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PhD THESIS SUMMARY

Benchmarking partnership of cluster enterprises

The concept of benchmarking is so large and flexible that one can try to adapt this process to the conditions of functioning of various socio-economic structures. As a result, some attempts have been made to transfer the benchmarking theory to the cluster, taking into account the specificity of its operations. Confronting the semantics of such categories as a cluster, an enterprise partnership, benchmarking, a cluster partnership and an enterprise benchmarking partnership has been an opportunity to present the view that the essence of a benchmarking partnership for cluster enterprises is: *a mutually beneficial exchange of information according to partnership rules by the cluster companies, their performance and best practices in various areas of activity which leads to improved performance of the benchmarking process.*

The main aim of the doctoral dissertation is to describe the complexity of the benchmarking partnership of cluster enterprises, and to propose a model framework for its development by working out a reference inter-cluster methodology of partnership nature and an identification and an analysis of the key factors favoring and limiting this form of partnership.

For the dissertation needs, eight research questions have been formulated that have been solved in its parts: theoretical-conceptual and empirical, with the use of appropriate methods, techniques, and research tools.

The state of ignorance reflects the following research questions:

1. What is the essence and characteristics of business partnerships as a category of inter-organizational relationships?
2. What are the motives for establishing partnership relationships by the cluster companies?
3. What is the place of intra-cluster benchmarking among types and generations of benchmarking?
4. What is the essence and characteristics of the benchmarking partnership of cluster enterprises?
5. How should the benchmarking partnership be built by cluster businesses taking into account the concept of partnership and benchmarking?
6. What type of partner-type intra-cluster benchmarking (formal or informal) is more commonly implemented by cluster enterprises?
7. Which group of contributing factors (internal or external) has a greater positive impact on the establishment of benchmarking partnerships in the cluster?
8. Which group of limiting factors (internal or external) has a greater negative impact on the establishment of benchmarking partnerships in the cluster?

Two theses of the dissertation come down to the following statements:

1. T1: Benchmarking partnership is a form of partnership cooperation justified for the use by cluster companies, because of its attributes (attributes) that promote mutually beneficial exchange of information about the results achieved and the best practices they use in different areas of an activity.

2. T2: Proper identification of the catalogue of the main factors for the establishment of benchmarking partnerships in the cluster is an essential part of the management process of this partnership.

The following hypotheses have been made:

1. H1: Cluster enterprises are more likely to participate in at least one non-formal benchmarking partnership than in at least one benchmarking project.
2. H2: Favorable internal (corporate) factors have a greater positive impact on the establishment of benchmarking partnerships in the cluster than favoring external factors.
3. H3: Restricting internal (corporate) factors have a greater negative impact on the establishment of benchmarking partnerships in the cluster than constraining external factors.

In the empirical part, the following quantitative methods have been applied: direct research conducted among clusters and experts with the use of questionnaire techniques such as the questionnaire and statistical methods. The concept of solving research problems in the theoretical-conceptual part has been based on a research procedure that included indirect research aimed at analyzing and criticizing literary and legal texts, systematic review of literature with elements of bibliometric analysis and an analysis of the content of documents and websites of clusters.

The first chapter presents the essence of business partnerships as a category of inter-organizational relationships. Chapter two identifies the characteristics of clusters and areas of partner business cooperation in clusters. The third chapter describes the benchmarking process, its classifications and typologies have been ordered, and the benefits, barriers and directions for its development have been shown. Chapter four presents the author's concept of the benchmarking partnership of cluster enterprises. The fifth chapter presents the results of empirical research and the conclusions drawn from them. The final part of the dissertation presents a summary of the research carried out by identifying key research achievements, the implications for management theory and practice, the limitations of the research process, and the direction of future research in the form of the partnership.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the research results related to the validation of the two theses and the positive verification of the three research hypotheses. The following key research achievements may also be considered:

1. Indication of the possibility of resolving a scientific dispute regarding recognition of benchmarking as a method, technique, tool, instrument or process by adopting two perspectives in its definition: static and dynamic.
2. Creation of own logical division of the benchmarking scope, after demonstration of disorganization in the issues in this area.
3. Presentation of the essence, features and inherent elements of benchmarking partnership of enterprises in the cluster resulting from the confrontation and integration of the basic conceptual categories contained in the concept name.
4. Development of two reference methodologies of benchmarking partnership in cluster enterprises.
5. Development of a scheme (model view) illustrating the strength of the influence of the key factors favoring and restricting the establishment of a benchmarking partnership in the cluster.

Key words: *benchmarking partnership, cluster, inter-organizational relations, mutual learning.*

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