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A QUANTUM LEAP IN INFORMAL BENCHMARKING

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Despite the paucity of available literature on informal benchmarking and the consequential lack of its understanding, informal benchmarking has outranked established benchmarking (formal), placing 4th out of 20 of the most used business improvement tools, based on a 2008 Global Benchmarking Network (GBN) survey of 450 organisations worldwide. This paradox is exacerbated by the growing popularity of informal benchmarking, even though it is not correspondingly as effective as it is widely used. Therefore, two significant gaps need be filled: firstly, to develop a theoretical understanding of, and secondly, to investigate how to increase the effectiveness of informal benchmarking as an organisational improvement tool.

A pragmatic mixed method quantitative-qualitative sequential design using an abductive-deductive-inductive approach is adopted. The product of abduction is a preliminary conceptual model of informal benchmarking from the transdisciplinary academic review of benchmarking, informal learning, organisation learning and knowledge management, augmented by concepts on quantum thinking, innovation and positive deviance. The model informs the quantitative survey questionnaire, whose deductive results of 81 survey responses from 14 countries informs the in-depth semi-structured interviews of 16 informants from 7 countries, the resulting dataset being inductively coded into conceptually-driven dendrograms. The integrated findings refine the conceptual model of informal benchmarking, and develops a toolset-based application model (a pragmatic outcome of the conceptual model), a maturity assessment framework and an eco-system strategy. From here, an informal benchmarking roadmap is synthesised, representing a sustainable platform for informal benchmarking to be deployed as an effective organisational improvement initiative.

The research sets the stage for a leap in scholarly understanding of informal benchmarking in the wider context of business and organisational improvement, and offers organisational improvement practitioners an invaluable cost-effective solution in a time-scarce executive world. This pragmatic study of informal benchmarking has possibly unleashed a different epistemological stance within the benchmarking field, by advocating an organic approach to benchmarking, in contrast to the highly methodical approaches associated with conventional benchmarking.

Abbreviations

APQC	American Productivity and Quality Center
BPIR	Business Performance Improvement Resource
GBN	Global Benchmarking Network
IB	Informal Benchmarking
IL	Informal Learning
KM	Knowledge Management
LO	Learning Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OL	Organisational Learning
NSD	Non-social Dimension
SD	Social Dimension

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Part 1 - THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

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