Guidelines for Best Practice Reports

A best practice is an in-depth study of an organizational practice used in one or more organizations that enables an organization to measure and to understand outcomes of its practices. Based on the results of cases, surveys, and/or interviews involving a number of individuals or organizations, a best practice report often makes use of benchmarking in the systematic examination of a practice in a situation or organization. A best practice report is a special type of research presumed to contain valid, tested information about human behavior and processes. In conceiving, structuring, and writing a best practice, the writer should consider certain basic and conventional goals. These are described below.

Writing Best Practice Reports

Results of analysis conducted in a particular field or industry, such as case studies, are used to determine outcomes that can be generalized (or applied) to organizations beyond those that have been individually tested. In this respect, a best practice makes use of well-defined processes through benchmarking. Benchmarking is a continuous and systematic process used to measure services, products, and practices against those of leaders in a given industry. This process begins with identifying the practice to be benchmarked, the organizations to be used for comparison, and the measures of performance. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected during this first step. The data are then analyzed, and core principles are identified for implementation.

As writers plan to design a best practice, they need to think about specific areas of an organization or firm that could benefit from structured change. The resulting outcomes must, therefore, include well-defined methods and frameworks. In writing a best practice, the writer should address two important questions:

- What is the desired outcome of the practice for the organization?
- What strategy (or set of strategies) offers the greatest opportunity and/or efficiency for achieving the desired outcome?

Layout of Best Practice Reports

As with all written reports, a best practice report should contain, or give due consideration to, seven key elements:

1. **The Introduction.** In the introduction of a best practice report, the writer presents the key elements of the study. This includes a description of the industry to which the best practice is to apply and an introduction to the main issues or central problem addressed by the best practice.

2. **The Description of the Objectives of the Practice.** This section of the best practice is crucial. In it, the writer defines the goals of the best practice and describes in detail why these goals are to be applied to the target organization.

3. **The Background.** The background is important for constructing the setting, particularly since a best practice can depend heavily upon past events. This section often contains pertinent histories of the organizations studied.
4. **Methodology.** In the methodology, the writer describes conceptual frameworks, definitions, and outlined procedures for the study. Procedures might include the processes of designing or administering a survey or an interview.

5. **Findings.** In this section, the writer presents the results of the study through descriptive analysis of the data. The researcher determines the difference between the target organization and other organizations with which it is being compared. This section is most comparable to the body in standard writing formats since it includes core principles that have been drawn from the analysis of organizations.

6. **Conclusion and Recommendations.** In this section, the writer transforms the analysis in the findings into meaningful conclusions regarding the best practice. Based on the conclusions, the writer makes recommendations on how the best practice should be implemented.

7. **References.** This part of the best practice report documents all of the sources cited. These include books, journal articles, information downloaded from the World Wide Web, interviews and personal communications. Sources need to be credited or cited in the main text and then listed in the reference section. All sources should be documented using a standard style format, for example, MLA or APA. Check with your instructor or editor for preferences in the formatting of the references section. Handouts with instructions for the most frequently used formats are available from the Center for Business Communication.

**Using Primary Sources**

Primary sources are essential to best practice reports. They contain original information as well as research data that are the building blocks of comparative practices. There is no substitute for primary sources, because they are stripped of external bias. Examples of primary sources are:

- **Journals.** By far, these are the most important sources of information about a specific topic of research. Any number of professional, educational, and analytical research journals (e.g., *Harvard Business Review*, *Academy of Management Journal*).

- **Abstracts** are useful when attempting to gather information at a broad level, quickly and conveniently. An abstract consists of a brief synopsis of an article in a journal, but should not be used as a substitute for reading the article itself.

- **Indexes** provide a quick overview of where articles are located and include the topic, the author, and sometimes a description or listing of key words/themes contained in the article.

- **Financial Statements.** These are useful for certain types of cases and may, in some instances, be essential in developing a best practice through benchmarking.

- **Electronic Resources.** There are a number of avenues for conducting electronic research. These include standard Internet search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo, Infoseek, etc.) that can be used to find business information, as well as industry information and annual reports available on the Internet (e.g., *Financial Times* at http://www.ft.com/). University libraries also offer specialized electronic databases, which provide an array of business information not available from standard Internet sources.
Using Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are useful in putting issues into a particular framework or context, but they often carry with them some bias and do not contain the specific information necessary for writing a thorough best practice. They are useful in supporting arguments and further developing ideas that have already been introduced by the writer.

Steps to Remember When Writing a Best Practice Report

• Manage your time. Give enough time for each step: data collecting, background research and writing a draft. Also allow time for revising, proofreading and documenting any sources used.

• Make an outline. This will help you to organize your information.

• Introductions are often hard to write. Try writing the other sections first and then go back and write the introduction later.

• Keep in mind the audience and the purpose of the report.

References

This handout was prepared using the following sources:

Boyce, Rosalie A.  "Best Practices in the Health Sector."  


Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.  156-157.