



Benchmarking strategy deployment practices

Benchmarking
strategy

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609

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe how managers from a network of organisations formed and operated as a team to work on a benchmarking project. The project had the dual purpose of enabling learning for the participants, and identifying leading practices in strategy deployment.

Design/methodology/approach – The participants were managers with responsibility for strategy deployment. Data were collected from case studies of seven diverse New Zealand organisations that were undertaking performance improvement using the Baldrige performance excellence model. The unit of analysis for the case studies was a strategic initiative that the organisation had deployed. Secondary sources were also used to identify leading deployment practices.

Findings – Despite the different sectors, sizes, and cultures of the participating organisations their strategy deployment issues were similar and the managers were able to share experiences and cooperate effectively. Over 50 leading deployment practices were identified. Seven dimensions of strategy deployment were determined. A framework for strategy deployment was developed.

Research limitations/implications – The framework aids the analysis and classification of strategy deployment practices. Future research using longitudinal studies could evaluate the effectiveness of leading strategy deployment practices and identify circumstances that lead to the success or failure of strategy implementation.

Practical implications – The framework highlights the management skills required for effective strategy deployment. It is applicable to a wide range of organisations.

Originality/value – The paper provides an example of network benchmarking and how it was managed. This will be of interest to organisations that are part of an existing network, or that wish to create a similar network. No benchmarking studies of strategy deployment were found in the literature.

Keywords Benchmarking, Networking, Quality, Management strategy, Learning

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Benchmarking for quality improvement within a networking environment is a recent phenomenon. Instances of benchmarking clubs, and of the role played by benchmarking



clubs in actively facilitating the benchmarking and networking process, both within and across sectors can be found in a variety of articles, including: Bowerman *et al.* (2002 – health services), Davis (1998 – local authorities), Dale *et al.* (1995 – sports club), Favret (2000 – libraries), Jackson (2001 – universities), Mann *et al.* (1999 – food industry), Ogden and Wilson (2001 – leisure management) and Prado (2001 – various manufacturing). This paper reports on a benchmarking project that was undertaken by one such multi-organisational network, the New Zealand Benchmarking Club (NZBC).

The NZBC was formed in May 2000, and comprised of 14 diverse organisations, each aiming to achieve a stated vision of “World-class performance by members and widespread adoption of excellent business practices within New Zealand.” The club format was designed to fully engage each member organisation in the process of organisational improvement. Working together the members sought to:

- identify strengths and weaknesses of each membership organisation’s business practices;
- collectively conduct benchmarking projects to identify leading business practices available in NZ and the world; and
- apply this acquired knowledge to membership organisations’ business practices in the areas of identified weaknesses.

Repeating this cyclical process, they aimed to make progress against the Club’s vision of world-class performance. Regular self-assessment against the Baldrige criteria for performance excellence (CPE) (NIST, 2002) was the mechanism by which the NZBC tracked the improvement of members.

The NZBC’s benchmarking project described here focussed on identifying leading practices in the area of strategy deployment. A “workgroup” consisting of a facilitator from Massey University’s Centre for Organisational Excellence Research (COER) and participants from NZBC organisations (typically those with responsibility for strategy deployment) was formed. The workgroup used a pre-established methodology to exchange experiences and identify leading practices in implementing strategy. The project had the dual purpose of enabling learning for group participants, and finding leading practices. Despite the different sectors, sizes, and organisational cultures of the participating organisations their strategy deployment issues were similar and they were able to share experiences and cooperate in benchmarking deployment practices.

The main purpose of this paper is to describe how managers from a diverse network of organisations formed and operated as a team to work on a benchmarking project. The way a range of benchmarking methods were used by the group will be of interest to organisations that are part of an existing network, or that wish to create a network similar to the NZBC. The empirical data were collected from case studies of seven NZBC member organizations. Secondary sources were also used to identify leading practices in deploying strategic initiatives, including the application documents of CPE Award winners and literature searches. From the combined data, a framework for deploying strategic initiatives was developed. The strategy deployment findings of the group are given in summary. The detailed findings and a description of the leading practices found are published in report form (Saunders, 2004).

A recent report published by the New Zealand Ministry of Economic Development found there is significant scope for New Zealand organisations to engage in inter-firm and cross-sectorial learning (Knuckey *et al.*, 2002). The findings from the project

reported here are evidence of the benefits that can be obtained from cooperative learning occurring between diverse organisations in New Zealand.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. The next section outlines the role of strategy deployment in organisational improvement, then the use of benchmarking by the NZBC network is summarized. The methodology employed by the NZBC network and details of the workgroup method and the actions undertaken follow. Finally, the benchmarking findings and the dimensions of the strategy deployment framework are discussed and the main conclusions summarized.

Strategy deployment and performance improvement

The deployment or implementation of strategy is the translation of strategy into action. As quality management concepts have evolved to produce performance excellence frameworks such as the CPE and the European business excellence model (EFQM, 1999) there has been an increased emphasis on assessing and improving the strategic management processes in organizations. In the late 1990s, performance excellence frameworks such as the CPE incorporated strategic planning as a category to address this organisational function (Ford and Evans, 2000). The strategic planning category of the CPE has two items, strategy development and strategy deployment.

The CPE strategy deployment item requires a description of how the organisation converts its strategic objectives into action plans, and a summary of the organisation's action plans and related key performance measures/indicators. It also requires projections of the short and longer term performance of the organisation based on the likely changes resulting from the implementation of the strategy. These projections should include benchmarking against best practices, and an outline of the assumptions used in the forecasts (NIST, 2000). The CPE state that objectives must be converted into action plans, but do not specify how this is to be done.

Researchers have noted gaps in the literature on the process of strategy deployment, and that the literature is weak on how strategy implementation should be done, and how it can be made to happen faster and more effectively (Mintzberg, 1994; Kaplan, 1995; Noble, 1999a). Previous studies have focused on strategy implementation from a single management perspective such as project management (Bryson and Bromiley, 1993; Hillson, 2003; Klein and Irwin, 1992; Zwikael and Globerson, 2004) or as a component of strategic control (Chenhall, 2003; Fisher, 1995; Langfield-Smith, 1997; Simons, 1990, 2000). The single focus of these studies is a limitation on their usefulness to practitioners and researchers of strategy deployment, who are concerned with understanding all the elements involved in the dynamic and complex process of deploying a strategic initiative (Dawson, 2003; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2003).

While Kaplan and Norton (1996, 2001) have developed the balanced scorecard as a means of assisting strategy deployment, it is primarily directed at ensuring a series of appropriate measures are used to evaluate and improve progress by ensuring a link back to the organisational vision and strategic objectives. In practice, balanced scorecards are used more to fulfill the performance measurement and strategic control functions of strategic management (Kaplan and Norton, 2001) rather than as a guide to effective strategy deployment practices.

Although strategy deployment occupies a central role in strategic management, few conceptual models have been developed of the processes that comprise strategy deployment itself. Models of strategy deployment from a management perspective

include Collins and Huges (1993), Hacker and Akinyele (1998), Noble (1999b – for private sector organizations) and Hacker *et al.* (2001 – for public sector organisations). A limitation of these strategy deployment models is their linear approach in which deployment is depicted as a step-by-step process. There were no frameworks found in the literature that employ a dynamic model of strategy deployment constructs. No benchmarking studies of strategy deployment were found in the literature.

The use of benchmarking in the NZBC network

A number of generations of benchmarking have been identified in the literature (Camp, 1995; Kyro, 2003; Watson, 1993; Yasin, 2002). The use of benchmarking by the NZBC workgroup reflected the evolving concept of benchmarking (Ahmed and Rafiq, 1998; Bhutta and Huq, 1999) and the group functioned on three benchmarking levels. The first was process benchmarking, also called best practice benchmarking (Camp, 1992). A process benchmarking approach has been used by a number of NZBC workgroups to identify and share leading practices within a particular Baldrige CPE category (Saunders and Mann, 2002). The emphasis in process benchmarking is on how processes operate and how to transfer proven good to better practices based on the idea that learning can be made from organisations outside the industry or sector of the benchmarking party (Camp, 1992, 1995; Codling, 1992, 1998).

The second form of benchmarking used by the workgroup was competence benchmarking. According to Kyro (2003) competence benchmarking recognises that the foundation of organisational change processes lies in the change of actions and behaviours of individuals and teams. It brings into benchmarking the organisational behaviour approach to organisational studies (Hodgkinson, 2003). The NZBC networking organisations viewed the benchmarking project as a developmental tool for the participants, who were managers in their enterprises. This was the competence benchmarking aspect of the group's work – sharing and learning about the organisational change processes that support strategy deployment. In support of this developmental focus, two expert speakers in strategic management were engaged to address group sessions.

The third form was networking benchmarking, in which a network of organisations undertook the benchmarking project together. According to Kyro (2003) networking benchmarking is exemplified by learning with others, in addition to learning from others. An example is Prado's (2001) account of Spanish businesses networking for sharing experience in quality improvement. Kyro (2003) states the advantages of networking over other benchmarking approaches are that learning is faster, and the sharing can lead to new practices being invented, rather than simply benchmarking "old" and outdated practices, a criticism that has been leveled at benchmarking public sector practices (Davis, 1998; Magd and Curry, 2003). The present study is an example of networking benchmarking, with 8 of the 15 member organisations of the NZBC network represented in the workgroup. The methods used in these three benchmarking approaches are detailed below.

Research methods

Process benchmarking

The process benchmarking method used by the NZBC was adapted from the 12-step process of Codling (1992). Codling's method has been divided into three areas in Table I, to highlight the role of the group ("workgroup" second column) in the process.

Table I.
The NZBC's
benchmarking process

Project selection	Benchmarking	Application
The NZBC members 1. Select a subject area at a core group meeting	The workgroup 2. Defines the process 3. Profiles potential partners 4. Identifies data sources 5. Collects data 6. Establishes best practice and performance gaps	The members then 7. Establish process differences 8. Target future performance 9. Communicate information 10. Set and adjust the goal 11. Implement changes 12. Review process and set future goals

Source: Adapted from Codling (1992)

The research topic was chosen using a structured selection process (Step 1 in Table I), following a NZBC meeting attended by 13 member organizations that examined the CPE strategic planning category and identified eight potential topics in strategic planning. The selection process ensured that the ultimate research topic was considered by NZBC members to be of practical relevance (Saunders and Mann, 2002). The selected topic was to determine best practices for implementing strategic initiatives.

Group research and competence benchmarking

Group research consists of small groups of people led by a facilitator. It is a qualitative research method in which groups discuss topics that are important for the research topic (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). The workgroup consisted of representatives from eight NZBC organisations, who had formed to identify leading practices for implementing strategic initiatives, employing the benchmarking steps labelled 2-6 in Table I. A researcher from COER acted as the group facilitator. The representatives were all senior managers involved in strategy deployment, and they participated in the study as partners with the facilitator.

Prior to the first session, the participants were given preparatory work to complete. This comprised a series of questions (developed by the NZBC's Director) to identify their organisations' leading practices in strategy deployment and their most important opportunities for improvement in strategy deployment. For the first two sessions, the group operated as a focus group, with members encouraged to share their views, to clarify each other's viewpoints, and provide detailed information and answers to questions about the topic (Greenbaum, 1987; Krueger, 1994). The facilitator's role was to ensure all participants were able to "speak their minds and to respond to the ideas of others" (Walker, 1985, p. 5). This mode of functioning of the group, with members learning and sharing their experiences of deployment, represents the competence benchmarking aspect of the exercise (Kyro, 2003).

Subsequent group meetings analyzed the data collected, and generated and refined the emerging framework for strategy deployment. All meetings were minuted and the minutes and research findings circulated to members. Action plans were agreed and tasks were allocated to team members to complete between meetings.

The workgroup identified common strategy deployment issues among members. Operating definitions and procedures were established. Two broad objectives were agreed: to identify the key dimensions of strategy deployment; and to identify the leading practices for each feature. During the second phase of the study an iterative process was used, with the emergent framework for deployment compared systematically with evidence from case studies and the literature, to assess how well it fitted with the data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994).

A literature review was used to identify theories, concepts, and leading practices in strategy deployment. Seven dimensions of deployment were determined through group discussion of the literature findings, elements of the CPE framework, and the combined experience of group members in deploying strategic initiatives. The seven dimensions were corroborated in a further literature search of the functional management areas that had been identified as important in strategy deployment. A survey (Knuckey *et al.*, 2002) provided data on current NZ business practices in strategic planning. The Quality Award applications of eight Australian CPE award-winning organizations were also evaluated to identify leading practices in strategy deployment (AQC, 1999, 2001).

Case studies and networking benchmarking

In addition to identifying leading deployment practices, the purpose of the case studies was to find evidence that confirmed (or disconfirmed) the emerging deployment framework. A multiple case study methodology was used to investigate the strategy deployment practices of seven NZBC network organisations. This methodology enables theory development through an in-depth investigation of practices and the surrounding context (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994).

Eisenhardt (1989) argues that the choice of case studies in theory building research (as opposed to hypothesis-testing research) relies on theoretical sampling (cases are chosen for theoretical not statistical reasons). The cases may be chosen to fill theoretical categories and provide examples of polar types. Pettigrew (1988) noted that given the limited number of cases that can be studied, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations or polar types in which the process of interest is transparently observable. By choosing diverse organizations for the case studies, the framework that is developed is then applicable to a broad range of organisations (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The seven case study organizations chosen for the study filled theoretical categories and provided examples of polar types. Three organizational dimensions represented by polar types are shown in Table II: size (small/large); ownership (public/private); and industry type (service/product). The smallest organization had between 40 and 99 employees, and the largest over 20,000. At least, two cases within each category allowed the findings to be replicated within categories.

Size	Small	Medium	Large
Number of organizations (<i>N</i> = 7)	2	3	2
<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Public agency</i>	<i>Public sector company</i>	<i>Private sector company</i>
Number of organizations (<i>N</i> = 7)	2	2	3
<i>Industry</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Service and product</i>	<i>Product</i>
Number of organizations (<i>N</i> = 7)	3	2	3

Table II.
The seven case study organizations classified by size, ownership and industry type

The unit of analysis for the case studies was a strategic initiative that the organisation had recently deployed, or was in the process of deploying. The industry sector and the strategic initiatives investigated for each case study organisation are shown in Table III.

Case study data collection

The case studies were conducted to determine current practices and to identify the leading practice tools used by network members for each deployment dimension. Site visits, documents supplied by the organisations, and interviews were used to collect case study data (Step 5 in Table I). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior and middle managers who were involved in deploying strategic initiatives. In semi-structured interviewing, while the questions are planned, the interviewer probes for clarification and deeper understanding (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995;

Food manufacturing	This case study examined a strategic initiative to commercialize third party product technology. It involved forming a strategic alliance with a Canadian corporation. The intent of this alliance was to leverage capabilities in manufacturing and marketing by licensing technology from the Canadian corporation and using it to grow the business
Insurance	The strategic initiative was to improve organisational performance using the CPE framework. "Champions" were appointed for each CPE category. The case study centred on the division who were the champion for the strategic planning criterion of the CPE, and involved the implementation of a strategic management framework for the organisation
Medical laboratory	The broad strategic initiative was to grow services to clients. One strand of the initiative was examined, the formation of a strategic alliance with external laboratories for registering and processing test samples. The case study examined the forming of a strategic alliance with another laboratory to share one overall laboratory information system
Scientific research	The case study examined the forming of strategic alliances between the case study organization and other research agencies to undertake collaborative research programs. The aim was to increase value from existing research programs through partnering. It also involved changing the research programs to target high value markets, making them more attractive to international investors, and improving the potential to commercialize intellectual property
Data management	The company provided electronic business to business transfer of data files and a secure data transfer facility for a utility market. The strategic initiative was to enter new markets off-shore. The case study examined the deployment of a proposal for a data management system in Australia
Dairy manufacturing and marketing	The case study examined the deployment of a strategic framework and a strategic planning model for the operational side of the business, and the implementation of new initiatives arising from the strategic plan
Software development	The case study examined the deployment of a strategic framework in an IT and automation technology development company. It involved deploying a groupware based strategic management system developed by the company. The system was also being implemented on the operational side of the business

Table III.
Industry sectors and the strategic initiatives investigated in the case studies

Miles and Huberman, 1994). Both individual and group interviews were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and returned to each participant for comment and editing. Offering the interviewee the opportunity to comment on the transcripts and case study write-ups is an important way of validating data and gaining new insights (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1994). The detailed case study write-ups for each site were also returned to the participants for comment and valuable feedback was obtained.

Case study analysis

The completed case studies were analysed at workgroup meetings. Using different types of data source (observational data from site visits, interviews, group work) was known to be an effective approach to undertaking business research (Eisenhardt, 1989) and was particularly useful approach for this project. Senior managers from five of the case study organisations participated in the workgroup and this provided an additional dimension to the analysis, as they were able to clarify and comment on issues in the written case studies of their own organisations. This exemplifies the networking benchmarking approach, with the network members benchmarking both their own and other network participants' practices. Practices from each case study were tabulated and after group discussion and comparison with best practices from the literature, were scored by the group on a scale of 1-5. Practices with scores over 4.0 were selected as leading practice examples.

Cross-case analysis consisted of looking for commonalities and patterns in the cases. The leading practice examples were sorted into separate dimensions of strategy deployment. Each dimension was examined for within-group similarities and differences. After discussion by the group of the linkages among the dimensions, the dimensions enabled the framework that had been developed through the literature review and expert opinion to be refined.

Findings

Four of the case studies involved the formation of strategic alliances and three were concerned with aspects of deploying a strategic management framework. Analysis of the case studies identified over 50 leading deployment practices. These practices were classified as either generic to deploying strategy, or specific to forming a strategic alliance or deploying a strategic management framework. Table IV shows an example of the tabulated practices and evidence for one of the dimensions (aligning implementation). The leading practices found for all the dimensions are published in report form (Saunders, 2004).

The analysis of the data that were collected from the group work and case studies generated seven dimensions (constructs) of the deployment of strategic initiatives. Each leading practice was assigned to a dimension and classified as requiring "hard" (systems or analytical) or "soft" (people/social/behavioural) management skills to implement. Some practices required a mix of both "hard" and "soft" management skills. The seven dimensions form the basis of a framework for the deployment of strategic initiatives. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a detailed context for the developed framework. The seven dimensions are shown in Table V with their purpose statements.

Case study	Type of initiative	Practice	Perceived strength	Supporting evidence	Practice score*
A	Generic	New opportunities identified undergo an authority approval process. Has questions on fulfilling the strategy, benefits	Proposed new initiatives must align with strategy. Also allows new ideas/innovations to be assessed and introduced quickly – all employees encouraged to do this	Opportunity form: Some questions are scored. Goes to development manager for assessment	5
B	Generic	Staffing and staff performance plans and incentives are developed from the business plan for the strategic initiative	Improved linkage between deployment of the initiative and HR plan/performance scheme	Human resource plans and policies	5
C	Generic	Vertical integration of strategies – links a hierarchy of plans	Ensures alignment of unit plans with corporate plans	Linked plans	5
D	Generic	Profit plan/budget and business plans are aligned to strategy/strategic initiatives. Person or team has a role to check/challenge business plans	Ensures that strategy is “locked in” the budget for the following year and that operational plans align with strategic direction – continuing feedback loop as the budget is developed	Budget plans from subsidiary companies or divisions are assessed by a team to check alignment with the strategy	5
E	Strategic alliance	Joint heads of agreement signed, and action plans derived from HoA	The action planning process across partner organizations promotes alignment	Heads of agreement document; action plans	5
F	Strategic alliance	Joint action plans developed by partners at each meeting. Separate action plans for each partner also	For alliances, work can be broken down into tasks and assigned to people in different organizations	Action plan circulated and agreed to by partners	5
G	Deploying a strategic management framework	Automated software tools used to facilitate business planning process and track progress against action plans	Helps in the tracking of unresolved issues, report generation. Action plans are linked to strategic goals and objectives	Software system, linkages demonstrated	5

Notes: *Score range of 5, 5 – best, 1 – poor. In this example, table only leading practices (score = 5) are shown

Table IV.
Example of tabulated evidence for aligning implementation

Discussion

The role of the network workgroup

The workgroup was the vehicle for the exchange of experience and knowledge between the network organizations on the deployment of strategic initiatives. Much of this exchange was achieved at the formal meetings of the workgroup. There were four meetings of the workgroup over a ten-month period. Informal sessions at meetings of the whole network were also held. Between these meetings documents were circulated and e-mail and phone contact maintained. The meetings and other contacts helped to create a working team among the participants who were from diverse organisations and who did not previously know each other.

The workgroup provided a unique benchmarking experience for the managers involved. They developed their knowledge and competencies in benchmarking, strategy deployment, and networking. This learning was gained in a number of ways: through their group work during meetings; networking with other participants informally between meetings; lectures by an invited experts in strategic management; and many insights were gained as a result of analysing and discussing the case studies and literature findings.

Three avenues were used to disseminate the workgroup findings. First, they were taken back informally by group participants to be applied as applicable to their organisation’s deployment system. Second, a meeting of the whole NZBC network was also organised at which the participants presented their findings. This gave all NZBC members the opportunity to learn about the workgroup’s findings and apply them using Steps 7-12 of Table I. Third, the findings were also published as a report so that they were available to organisations that were not part of the network (Saunders, 2004).

The framework for strategy deployment

The framework of seven dimensions was derived from analysis of the research literature and validated from the case study data. By filling theoretical categories, providing examples of polar types and examining underlying similarities, the sampling plan for the case studies allowed a theory/framework for the deployment of strategic initiatives to be built that would be applicable to a wide range of organizations (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Note that the seven dimensions are not a step-by-step deployment process to be followed sequentially. A number of the dimensions operate in parallel, for example, communicating and building understanding of the initiative is necessary throughout all phases of deployment. A number of the dimensions are linked, for example

Dimensions of strategy deployment	Purpose of each dimension
1 Communicating the initiative	Ensuring understanding of the strategy
2 Achieving buy-in	Acceptance and adoption by stakeholders
3 Aligning implementation	Actions are aligned to the strategic direction
4 Learning	Continuous evaluation and adaptation
5 Creating the infrastructure for deployment	Organising teams, roles and responsibilities
6 Understanding the business drivers	Awareness of the business reasons for the initiative
7 Identifying deployment options	Identifying and scheduling projects, assessing risk, choosing performance measures

Table V.
Seven dimensions of strategy deployment

communicating the initiative, achieving buy-in and aligning implementation. These three are associated with the “soft” (people/social/behavioural) management skills of changing behaviour and attitudes. Understanding the business drivers, creating the infrastructure for deployment and identifying deployment options form another closely linked group, these three associated with “hard” (analytical or systems) management skills. Other links exist, for example between achieving buy-in, and creating the infrastructure for deployment, where buy-in is increased when teams have responsibility for developing action plans. The learning dimension underpins and supports all the other framework dimensions.

A search of the strategy deployment literature for each framework dimension corroborated the findings. Although there is relatively little literature on the CPE strategy deployment item there are studies from functional management disciplines that relate to and support the seven dimensions identified. The linkages between the dimensions, and a detailed examination of the framework and the supporting literature for each deployment dimension will appear in a forthcoming paper.

Application of the framework

The framework is relevant to deployment of both corporate and business unit strategy. Corporate strategy (strategy developed at the centre of a large organisation) is usually deployed through the business units that report to the centre and so the deployment approach used for corporate or business unit strategy is related in any case (Golden, 1992; Johnson and Scholes, 2002; Koch, 2000). Whether the strategic initiative is developed in the corporate centre or in a business unit, the organisation needs the management and operational skills to implement the initiative. The framework highlights the skills that need to be developed or in place for effective deployment, for example, in communicating the initiative and achieving buy-in. Having the relevant elements of the seven dimensions in place for a particular strategic initiative is supported by the resource-based view that having the appropriate culture, competencies and people are key to successful strategy deployment (Barney, 2002; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Peteraf, 1993).

Limitations of the study

An aspect of the CPE deployment item that the study did not attempt to research was to identify measures of the effectiveness of strategy deployment. The reason this was omitted was that two other NZBC workgroups were investigating best practices in the selection of key performance indicators, and best practices in project management. Both of these topics are integral to strategy deployment, with key performance indicators (measures) incorporated in the framework under “identifying options” and “learning,” and the management of projects in “identifying deployment options.” The framework can evolve as the findings from these and other benchmarking studies are incorporated. Future longitudinal studies could evaluate the effectiveness of leading strategy deployment practices and identify the circumstances that lead to the success or failure of strategy implementation.

Concluding remarks

This paper has attempted to show how benchmarking has been used by a network of New Zealand organisations to improve their deployment of strategic initiatives.

The study has made three main contributions. First, as a practical example of multiple benchmarking methods in action, and particularly as an example of network benchmarking. This should assist benchmarking by other organisations that are part of an existing network, or that wish to create a network similar to the NZBC.

Second, by benchmarking the deployment processes in organizations that are involved in improvement initiatives using the CPE model. No benchmarking studies of strategy deployment were found in the literature. The workgroup members were able to benchmark their organisation's deployment practices against the other participating organisations and against world-class practices as evidenced from the literature and analysis of Quality Award winners' applications.

The third contribution of the research was the development of a broad framework for deployment that is built on prior theory and expands previous models of deployment. The framework furthers understanding of how managers deploy strategic initiatives in a performance excellence environment. It also provides a guide to assist organisations in developing an effective strategy deployment process. The framework dimensions are: communicating the initiative; achieving buy-in; aligning implementation; learning; creating the infrastructure for deployment; understanding the business drivers; and, identifying deployment options.

While the case study organisations were diverse, from both the private and public sectors, and they varied in size, organisational structure and strategic objectives, the cases revealed many common issues in deploying a new strategic initiative. The workgroup concluded that for an organisation to deploy a strategic initiative effectively, leading practices from all seven deployment dimensions should be in place. While none of the NZBC case study organisations exhibited best practice in all facets of deploying a strategic initiative (as assessed against the framework), the benchmarking findings provided a basis for further improvement of their deployment practices. The deployment framework and knowledge of the leading practices found in this study will assist other organisations to effectively implement their strategic initiatives.

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