to define the current place and prospects, such as vision, possible ways of this vision achievement, vector of further development of any organization, company, department, etc. The term appeared in response to development of both new communications technologies and new public management [1, p. 106]. It is a well known fact that the term and method were born in the United States. The method was initially

used by the Xerox Corporation based on work experience of similar companies to increase own effectiveness and efficiency. Currently, it is also common to implement it within the public administration and through the strategic communications realization in order to form and develop effective and successful administration.

Marketing technologies prove their effectiveness, thus, they should be integrated into public administration and in some measure they should be used in defence sphere, too.

Material and Method

The topic of marketing, benchmarking integration into public administration was raised in researches of Mariia O. Dushina, Dusan Milosevic, Mladen Djuric, Jovan Filipovic, Slobodan Ristic, etc. Quality management in the field of public administration has been a growing and evolving concept in the past two or even three decades. Practitioners have come to realize that efficiency and effectiveness are two ideas that will, and must, rule everything, even the most backwards, encumbered bureaucracy. However, as private sector concepts get ported to the public sector, a very peculiar occurrence has been taking place [3].

Benchmarking is a comprehensive method of finding the highest standards of products, services, and processes by comparing them in

different businesses and companies (we can apply it comparison in different ministries within one country or considering the foreign experience). Moreover, the most important part of the benchmarking is the use of the received information as guidance or for changes and improvement of the organization state of affairs in order to achieve the highest standards popular for advanced methods.

Nowadays, social media are changing benchmarking methods and provide new communications tools and save resources, which makes this process more cost-effective due to its online character and renders a continuous and interactive character to it [2].

Benchmarking is a term which was originally used by land surveyors to compare elevations.

Today, however, benchmarking has a narrower meaning in the management lexicon since the benchmark is industry best-practice and is not in any sense a standard [4, p. 123]. Meanwhile, we propose to use it in public administration, defence sphere and for assessment of strategic communications.

Benchmarking helps to imagine and understand future development based on conducted analysis and research of similar organizations. It is a good way to check the right way of development of strategic communications in public administration. The deep comprehensive and holistic benchmarking will ensure more efficient communications. The more attractive application of the benchmarking is the fact that it can be applied vertically and horizontally that is similar to organization of public administration and well applicable to monitoring process within the strategic communications process requiring permanent understanding of reaching target audiences in terms of appropriate narratives, themes, and messages.

Principles of this method can be applied to analysis of effectiveness of a comprehensive process of strategic communications by comparing its realization within the private sector. Moreover, current planning with public organizations is based on measurement of effectiveness (MOEs) and measurement of performance (MOPs). Benchmarking corresponds to the aim of defining MOEs and MOPs and always searches the best practice to rectify all the gaps. And the current situation in Ukraine requires effective implementation of all the elements of strategic communications based exactly on best practice and experience. This method raises transparency, flexibility, visibility, credibility, and openness in administration, which are obligatory parts of current world.

Benchmarking in public administration permits to achieve a certain level of quality and

gives a good chance of identifying and analyzing alleged inefficiency; thus, it means measurement of effectiveness through comparison. It includes understanding the sense of the organization, identifying the elements of comparison, analyzing differences revealed through comparison, setting objectives and planning activities considering potential target audiences and channels used, results implementation, and further analysis and monitoring. Thus, this approach permits to track performance and evaluate effectiveness. The marketing is the best example of working with target audiences in promoting and distributing products and services on the basis of wishes and interests of these audiences.

Benchmarking of public organizations can facilitate performance management, leading to the spread of best practices and improved organizational performance [5]. It is more not a requirement but rather an integral part of current world to integrate benchmarking in public administration, notably, in military sphere (in defence) limiting and framing this approach following military rules, norms, standards, and practice.

In terms of strategic communications it makes sense to transfer experience from private sector to public one implementing the best world practice in this sphere. Benchmarking research will ensure to meet expectations of target audiences making strategic communications more effective and efficient in order to achieve primary state tasks. It permits to plan the whole work and activities on a results-oriented principle. The US army also actively uses benchmarking approach [6] in line with private companies. The US Department of State was one of the first to use it inspiring many budgeting methods used nowadays (for example, results oriented budgeting) [7]. This approach permits to control and enhance quality and accumulate best practice.

Results and discussion

Accumulation of experience of strategic communications realization in private sector permits and ensures better results and

effectiveness of communications, particularly in public administration and military (defence) sphere as it is traditionally deemed as a tool of

improvement. Especially, it should be done in a rapidly developed society full of crises, which need the appropriate response. Benchmarking is an indispensable part of decision making process. Its primary aim is to avoid mistakes in the future and achieve improvement, integrate innovations and best practice. The approach is widely applicable in development of countries, regions, businesses and it reveals new methods in public administration in line with current trends in businesses [8].

Due application of benchmarking will contribute to improvement of both internal and external development of organizations, ministries, etc. This tool enables to analyze particular functions and administration

processes. The benchmarking is a philosophy and tool for studies and researches to reveal advantages and define further effective development. It helps to enhance decision-making process in a rapid manner and develop own model based learning best practice and experience [8].

Benchmarking is well-integrated in current public planning because it corresponds to current trends in planning such as:

- to define the final result to be achieved;
- to define measurement of effectiveness and measurement of performance to understand that the result is achieved; and
- to define activities to achieve the final result.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this article was to explore how to deal with benchmarking in public administration and defence, particularly, in strategic communications. Our main finding is that it makes sense to integrate this approach within Ukrainian public administration, in military (defence) sphere, and strategic communications.

Considering the abovementioned, benchmarking approach as a progressive tool of improvement should be actively used in public administration, including as measurement of effectiveness of realization of the strategic communications in public administration following the best world practice and the experience of implementation of this method in responding to current challenges and threats. Moreover, it highly fits with strategic communications goals of synchronized

communication in order to transfer information to target audiences. This comprehensive process requires deep analysis and permanent monitoring and should be used in line with after-action review to avoid errors and ineffectiveness.

Benchmarking comprises analyzing, measuring, comparison, and monitoring. Due to benchmarking, it is possible to ensure planning based on measurement of effectiveness and measurement of performance – result-oriented planning; especially these indicators are widely used in assessment of strategic communications realization. It ensures to define strategies and practices to be implemented and can be used as information basis for activities and actions planning. Moreover, the tool contributes to civil democratic control of the Armed Forces of Ukraine if we speak about defence sector.

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