

Benchmarking For a Burst of Creative Thinking

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by Linda Kloss, RRA, AHIMA executive vice president/CEO

It is precisely when an old paradigm crumbles and the new one is not yet in place that we get great bursts of creative thinking.¹ I'm convinced that this is such a moment for HIM.

The old paradigm of a static, facility-bound record is, unfortunately, still the norm, but a new paradigm of a dynamic, information-rich healthcare system is emerging and taking shape. The juncture between old and new is an uncomfortable time. We can't really stop the old to do the new—we must do both simultaneously. To successfully straddle two worlds, we must be agile and creative and possess a good sense of humor. This is a time that permits, even requires, us to take more risks and try new approaches to solving problems.

One way to find new approaches is through benchmarking—comparing the cost and effectiveness of one organization's operations to those of others. Unlike internal yardsticks, benchmarking forces organizations to consider how others are able to produce better results at lower cost.

HIM professionals can benchmark with other organizations in an integrated delivery system or with peers in an informal network to share key performance measures and "best practices." Colleagues in various specialty aspects of HIM can work together to develop performance measures, share data, and learn about differences in practices and how they affect outcomes. We must work together for solutions to our challenges.

HIM Benchmarks for Operational Excellence

Our cover story, "Productivity: How Do You Measure Up?" by Lorence, offers more material from the results of AHIMA's census data—this time focusing on productivity standards in a variety of settings. In "Changes for the Better: Implementing Four Best Practices," Doyon, Thompson, and Meottel illustrate process reengineering within a single facility and emphasize the creative and iterative parts of process improvement. And Buff and Hohmann show how benchmarking data analysis improved the outcomes for a cardiac surgery program in "Navigating from Data to Excellence."

Later this year, AHIMA will announce the results of its Best Practices Awards program. We hope to kick off a new era of practice innovation with this and other research initiatives, so the HIM profession impacts the new paradigm with our creative thinking, promulgates standards of practice, and works to continuously improve them.

Decision Making or Comfort Zone?

To advance practice, we have to take advantage of our unique AHIMA community to share data yardsticks and insights about best practices. We must also guard against being satisfied with mediocre performance. If few of us have engaged in the types of reengineering Doyon describes, then we are comparing ourselves against mediocre standards and may reach the flawed conclusion that everything is fine.

Challenge one another by sharing ideas, expanding the types of measures you use, looking beyond our field for process models. The speed of today's world does not let us improve through safe, incremental change. We need to take some risks and, as Doyon suggests, "Be creative and try something new to see if it works."

Designing Tomorrow's Solutions

According to reengineering expert Michael Porter in *Rethinking the Future*, improving operational effectiveness is "necessary just to stay in the game. But staying in the game is not sufficient." Today's managers must innovate and upgrade by intelligently

applying technology, designing value-added services, eliminating outdated services, and redeveloping organizations. We need to take some big risks that will move us closer to the future—which is right around the corner.

Notes

1. Toffler, Alvin. *Foreword to Rethinking the Future*, ed. by R. Gibson. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 1997.

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