

Examples Of Benchmarking From Strategic Management Tools In Akhism*

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ABSTRACT

Strategic management has been in the limelight for businesses in recent years. Majority of businesses set sight on strategic management, gaining competitive capacity, searching to increase their successes. In parallel with these advances, numerous tools to be used in strategic management have emerged. In this context, using the strategic management tools in business are continues to increase with each passing day. One of these tools is benchmarking. Within having no direct translation for the term 'benchmarking' in Turkish language, benchmarking is to adapt an application in certain area into its own management structure by investigating the processes of the management, which applies them in the best way, instead of discovering that application. According to viewpoint of benchmarking, available and previous applications may bring some most important gains in terms of saving time and resource on condition that they are adapted into the culture of that management. In the last quarter of 20th century, benchmarking that emerged as a strategic management tool, is not a strange technique for Turkish culture. Although debates that benchmarking is originated from Japan or Chinese in literature continue, we think that benchmarking is a technique, many practices of which have been carried out, and that has been handled in Akhism philosophy enhanced by Ahi Evran-i Veli in Anatolia of 13th century. Benchmarking technique corresponds to Akhism in many points, put forward by Akhi Evran-i Veli. The aim of this study is to propound that benchmarking, one of the problem-solving tools in total quality management and a strategic management tool, which is quite popular in 21st century, was functioned in 13th century with Akhism philosophy. Different authors deal with the same type of benchmarking under different terms although the classifications on benchmarking are different according to them. In this view, this study is conducted by basing on intrinsic, competitive, functional and generic benchmarking according to the partner selected without causing any further controversy. Within this scope, this benchmarking classification accepted in literature was based on and usages of all benchmarking types in Akhism philosophy were probed with examples. Therefore, the example applications in Akhism are compared with the benchmarking technique in our modern management literature. Consequently, benchmarking was surmised to have been a technique, originated from Akhism. We also believe that it will contribute a lot to the management literature if Akhi philosophy is investigated thoroughly within the framework of management.

Keywords: Benchmarking, Akhism, Turkish culture.

Stratejik Yönetim Araçlarından Kıyaslamamanın Ahilikteki Uygulama Örnekleri

ÖZ

Stratejik yönetim, işletmeler için son yıllarda ilgi odağı haline gelmiştir. Çoğu işletme, rekabet gücü kazanmak ve başarılarını artırabilmek için çeşitli arayışlar içine girmekte ve stratejik yönetime odaklanmaktadır. Bu gelişmelere paralel olarak stratejik yönetimde kullanılmak üzere pek çok araç ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu bağlamda stratejik yönetim araçlarının işletmelerde kullanımı, her geçen gün artarak devam etmektedir. Bu araçlardan biri de kıyaslamadır. Kıyaslama kavramının ortak kabul görmüş bir Türkçe tercümesi ve tanımı olmamakla birlikte, belirli bir alandaki uygulamayı keşfetmek yerine o süreci en iyi uygulayan işletmenin süreçlerini inceleyerek kendi işletmenin yapısına uyarlamak olarak tanımlanabilir. Kıyaslamamanın bakış açısına göre, var olan ve denenmiş uygulamaların işletmenin kültürüne uyarlanması suretiyle zaman ve kaynak tasarrufu açısından önemli kazanımlar edinilebilir. 20. yüzyılın son çeyreğinde bir stratejik yönetim aracı olarak ortaya çıkan kıyaslama (benchmarking), Türk kültürünün yabancı olduğu bir yönetim tekniği değildir. Literatürde Japonya ya da Çin kaynaklı olduğuna ilişkin tartışmalar sürmekle birlikte kıyaslamamanın, 13. yüzyıl Anadolu'sunda Ahi Evran-ı Veli'nin geliştirdiği Ahilik felsefesinde ele alınmış ve pek çok uygulaması yapılmış bir teknik olduğunu düşünmekteyiz. Kıyaslama tekniği, Ahi Evran-ı Veli'nin ortaya koyduğu Ahilik anlayışı ile pek çok noktada örtüşmektedir. Bu çalışmadaki amaç; 21. yüzyılın oldukça ilgi gören stratejik yönetim araçlarından ve Toplam kalite yönetiminde problem çözme araçlarından biri olan kıyaslama tekniğinin 13. yüzyılda Ahilik felsefesiyle işlendiğini ortaya koymaktır. Çeşitli yazarların kıyaslama konusunda yapmış oldukları sınıflandırmalar farklı olsa da içerikleri incelendiğinde

* This study is an expanded and revised version of "Benchmarking Applications of Akhi Evran-i Veli in 13th Century", the summary of which was published (in 2011) in 1st International Akhi Culture and Kirsehir Symposium, organized in Kirsehir between 15-17 October, 2008 by Akhi Evran University.

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Makalenin Gönderim Tarihi: 27.02.2016; Makalenin Kabul Tarihi: 17.02.2017

yazarların aynı anlamı temsil eden kıyaslama türünü farklı bir kavramla ele aldıkları görülmektedir. Bu doğrultuda anlamsal tartışmalara girmeksizin seçilen ortağa göre; içsel, rekabetçi, fonksiyonel ve jenerik kıyaslama sınıflandırması esas alınarak çalışma yapılandırılmıştır. Bu kapsamda literatürde kabul görmüş bu kıyaslama sınıflandırması esas alınmış ve tüm kıyaslama türlerinin Ahilik felsefesindeki kullanımı örneklerle incelenmiştir. Böylece modern işletmecilik literatüründe yer alan kıyaslama tekniğinin Ahi teşkilatlanmasındaki uygulama örnekleri irdelenmiştir. Sonuçta kıyaslanmanın Ahi teşkilatlanması orijinli bir teknik olduğu kanısına varılmıştır. Ahilik felsefesinin işletmecilik bakış açısıyla derinlemesine sorgulanmasının, işletme literatürüne daha birçok önemli katkılar sağlayacağını düşünmekteyiz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıyaslama, Ahilik, Türk kültürü.

1. Introduction

The need to increase productivity and efficiency has directed managements to various problem-solving techniques. In this view, most of the managements know that they cannot develop only by their own efforts. Available and previous applications may bring some most important gains in terms of saving time and resource on condition that they are adapted into the culture of that management. This situation makes it necessary to revise the term of innovation within the framework of managing.

Innovation is defined as the creative development of new products and/or intrinsic processes according to the managements believing that innovation must be an intrinsic process. However, innovation is not synonymous to creativity. Innovation refers the successful adaption of ideas no matter where they are developed (Stanley, 1995: 24; Wilson, 1995: 80). M. Porter interprets this issue in a way that managements, which are unable to conduct their production like a specialist, may provide its requirements from external sources and thereby focusing on processes that have operational efficiency (Appleby et al., 2000: 554). Focusing on the better applications of external sources will bring forward the term of 'benchmarking'.

Although there is no consensus in the literature about the origin of benchmarking technique, the discussions indicate that it is somewhere between China and Japan (Cati et al., 2007: 148). Benchmarking, as a term, has entered into the management literature in the last quarter of 20th century. However, benchmarking was not a new technique for Turkish culture and we think that it was an old technique, used by Anatolian shopkeepers and craftsmen in 13th century. Benchmarking technique corresponds to Akhism in many points, put forward by Akhi Evran-i Veli.

In this study, the aim is to indicate that the benchmarking term, one of the problem-solving techniques in total quality management and one of the techniques used in strategic management, was also used in 13th century under Akhism philosophy. Therefore, the example applications in Akhism are compared with the benchmarking technique in our modern management literature. Besides, the study also plays an important role to contribute into explaining unclear issues in the management literature by evaluating them in view of Akhism philosophy of management.

2. Conceptual Framework: Benchmarking

Benchmarking is the way of comparing a performance of a management with the best performance on that range and determining how they reach this performance level, then using all these data to set a good example for the goals and objectives of a management (Gerek, 2010: 13). According to the definition by International Benchmarking Clearing House, benchmarking is to show modesty by accepting that there are better ones than you at certain points and learning how to reach that level and mastering on it (O'Dell, 1994: 63). In Japan, the term 'dantatsu' is used in equivalent with benchmarking and means 'the best of the best' (Bergman et al., 1994: 324). The basic principle of benchmarking depends on the fact that understanding and assimilating what is already available is more rationalist instead of trying to discover (Esin, 2002: 219). In short, benchmarking is to adapt an application in certain area into its own management structure by investigating the processes of the management, which applies them in the best way, instead of discovering that application. Although having no direct translation for the term 'benchmarking' in Turkish language, we often see such terms as equating, paralleling, sampling, measuring, spanning and comparing used in the literature.

Although benchmarking technique was named in 1970s, its applications date back a couple of centuries earlier. The most significant example in the historical development of benchmarking is the method of preparing tactics and strategies as a result of analysis by collecting and comparing the data on enemy

forces when developing military attack plans (Tepe, 2006: 19). Again, the production via belt conveyor system is another significant example for benchmarking applications before 1970s, which was developed by Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Automotive, when he went to see one of his friends in Chicago in 1912 and got inspired from a slaughterhouse. After seeing that butchers cut some parts of each carcass (beef with bones) and then sending it to another friend, Ford realized this application in car manufacture as a movable belt instead of conveyable steel rails over hooks (Mert, 2006: ii). Aktan (1999) also exemplifies in his study that there were scientific studies conducted by IBM in 1960s to determine the best application.

In addition to the fact that the first application of benchmarking around the world is determined to be in China or Japan (Cati et al., 2007: 148; Demirdogen et al., 2003: 304), the first example of benchmarking seen in the literature as a disciplined process is accepted to be the benchmarking project by an American company, Xerox, in 1979. Xerox wanted to know how Japanese competitors sold the same products in much cheaper prices than their production costs. Therefore, they investigated the products bought from Japanese competitors and tried to adapt the better sides (Mukherjee et al., 2009: 312-313). Robert C. Camp, the benchmarking specialist of Xerox, went to Freeport in Maine to learn how L. L. Bean Company wrapped the goods three times faster than Xerox employees. Then, Xerox made a benchmarking with American Express Company to send invoices to customers much quicker and with Cummins Engine to make a production planning (Kotler, 2000: 227).

Among other effective benchmarking examples are British Airways and British Rails. Airways developed a program for frequent flier customers and made a benchmarking with Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. It also studied on how the customers were hosted in the hotel, which registries were kept and how they were evaluated and used these results to improve its own program. British Rail determined the most important customer expectation as cleanliness after punctuality and found out that the best application was available in a travel company, named British Airways. A Jumbo-jet with 250 seats was cleaned just in 9 minutes by eleven persons in British Airways. British Rail benchmarked itself with British Airways to improve its efficiency in cleaning process and today, the cleaners in British Rail have started to clean a train with 12 wagons and 660 seats just in 8 minutes (Beduk et al., 2008: 145, quoted from Capital, 1997).

There are many different points of view in the literature on the stages of benchmarking process. For example, Kotler (2000: 227) emphasizes on realizing this benchmarking in seven stages. These stages are deciding on which functions will be benchmarked, determining which main variables will be measured, determining the best managements within the range, measuring the activity reports of the best managements within the range, measuring the activity reports of your own management, preparing programs to close the gap in-between and following the results after applying all these. Camp (1989: 17), realizing the first application of benchmarking in Xerox Company, suggests a five-stage and ten-step process. These stages are planning, analysis, integration, putting into action and maturity. It is possible to increase the number of examples on benchmarking stages suggested by several authors. However, it will be useful to indicate that there is a common issue in all points of view. The critical issues or activities of benchmarking should be defined first and the benchmarking should be done with the most successful examples. In this framework, the benchmarking can also be made with examples from different sectors besides the ones from the same sector.

3. Relation Between Akhism and Benchmarking

In our study, the relation between Akhism and benchmarking technique is explained by basing on the types of benchmarking. Therefore, the views on the classification of benchmarking are stated initially in the literature. Benchmarking classifications are given in Table 1 according to various authors.

Table 1. Benchmarking Classifications According to Various Authors

AUTHOR(S)	BENCHMARKING CLASSIFICATION	
	MAIN CLASSIFICATION	LOWER CLASSIFICATION
Avcı, 2007: 15-20	-	Internal, competitive, functional, strategic
Barutçugil, 2004: 202-203	-	Process, performance, strategic
Camp, 1989: 61-65	-	Intrinsic, competitive, functional, generic
Çatı, Kınır ve Mesci, 2007: 158-162	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, external
	According to the subject focused	Product, process, strategic
Demirdögen ve Küçük, 2003: 311-314	According to the partner selected	Internal, competitive, functional, generic
	According to the subject focused	Product-focused, process-focused, performance-focused, strategic
Dogan ve Demiral, 2008: 8-9	-	Strategic, competitive or performance-focused, process-focused, functional, intrinsic, international, the best application of its range
Dokuzer ve Unal, 2008: 378-379	-	Intrinsic, competitive, functional, generic
Erdem, 2006: 77-82;	According to the partner selected	Internal, external-sectorial, external, generic, global
	According to the subject focused	Functional, process, organizational performance based
Erdem, 2007: 188-206	According to the purpose of relation	Strategic, competitive, cooperative
	According to the subject focused	Product, process, strategy focused
Karabulut, 2008: 26-35	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, external
	According to the subject focused	Competitive, cooperative, intrinsic-internal, qualitative, quantitative
Kurulgan, 2007: 30-48	-	Intrinsic, extrinsic (competitive and functional), general
	According to the partner selected	Process, performance and strategy focused
	According to the subject focused	Strategic, operational (functional), administrative
Mert, 2006: 22-33	According to the purpose pursued	Product focused, process focused, strategy focused
	According to the subject focused	Intrinsic, competitive, external
Özer ve Yereli, 2001: 211-214	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, external, the best application of its range
	According to the subject focused	Product, process, strategy
Sancaklı, 2006: 41-49	According to the subject focused	Product focused, process focused, strategy focused
	According to the partner selected	Internal, competitive, functional, best application of its range
Saraç, 2005: 63-64	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, functional, uniform
	According to the subject focused	Product, process, strategic
Tepe, 2006: 31-33	-	Internal, competition-based, functional, generic, performance focused, process focused, strategic
Tezel, 2007: 14-19	According to the subject focused	Performance, process, strategic
	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, functional, generic
Topaloglu ve Kaya, 2008: 34-37	According to the partner selected	Intrinsic, competitive, functional, generic
	According to the subject focused	Product, process, strategic
Topaloglu ve Sökmen, 2002: 51-77	-	Internal, competition-based, functional, performance, strategic, contractual, group work, wide range

In this part of the study, each type of benchmarking is discussed with example applications in Akhism. As shown in Table 1, we see that authors deal with the same type of benchmarking under different terms although the classifications on benchmarking are different according to them. In this view, this study is conducted by basing on intrinsic, competitive, functional and generic benchmarking according to the partner selected without causing any further controversy.

3.1. Intrinsic Benchmarking

Intrinsic benchmarking is the way to determine the best application by making a benchmarking between internal operations and processes of the management (Cati et al., 2007: 160). One of the most important features of intrinsic benchmarking is that it retrieves managements from searching for the previous solutions. Some of the problems faced by the managements are related to common problems of

all managements. A management saves on time and financial sources by adapting the applications of another company to its own management, in which the same problem is experienced and solved successfully (Dokuzer et al., 2008: 375). This situation may realize within the internal functions of a management. For example, modeling the document organization of finance department by the manufacture department refers to intrinsic benchmarking. Another example of intrinsic benchmarking is seen in a management, which also models the sales techniques of another management within the same holding.

We think that intrinsic benchmarking was conducted in two ways in Akhism. The first of these is the benchmarking made among the members of the organization. “The managers in Akhism used to come together in the evenings and discuss how they could have more efficient and high quality production with cheaper cost. As a result, they used to start using the ideas and methods offered in these meetings and help each other” (Cora, 1990: 30). The discussions of members in Akhism correspond to the adaptation ideas, in which the solutions or functions offered for current problems by different managements are adapted by benchmarking. It is possible to claim that the discussions of craftsmen in the evenings are a search for determining the best applications.

The second way of intrinsic benchmarking in Akhism is the relations among masters, foremen, apprentices and errand-boys within the management. Kocel (2003: 411) states that the relation between a master and an apprentice is one of the best examples of benchmarking. The apprentice benchmarks his work with his master, examines closely whatever his masters do, he adapts it into his own work, therefore learning many things from his master in the end. After developing his own methods, he becomes a master, with whom other apprentices make a benchmarking, and this is the way that benchmarking process goes forward (Dokuzer et al., 2008: 373-374). This relation is very visible in Akhism. The master in the organization used to be in a great effort to teach his apprentice the best of what he knew about his job and to make him a good man and a good citizen at the same time. The master was disrespected if the apprentice was bad at learning his job or if he had some bad attitudes (Ekinci, 1991: 12). In Akhi organizations, the masters and foremen used to have such contributing effects on apprentices as guiding, leading and supporting (Durak et al., 2010: 166). Therefore, it is possible to argue that there used to be an educational environment, in which an apprentice can learn about the attitudes and applications of his own master or other craftsmen in Akhi organizations.

Young volunteers in Akhi organization used to start under ‘errand boy’ name. When the master thinks it is appropriate, then he reaches other ranks such as ‘apprentice’, ‘foremen’ and ‘master’. We can say that errand boys who have no knowledge or skills and apprentices who have learnt some have undergone a natural process to learn from his masters, in other words, to make a benchmarking. While the apprentice finds the opportunity to share his work with his master and to compare his work with his master after he is promoted as a foreman, it is possible to say that other apprentices and errand boys also find the opportunity to compare their work with him. In this view, all aspects of intrinsic benchmarking is realized within Akhi organizations.

3.2. Competitive Benchmarking

Competitive benchmarking is the way to compare a management with other competing managements in the sector (Demirdogen et al., 2003: 311) and to adapt the better features into its own management. The partner selected in competitive benchmarking must be from the same sector. Competitive benchmarking aims to increase the competing power by filling the gaps in the working performance of a management (Dogan et al., 2008: 8). The most important feature of competitive benchmarking is that it is made with a competitor management. An example of competitive benchmarking is that a management actively involved in automotive sector models the raw material provision process of another management in the same sector.

Competitive benchmarking corresponds to a basic factor in Akhism. “The aforementioned factor in Akhi organization is the ability to compete and hold on with Byzantine craftsmen” (Gulerman et al., 1993: 23). After Turkish people adopted a sedentary life as a result of their migration to Anatolia, the importance of craftsmen and tradesmen came into prominence in addition to agriculture. However, the

handicrafts and trade was in the monopoly of Greek and Armenian people developed in Byzantine corporations in this region during the settlement period of Turkish people. It was only possible for Turkish craftsmen and tradesmen migrating from Asia to hold on against these local craftsmen and tradesmen, to live with them by establishing cooperations, therefore by selling high-quality, durable and standard goods. Akhism was the natural result of these conditions (Cagatay, 1974: 59; Poyraz, 1996: 140-141). It indicates that Turkish people compared themselves continuously with competing applications to create alternatives for better production when competing against Greek and Armenian managements.

It should also be noted that, the relationship between a master and an apprentice or among managements operating in the same field in evening meetings is supported by all parties. However in benchmarking applications, the modeling management may not be willing. Therefore, we can say that Akhi organization has experienced the benchmarking application in a very comprehensive way.

3.3. Functional Benchmarking

Functional benchmarking is the way to adapt the applications, functions and professional processes of external organizations without making any distinction among different sectors after analyzing their best applications and determining which one to benefit from (Erdem, 2006: 80). This type of benchmarking is applied by associating with successful managements in different areas or in the sector in order to improve their professional functions and periods. Functional benchmarking is the type of benchmarking used to make innovatist developments and radical changes (Dogan et al., 2008: 9). It is possible to make a benchmarking between two managements involved in two different sectors in terms of sales and marketing. For example, a hotel management may ask for a benchmarking with a bank management, which serves in a different area of service sector in terms of customer relations or with a hospital management in terms of accommodation management (Topaloglu et al., 2008: 37). As seen, the most important feature of functional benchmarking is the successful applications without making any difference among different sectors.

The applications of all people have been benchmarked especially in terms of professional ethics, customary practices of shopkeepers in Akhism without making any distinction among different sectors. The most substantial example is the participation in evening meetings. The searching process for good applications involved everyone from young to old no matter what profession they may have. Another example for functional benchmarking is the conversations made with friends. "It is remarkable that there are elder people among the members although the leading friend is quite young in these conversations, because the leading friend used to have such an authority that he could export the participants out from the meetings, even exiling them from the profession in cases of penalty" (Ekinici, 1991: 168-169). Therefore, we think that the people from different business areas contributed to one another in terms of processes and methods in Akhism. This indicates the presence of functional benchmarking in Akhism.

3.4. Generic Benchmarking

Generic benchmarking is the process to acquire general information about the structure, system and processes of successful managements worldwide and to adapt their applications into their own managements. In this method, the purpose is to gather data from the most successful managements described as 'world class' via various means (Dokuzer et al., 2008: 379). An example for generic benchmarking is the adaptation of a food retailer modeling the applications of a management, which has the most successful marketing network. In Akhism, the focus is also always on the best. Either the proactive audit of Akhi Baba in the market or the reactive audit made by collecting the opinions of customers and tradesmen in evening meetings all indicate that certain applications were negotiated over a platform in these evening meetings. The problems were clearly defined and solutions offered in this framework. After discussing the opinions of other manufacturers on the subject, they used to reach a common decision for the best application and each single discovery was shared by everyone thanks to these evening meetings.

In Akhism, there has been a search for finding examples of all applications from Akhi Seyhi, known as the father of tradesmen and others in related professional areas. There was a father for each art in Akhism

and Akhi people used to believe their seniors from their masters to all fathers in all arts. It is believed to be impossible to reach maturity in arts without committing a father or a master in Akhism (Ekinci, 1991: 30). The father of a profession was selected among the prophets or important persons in that professional art in Akhism. For example, it is accepted that the father of tradesmen is Mohammed the Prophet; the father of travellers is Jesus Christ; the father of shepherds is Moses the Prophet; the father of farmers is Adam the Prophet; the father of clockmakers is Joseph the Prophet; the father of armor makers is David the Prophet; the father of fishermen is Jonah the Prophet; the father of tailors is Enoch the Prophet; the father of hunters is Ishmael the Prophet; the father of doctors is Lokman the Prophet; the father of tanners is Akhi Evran, the father of goldsmiths is Nâsr Ibn Abdullah and the father of archers is Sad Ibn Ebi Vakkas (Cagatay, 1989: 161; Ekinci, 1991: 30-32; Gokalp, 2005: 23). Our point of view on explaining generic benchmarking and Akhism for modeling the most successful application is supported by having a 'master' for each member in the organization, gathering data about the fathers of traditional arts and modeling their behaviors (Solak, 2010: 14). In short, generic benchmarking refers to the acquisition of the best representations and their modeling according to their business area in Akhism (Akhi Seyhi and the father of that professional area).

4. Results

We see the benchmarking application in Akhism during 13th century, which is accepted as one of the most important techniques used in strategic management and entered into business literature in the last quarter of 20th century. We think that the characteristics of benchmarking technique were also present in Akhism and many of its applications were used during that period. All examples of application in Akhism have been the focus of this study including 4 basic types of benchmarking accepted in the literature. The examples of application for intrinsic benchmarking in Akhism are the search for good application in evening meetings of member managements and the relations among apprentices, foremen, masters and errand boys within the managements. The search for adapting successful applications due to the competition with local Greek and Armenian tradesmen is an example for competitive benchmarking and the comparison of everyone in terms of example attitudes regardless of their profession and their search for finding the best is an example for functional benchmarking. The search for finding the best application and modeling the applications of masters (their attitudes) indicates the generic benchmarking. Besides, the benchmarking applications in Akhism not only include production process but also does it apply all of its dimensions from the use of financial resources to professional ethics. It is possible to argue that the benchmarking applications gained an institutional structure in the leadership of Akhi Baba in Akhism and therefore making it an Akhi-originated management technique of 13th century. We also believe that it will contribute a lot to the management literature if Akhi philosophy is investigated thoroughly within the framework of management.

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