

Participants' experiences

Acea Group (Italy)



Ercole De Luca

Energy manager water division

EBC welcomed seven new participants from Italy: Acea ATO2 (Rome, Lazio), Acque (Pisa, Tuscany), Acquedotto del Fiora (Grosseto & Siena, Tuscany), G.O.R.I.(Sarnese Vesuviano, Campania), GEAL (Lucca), Umbra Acque (Perugia, Umbria) and Publiacqua (Florence, Tuscany). They are all members of the Acea group. We asked Ercole De Luca about Acea, its reasons for joining EBC and its first experiences.

"Acea is one of the major public utilities in Italy; our two main activities are energy and water. We handle 57.000 km of water grids and over 30.000 km of sewage grids in Lazio, Campania, Toscana and Umbria, providing integrated water services to more than 8 million residents. Acea also offers various water-related services in Peru, Colombia and the Dominican Republic. In energy, Acea is active in production and distribution, renewables, energy production from waste, energy sales and more. Exchanging competences between water and energy businesses, Acea Group is able to offer a wide and complete range of services to its customers".

"When other operators told us about EBC, we decided to join for various reasons. First and foremost, we wanted to know where we stand compared to our peers and, indeed, competitors. Identifying areas of strength helps us to appreciate our own achievements and, more importantly, finding weaknesses guides us in our efforts to offer better services at lower cost. All in all, the results of the EBC exercise are an important instrument in Acea's strategy. Furthermore we realised that the extensive data collection required by the programme could give us a better understanding of the determinants of our business".

"Acea's people involved in the exercise reported that EBC's work leads in the expected direction. In addition, the deep details of all the aspects of the business they had to analyse to answer to the EBC questions were a great opportunity to focus on items that we tend to overlook. For example, the detailed sub-division of total costs and human resources under the several processes analysed, both for drinking and waste water, helped us to identify specific improvement areas. In particular, it was interesting to compare with similar utilities, for each process area, the efficiency of the in-house/outsourced services mix."

Charleston Water System (United States)

Jane Byrne & Linda Hans



2012 marked Charleston Water System's first participation in the EBC benchmarking programme. CWS, based in Charleston, South Carolina, provides water to ± 400.000 people and sewer services to 180.000 people. As an American company, CWS stands out in a predominantly European programme. We spoke with Jane Byrne and Linda Hans and asked them about their motives for joining EBC.

"It all started with the 2007 strategic plan. In it, our new CEO stated his ambition for CWS to be worthy of winning the South Carolina Governor's Quality Award by 2012. Emphasising the words worthy of, actually collecting the crystal trophy was not the main goal. Rather, the plan was about embarking on a journey of continuous improvement."

"Data and Culture are what you could call two of the guiding principles on our journey – and they are more closely intertwined than one might think. As everyone involved with CWS was included in the new strategy, a focus on data has helped to improve both measurability and accountability. The Governor's award is explicitly data driven, and by 2011, CWS was too. One year ahead of schedule, CWS was not just worthy of winning, but won, the first utility to do so. Next step: contending for the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award by 2017. To keep improving, we needed references and ideas. Our search for comprehensive, sustainable benchmarking programmes in the US produced few results, so we were happy to be able to join EBC. A lot of our associates are involved in the benchmarking process, and the entire company is aware of our participation in the programme."

"With data based decision making and best practice implementation such a strong focus of the programme, participation in the EBC program has presented us with an excellent source to work on some of the specific opportunities for improvement that we have identified within CWS. We were struck by the openness during the workshop: everyone's here to share – and for us, the workshop is the most important part. It would be helpful to get a clearer picture of who our peers are. Other than that, we have already gotten more out of this exercise than expected: benchmarking, best practices, and networking."