


“Barriers to the practice of benchmarking in South African restaurants”

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BARRIERS TO THE PRACTICE OF BENCHMARKING IN SOUTH AFRICAN RESTAURANTS

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to find the barriers of benchmarking use in independent full-service restaurants in South Africa. The global restaurant industry entities operate in a highly competitive environment, and restaurateurs should have a visible advantage over competitors. A competitive advantage can be achieved only if the quality standards in terms of food and beverage products, service quality, relevant technology and price are comparable to the industry leaders. This study has deployed a descriptive, quantitative research design on the basis of a relatively large sample of restaurateurs. The data was collected through the SurveyMonkey website using a standardised questionnaire. The questionnaire was mailed to 2699 restaurateurs, and 109 respondents returned fully completed answer sheets. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. The main findings were as follows: 43% of respondents had never done benchmarking; only 5.5% respondents considered themselves as highly knowledgeable about benchmarking; respondents thought that the most significant barriers to benchmarking were difficulties with obtaining exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information and adapting the anomalous (own) practices to derive a benefit from best practices. The results of this study should be used to shape the knowledge about benchmarking practices in order to develop suitable solutions for the problems in South African restaurants.

Keywords

barriers, benchmarking, restaurants, competitive advantage, best practice

JEL Classification M1

INTRODUCTION

The restaurant industry is able to play a significant role in contributing to the economy of Africa and South Africa. The food and beverage industry in South Africa is growing with a contribution of 7.7% to the economy between 2014 and 2015 (Statistics-SA, 2015). The South African restaurant industry is a billion Rand industry that is growing and expanding. The restaurant industry has a total turnover of R1728 billion per year (CATHSSETA, 2013). However, in 2013 consumers spent 28.3% of their food budgets on dining out, compared to 30% in 2003 (Statistics-SA, 2015). Between October 2013 and 2014, the total income generated by the food and beverage industry increased significantly compared to the same period in 2012 (Statistics-SA, 2014).

The global restaurant industry operates in a highly competitive environment characterized by an influx of new entrants offering a variety of new food, products and services. Because the hospitality industry is referred to as the one that creates happiness in people's lives, customers come with much higher expectations when they visit restaurants when compared to those in other service industries (Pizam & Shani, 2009). Owing to the in-

creased competitiveness restaurants have had to become more consumer-orientated. A major responsibility of a restaurateur is to develop defensive and offensive strategies to respond to demands that the dynamic current business environment poses to the restaurant industry (Thompson & Strickland, 2003).

Addressing the quality requirements of customers will not contribute to customer satisfaction only, but will also contribute to positive financial results, increased re-patronage, positive word-of-mouth advertising, retention and expansion of customers, reduced costs, increased customer loyalty and achievement of a restaurant's aims and goals (Duggal & Verma, 2013; Nayak, 2013).

To be successful in the challenging restaurant industry and to outmanoeuvre competitors restaurants need to maintain a competitive advantage in terms of the selection of food and beverage products, service quality, relevant technology and price. Restaurateurs can achieve these goals only when they compare their quality standards to those of industry leaders (Phillips & Appiah-Adu, 1998). The process of finding and adopting industry best-practices in order to gain an understanding and to meet the needs and demands of customers is referred to as benchmarking (Nassar, 2012).

The main purpose of this study is to identify and investigate the barriers to benchmarking. This study is set in the South African hospitality industry milieu and specifically, in restaurants. First a short introduction to benchmarking will be provided. Thereafter, barriers to benchmarking will be explored, followed by the research design. Finally, the findings and discussion will be presented with reference to implications for industry and education.

1. THE CONCEPT OF BENCHMARKING

Benchmarking is a term used by industry to compare business processes and performance metrics to like processes and metrics of other businesses for the purpose of improvement (Williams, Brown & Springer, 2012). It is a market-based learning process by which a firm seeks to identify best practices that produce superior results in other firms and to replicate these to ensure its own competitive advantage (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).

An aim of benchmarking in the restaurant industry is to improve service provided to customers (Min & Min, 2011) by implementing industry best practices (Kale & Karaman, 2011; Reid, 2008). To determine the level of satisfaction among restaurant customers, customer perception benchmarking can be extremely useful. Quality dimensions that influence customer perceptions should be prioritised. Performance of anomalar and exemplar restaurants should be measured and assessed after which reasons for the shortcomings should be identified and solutions implemented. The restaurateur who focuses his limited resources on customer benchmarking will reap maximum benefits (Al-Fawaer, Hamdan & Al-Zu'bi, 2012).

A grading system, one form of customer benchmarking that is commonly used in the hospitality industry, is designed to compare and measure service delivery and business performance (Kozak & Rimmington, 1998). Expected and perceived quality aspects/dimensions are the point of departure for customers' benchmarking as well as for the grading of an establishment.

A customer is able to compare various establishments using quality as the basis. The findings of these comparisons influence customer purchasing decisions, as well as whether they will recommend the service providers to other individuals (Gerdes, Stringam & Brookshire, 2008; Stringam & Gerdes, 2010). The absence of a set of uniform standards in an industry makes it difficult to compare establishments (Hong et al., 2012). Yusof and Aspinwall (2000) state that an effective benchmarking system needs to possess the following attributes:

- a simple and systematic plan;
- clear links between different components/dimensions;
- general guidelines to suit the full spectrum of organisations (restaurants);

- focus on implementation of quality interventions and implementation possible at reasonable cost.

Restaurateurs that want to adopt a benchmarking process will be obliged to: set customer-focused goals; plan, control, partner, network and communicate internally and externally; achieve consistent standards; implement human resource management strategies; manage cash flow; and monitor performance management (Hwang & Lockwood, 2006).

Benchmarking is a continual process that begins with management commitment to the benchmarking process. As benchmarking cannot be done in a haphazard fashion, planning is identified as a vital step in the process. Before embarking on the process, the restaurateur needs to develop a framework (Deros et al., 2006). During the planning phase it is important that the restaurateur aligns the benchmarking framework to the restaurant's strategic as well as marketing and human resource goals.

2. LIMITATIONS OF BENCHMARKING

In independent full-service restaurants it can be difficult to apply benchmarking as restaurateurs seem to have inadequate knowledge or access to benchmarking tools and are unsure how to implement best practices (Hwang & Lockwood, 2006). A lack of resources and knowledge lead to a low commitment to benchmarking. With no generally accepted industry service quality norms and standards, benchmarking is almost impossible to implement (Phillips & Appiah-Adu, 1998).

Ladd (2010) warns that if the process of benchmarking is flawed, the misinterpretation of the restaurant's competitive position will yield average performance. Benchmarking does not pretend to offer a solution to managerial and quality problems, as it does not differentiate between efficient and inefficient practices (Deros, Yusof & Salleh, 2006). The restaurateur in charge of the benchmarking exercise needs to interpret the benchmarked data to distinguish between efficient and inefficient activities. Benchmarking involves a critical ap-

praisal of activities to identify performance gaps. Restaurateurs need to be aware that benchmarking is historical in nature therefore, even though it assists in ensuring competitiveness, it will not necessarily catapult a restaurant to becoming a market leader (Moriarty, 2011).

A restaurateur should be cautious when implementing best practices of other restaurants in his/her restaurant, as often these practices are already outdated and might not be effective in a different setting (Hong et al., 2012). Applying best practice from the exemplar restaurant to the anomalous restaurant could improve a specific aspect, but there may then be disproportionate resource allocation, or more seriously, strategic drift (Hwang & Lockwood, 2006). The maximum benefit from benchmarking can be derived only when a holistic comparison is done. Focusing on one or two quality aspects is not sufficient to achieve the aims. Moriarty and Smallman (2009) raise an additional number of objections to benchmarking:

- It is difficult to obtain exemplar best-practice information.
- It is difficult to adapt anomalous practices to derive benefit from best practice.
- It is a complex managerial activity in which outcomes can be clouded by excessive data.
- Managers consider benchmarking to be a passing fad.
- Many confusing benchmarking models exist from which to select.
- Uncertainty exists about the reliability of exemplar data.
- Exemplars may be less than willing to part with their trade secrets.
- Exemplar best practice might not fit into anomalous practices and environment.
- Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalous implements it.

- A best-practice policy that is implemented widely will lead to unexciting establishments thereby depriving customers of different or unique service experiences.
- Management needs to be aware that an exemplar and an anomalar could have divergent strategies therefore unadjusted copying of best practice can be counter-productive.
- Limited financial resources will prevent benchmarking from becoming widely used; management might select poor partners or implement less important best practices.
- As anomalar restaurant managers might use incorrect data and analytical techniques, they could formulate best practices incorrectly.
- other essential business activities prioritised;
- a lack of knowledgeable and experienced employees to implement the process;
- resource capacity constraints;
- philosophical aversion;
- uncooperative exemplars;
- internal competition;
- innovation/copying imbalance;
- resistance to change;
- constant changes in needs, expectations and demands; and isolated location (Adebanjo et al., 2010; Hong et al., 2012; Moriarty, 2011).

Despite challenges and shortcomings in the benchmarking process, restaurateurs should refrain from implementing fragmented or one-off best-practice benchmarking, because the benefits will be non-existent. Restaurateurs should rather focus on existing systems that are beneficial to the participant (Kozak & Rimmington, 1998). Restaurateurs can strive to address shortcomings in benchmarking programmes by providing a generous budget, sound technical support and leading by example (Moriarty & Smallman, 2009).

Benchmarking comprises two broad approaches namely process or performance-based. In performance-based benchmarking only the outcomes are considered and compared with no attention paid to the processes that were followed to achieve those outcomes (Adebanjo et al., 2010).

Service industries of which independent full-service restaurants form part, exhibit a low uptake of benchmarking to improve quality management (Broderick et al., 2010). This is unfortunate as dynamic benchmarking is an effectual method of sustaining service excellence (Min & Min, 2011). This is especially true about research on benchmarking in independent full-service restaurants in South Africa as no academic research-based articles could be located for this study.

Reasons for managers not implementing benchmarking are:

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative research approach using a survey design to gather information from South African restaurateurs was employed. The study was undertaken to analyze and describe existing perceptions and praxis on benchmarking in independent full-service restaurants. The sample for this study was a selection of independent full-service restaurants in South Africa.

The first step in this study was secondary data analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). To this end the researchers undertook a comprehensive literature review of published documents on benchmarking. The collected secondary data were used to develop a questionnaire with which to collect data on the perceptions of restaurateurs. Each questionnaire was administered by self-completion. The link to the website hosting the questionnaire was emailed to the participants who, on completion returned their responses to the researcher by email. Advantages of the method are quick response time and granting participants time to consider their answers (Brace, 2010).

From the literature review 20 different benchmarking classifications by various researchers

were identified and 15 models that might be of assistance to this project were chosen. A selection of components and activities from these models were used in the development of the questionnaire. A panel of four academics and a statistician reviewed the questionnaire to ensure the relevance of each item and to check for consistency in the questions included in the questionnaire and the literature reviewed.

The researcher tried to involve a large number of independent full-service restaurateurs by assuring them of anonymity while at the same time collecting data that would allow standard statistical analysis. To meet these criteria a questionnaire was decided upon (Coldwell & Herbst, 2004). The self-administered questionnaire consisted of two sections namely a demographic section containing 8 items and a section covering benchmarking perceptions.

The Department of Hospitality Management at Tshwane University of Technology had a database of independent full-service restaurants in South Africa compiled over a number of years. The questionnaire was sent to the entire population. This ensured high levels of statistical confidence and meant the results could be generalised to the entire independent full-service restaurant industry in South Africa (Coldwell & Herbst, 2004).

The web-based research system "survey monkey" was used to administer the questionnaire to the participants. Using a web-based survey has the following advantages:

- The questionnaire can be designed electronically using one of the formats available.
- Some biographical questions are available on the data bank.
- Responses are compulsory (the respondent cannot go on to the next question without having entered an answer) to ensure completeness.
- A tutorial and help option is available to ensure that a quality questionnaire has been developed.

- Once the questionnaire has been developed respondents' emails can be entered and the software is able to track participant status.
- The delivery of e-mails to request participation can be done beforehand.
- Each email provides a link to the SurveyMonkey website giving the participant access.
- The participant is able to complete the questionnaire in a number of sessions as information is saved on the program. Once the participant has returned to the site, he/she can continue. However, once the participant has submitted a completed questionnaire he/she cannot return, or complete additional questionnaires.
- The application allows for real-time viewing of incoming data.

The data can be exported to Excel or SPSS directly (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

SurveyMonkey e-mails a link to the participants and records all their responses. The data base uploaded to SurveyMonkey contained 2 699 e-mail addresses. The first request for participation was emailed to every restaurateur on the list. The e-mail contained a cover letter that explained the purpose of the research project and also gave the participant the option to click on a link to withdraw from participation in the study. The researchers sent further 53 reminders to ensure maximum participation. Lastly the researchers sent an e-mail to all the restaurateurs to thank them.

The questionnaire was mailed to 2 699 participants of which 233 responded, 198 opted out and 186 bounced because the e-mail addresses no longer existed.

Analysis of data was done using IBM SPSS V20.

4. RESULTS

A large proportion of the respondents indicated that they had never done benchmarking (43.1%, $n=47$). A method that is used most of-

ten by the South African restaurateurs is to engage in conversations with other restaurateurs with the aim of learning from them (45.0%, $n=49$). Very few respondents had ever conducted a formal benchmarking exercise (2.6%, $n=4$).

5. KNOWLEDGE OF BENCHMARKING

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge regarding benchmarking. The responses revealed that more than 60% (61.5%, $n=67$) of the respondents reported that they had moderate knowledge of benchmarking while about one third (33.0%, $n=36$) indicated that they had little or no knowledge of benchmarking. Only 5.5% ($n=6$) considered themselves to be highly knowledgeable about benchmarking.

On average, respondents scored their level of knowledge at 1.72 on a scale of 1 to 3 with smaller scores reflecting lower levels of knowledge. There was quite some agreement among the respondents with a smaller amount of variation (coefficient of variation = 0.325) in their perceptions of their knowledge, indicated by the standard deviation of 0.559.

6. BARRIERS TO BENCHMARKING

Respondents were asked to rank the possible barriers to implementation of benchmarking from most likely (1) to least likely (13) (Table 1).

The proportion of respondents that ranked "It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information

Table 1. Barriers to benchmarking

| Barrier | 1 n % | 2 n % | 3 n % | 4 n % | 5 n % | 6 n % | 7 n % | 8 n % | 9 n % | 10 n % | 11 n % | 12 n % | 13 n % | Total |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information | 29 | 16 | 13 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 109 |
| | 26.6 | 14.7 | 11.9 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 4.6 | 7.3 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| It is difficult to adapt anomalar (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices | 29 | 24 | 16 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 109 |
| | 26.6 | 22.0 | 14.7 | 6.4 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 0.9 | 4.6 | 5.5 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 5.5 | 1.8 | 100.0 |
| It is a complex managerial activity in which outcomes can be clouded by excessive data | 6 | 14 | 26 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 109 |
| | 5.5 | 12.8 | 23.9 | 9.2 | 8.3 | 9.2 | 6.4 | 5.5 | 1.8 | 5.5 | 4.6 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 100.0 |
| Managers consider benchmarking to be a passing fad | 1 | 5 | 15 | 22 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 11 | 109 |
| | 0.9 | 4.6 | 13.8 | 20.2 | 8.3 | 7.3 | 9.2 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 4.6 | 6.4 | 3.7 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| Many confusing benchmarking models exist from which to select | 5 | 6 | 1 | 15 | 22 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 109 |
| | 4.6 | 5.5 | 0.9 | 13.8 | 20.2 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 4.6 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 100.0 |
| Uncertainty exists about whether exemplar data is reliable | 4 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 17 | 29 | 15 | 4 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 109 |
| | 3.7 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 4.6 | 15.6 | 26.6 | 13.8 | 3.7 | 9.2 | 4.6 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Exemplars may be less than willing to part with their trade secrets | 10 | 12 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 28 | 11 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 109 |
| | 9.2 | 11.0 | 6.4 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 8.3 | 25.7 | 10.1 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 0.9 | 100.0 |
| Exemplar best practice might not fit into anomalar practices and environment | 2 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 37 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 109 |
| | 1.8 | 8.3 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 9.2 | 6.4 | 9.2 | 33.9 | 9.2 | 4.6 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 100 |
| Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalar implements it | 2 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 2 | 11 | 7 | 6 | 41 | 13 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 109 |
| | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 7.3 | 1.8 | 10.1 | 6.4 | 5.5 | 37.6 | 11.9 | 7.3 | 4.6 | 1.8 | 100 |

Table 1 (cont.). Barriers to benchmarking

| Barrier | 1 n % | 2 n % | 3 n % | 4 n % | 5 n % | 6 n % | 7 n % | 8 n % | 9 n % | 10 n % | 11 n % | 12 nw % | 13 n % | Total |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| A best- practice policy that is implemented widely will lead to uninteresting establishment thereby depriving customers of different or unique service experiences | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 13 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 39 | 10 | 6 | 5 | 109 |
| | 4.6 | 1.8 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 11.9 | 9.2 | 4.6 | 2.8 | 5.5 | 35.8 | 9.2 | 5.5 | 4.6 | 100 |
| Exemplar and an anomalar restaurants have divergent strategies, therefore simply copying best practices can be counterproductive | 1 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 5 | 40 | 13 | 2 | 109 |
| | 0.9 | 4.6 | 3.7 | 5.5 | 7.3 | 3.7 | 8.3 | 6.4 | 4.6 | 4.6 | 36.7 | 11.9 | 1.8 | 100 |
| Limited financial resources will prevent benchmarking from being widely used | 7 | 3 | 5 | 11 | 0 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 3 | 39 | 20 | 109 |
| | 6.4 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 10.1 | 0.0 | 4.6 | 3.7 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 7.3 | 2.8 | 35.8 | 18.3 | 100 |
| Using incorrect data and analytical techniques could lead to failure to identify best practices | 8 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 44 | 109 |
| | 7.3 | 4.6 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 1.8 | 6.4 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 7.3 | 8.3 | 40.4 | 100 |

ner) best-practice information” and “It is difficult to adapt anomalar (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices” as the most likely barriers to benchmarking is 26.6% ($n=29$) while the proportion of respondents that ranked “It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information” as the least likely barrier to benchmarking is 6.4% ($n=7$).

In the second ranking the barrier “It is difficult to adapt anomalous (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices” was selected by 48.6% ($n=53$) of respondents and the option “It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information” by 41.3% ($n=45$).

The following rankings were done by considering the first and second ranking of barriers (Table 2).

Respondents ranked “Exemplars might be less than willing to part with their trade secrets” as the third highest barrier to benchmarking. Restaurateurs’ perception regarding the sharing of trade secrets is a valid concern as not all restaurateurs want to share their success recipes. The lowest ranked barrier was “ Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalar implements it”. The perception that “Managers consider benchmarking as a passing fad” was ranked by respondents as one of the less important barriers

Table 2. Ranked barriers

| | | |
|----|---|--------|
| 1 | It is difficult to adapt anomalous (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices | 48.60% |
| 2 | It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information | 41.30% |
| 3 | Exemplars may be less than willing to part with their trade secrets | 20.20% |
| 4 | It is a complex managerial activity in which outcomes can be clouded by excessive data | 18.30% |
| 5 | Using incorrect data and analytical techniques could lead to failure to identify best practices | 11.50% |
| 6 | Exemplar best practice might not fit into anomalous practices and environment | 10.10% |
| 7 | Many confusing benchmarking models exist from which to select | 10.10% |
| 8 | Uncertainty exists about whether exemplar data is reliable | 9.20% |
| 9 | Limited financial resources will prevent benchmarking from being widely used | 9.20% |
| 10 | A best-practice policy that is implemented widely will lead to uninteresting establishment thereby depriving customers of different or unique service experiences | 6.40% |
| 11 | Managers consider benchmarking to be a passing fad | 5.50% |
| 12 | Exemplar and anomalous restaurants have divergent strategies, therefore simply copying of best practices can be counterproductive | 5.50% |
| 13 | Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalous implements it | 3.60% |

Table 3. Barriers' standard deviation

| Barriers | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | CV |
|--|------|-----|----------------|-------|
| It is difficult to obtain exemplar (benchmarking partner) best-practice information | 5.28 | 109 | 4.314 | 0.817 |
| It is difficult to adapt anomalous (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices | 4.26 | 109 | 3.745 | 0.879 |
| It is a complex managerial activity in which outcomes can be clouded by excessive data | 5.39 | 109 | 3.388 | 0.629 |
| Managers consider benchmarking to be a passing fad | 6.67 | 109 | 3.488 | 0.523 |
| Many confusing benchmarking models exist from which to select | 6.78 | 109 | 3.278 | 0.483 |
| Uncertainty exists about whether exemplar data is reliable. | 6.17 | 109 | 2.549 | 0.413 |
| Exemplars may be less than willing to part with their trade secrets | 5.72 | 109 | 2.959 | 0.517 |
| Exemplar best practice might not fit into anomalous practices and environment | 7.13 | 109 | 2.783 | 0.390 |
| Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalous implements it | 8.17 | 109 | 2.562 | 0.314 |
| A best-practice policy that is implemented widely will lead to uninteresting establishments thereby depriving customers of different or unique service experiences | 8.27 | 109 | 3.120 | 0.377 |
| Exemplar and anomalous restaurants have divergent strategies, therefore simply copying best practices can be counterproductive | 8.69 | 109 | 3.211 | 0.370 |
| Limited financial resources will prevent benchmarking from being widely used | 9.22 | 109 | 4.081 | 0.443 |
| Using incorrect data and analytical techniques could lead to failure to identify best practices | 9.25 | 109 | 4.334 | 0.469 |

to benchmarking. This is pleasing as it shows that, although a large number of the restaurateurs do not benchmark their restaurants, they realise that it is an important managerial practice which is not a “passing fad”.

Table 3 lists the mean and standard deviation of the variables. “It is difficult to adapt anomalous (own) practices to derive benefit from best practices” was ranked the most likely barrier among those listed, but it also had the highest variation relative to the mean (CV = 0.879) which meant that for this barrier there was least agreement among the respondents and more specifically, large disagreement.

The barrier with the most agreement among the respondents is “Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalous implements it” (CV = .314) and it was ranked more unlikely (M = 8.17, SD 2.562) on average. “Exemplar and anomalous restaurants have divergent strate-

gies, therefore unadjusted copying of best practices can be counterproductive” and “A best-practice policy that is implemented widely will lead to uninteresting establishments thereby depriving customers of different or unique service experiences” were two categories that had high agreement among respondents 0.37 and 0.377, respectively. Both were ranked as more unlikely.

7. DISCUSSION

The large proportion of the respondents who indicated that they had never done benchmarking was surprisingly high because in other studies the advantages of benchmarking in the hospitality industry have been emphasized (Nassar, 2012; Mura & Sharif, 2015; Johann & Padma, 2016; Cano, Drummond & Kourouklis, 2011).

It was also interesting to note that, although most of the respondents had never done bench-

marking, a substantial number indicated that they had moderate knowledge about benchmarking. These findings corresponded with those of a study in the hotel sector in Petra, Jordan where the percentages of respondents with high knowledge was 16%, moderate was 50% and little or no knowledge was 33% (Twaissi & Alhelalat, 2015).

Respondents ranked “It is difficult to obtain exemplar best-practice information” and “It is difficult to adapt anomalar practices to derive benefit from best practices” as the two most likely barriers to benchmarking. In a study conducted by Vermeulen (2006:319) the two most important barriers identified were, “difficulty to get a benchmarking partner” and “difficult to get information from competitors” that corresponded with barriers ranked second and third. Williams, Brown and Springer (2012) report that there are four main categories of benchmarking barriers. The first category pertains the reliability of benchmarking due to “apples to oranges” comparisons. The capacity of the organisation with regard to finances, time, expertise, data and organisational hierarchy is indicated as the second category. The third category refers to resistance to change due to satisfaction with the status quo. Undesirable job changes and loss of influence or resources are concerns that fall into the fourth category. According to Nassar (2012) as technical expertise and detailed knowledge of how to conduct a benchmarking exercise

is unknown in Egyptian hotels, there is resistance to benchmarking. Benchmarking barriers include challenges with data, employees’ lack of confidence in new initiatives (Williams, Brown & Springer, 2012), poor support from senior management and a lack of awareness of the achievable prospects of the project (Adewunmi, Koleoso & Omirin, 2016).

Restaurateurs’ perception regarding the sharing of trade secrets is a valid concern because not all restaurateurs are prepared to share their success recipes. In Egyptian hotels it was found that an unwillingness to share information among hotel managers was one of the greatest obstacles to successful benchmarking. Liaising with competitors could place individual businesses in a position of vulnerability (Nassar, 2012). Managers tend not to release information because they believe they are in competition with other restaurateurs and if information is released this could result in a decrease of clients (Adewunmi, Koleoso & Omirin, 2016). According to Hinton et al (2000) confidentiality is not seen as a problem in countries with developed economies such as the UK, while Jain et al (2008) report that it is a problem in developing countries such as India and Nigeria (Adewunmi, Koleoso & Omirin, 2016). The lowest ranked barrier was “Benchmarking is a retrospective process therefore current best practice will already be outdated by the time the anomalar implements it”.

CONCLUSION

South African restaurateurs have not fully implemented benchmarking yet. They have a limited knowledge and experience on benchmarking, which could dull their competitive edge. If restaurateurs become aware of the use of benchmarking as a tool to understand their operations, this will lead to the development of accurate productivity measurements, thereby ensuring that restaurateurs would use benchmarking to achieve sustainability in a demanding industry.

South African restaurants have great potential for success as the country’s tourism industry is thriving. Restaurants should take advantage of opportunities to establish a total quality management system which would ensure competitive advantage in the industry. It is imperative that restaurateurs acquire detailed information and knowledge on benchmarking. An inquiry into benchmarking internationally could be undertaken to determine whether restaurateurs are aware of global quality management standards.

Before benchmarking can be executed successfully the organization needs to establish best practice. One of the key aims should be to convince the entire organization to embrace benchmarking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Benchmarking, as part of total quality management, should be an integral component of training programmes. Tertiary institutions and restaurant training establishments should incorporate total quality management into their curricula. Industry organisations should encourage restaurateurs to utilize relevant total quality benchmarking opportunities. Their employees should be trained in benchmarking to be assured of their support in the process. If prospective restaurateurs, are made aware of the possible barriers to benchmarking, they will be able to develop their own strategies to overcome these barriers and implement total quality management successfully. Industry role players and training institutions should be knowledgeable of barriers to benchmarking in order to develop suitable solutions to these problems. Benchmarking skills that will be to the advantage of managers in the restaurant industry will lead to a successful career in the hospitality industry. Trained restaurateurs in benchmarking practices will lead to increased productivity, higher profit and improved service quality resulting in restaurants having a competitive edge.

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