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The Business Excellence Journey in UAE Organizations

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Abstract

Purpose: *The business excellence awards have now evolved from a narrow focus of quality management to a broad focus on organizational performance. The UAE has given significant focus to performance excellence through its various programs such as the Dubai Government Excellence Programs, Dubai Quality Award and Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award. However, there is limited research on the experiences of award-winning organizations. In the UAE, we believe that the implementation steps for the business excellence could show some specific activities & practices due to a different power distance leadership culture, context culture - where UAE should belong to the high power distance leadership culture and high context culture - and the multinational mix of the employees. Thus the objectives of this study were to explore the activities that award-winning organizations adopted on embarking upon the journey of excellence.*

Methodology: *A questionnaire survey was used to gather the data. A total of 110 participants from 36 organizations participated in this survey. Survey used open questions to extract the experiences of the award winning organizations. The questionnaire analysis mainly included qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative non-formal method, through the reading of the answers, repeating actions were noted. In the qualitative analysis the practices that were most important for organizations to observe were analysed.*

Findings: *This research extracted the activities that the organizations can follow on their journey towards business excellence. It is notable that organizations opting for the business excellence model*

have previously introduced other improvement programs and systems such as ISO standards. Further, the business excellence model has proven to be an effective tool for comparison and benchmarking purposes between the organizations. Leadership indeed is an important driving force of quality improvement and for the effective implementation of a business excellence model. However, there is no evidence of different practices & steps which would strongly differ from the activities spread across other countries. An in-depth qualitative study is needed to explore the context further to propose context specific actions.

Originality: *This research makes an original contribution by adopting an empirical method to study the actions and practices that the UAE organizations have taken on their journey of excellence. It proposes a model that can be used by the organizations to embark upon their excellence journey. They represent a solid starting point for aspiring organizations.*

Keywords: *total quality management (TQM), business excellence model (BEM), national quality award (NQA), implementation steps, continuous improvement*

Introduction

Interest in quality management (QM) has increased in many sectors because it is known to improve organizational performance (Asif et al., 2013). For decades, the TQM system has been recognised as an important platform supporting continuous improvement and measuring business performance; the application of business excellence, through

an understanding and use of business excellence model criteria, concepts, and values, has a wide appeal to many organisations (Mann et al., 2011). Organisational excellence is the level that organisations aim to achieve (Araujo and Sampaio, 2013). In searching for sustainable excellence, organisations are constantly seeking new ways to adjust to the emerging requirements of technological development, legislation, competition, the global environment, as well as customers and other stakeholders. On a national level, national quality awards (NQA) have been launched to support the TQM implementation via the systematic implementation of continuous improvement in private and public organisations using business excellence models (Kern Pipan et al., 2014). The existing BEMs have, in most cases, been developed or supported by national bodies as a basis for award programmes and for the widespread adaption of the principles and methods of TQM and business excellence (Dahlgard et al., 2013).

In 1992, the Dubai Quality Award was established based on EFQM criteria. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) aspires to make a mark on the world global competitive index and intends to improve organizational excellence throughout the country. In 2010, the government released its strategic vision document, Vision 2021, affirming its commitment to furthering the UAE's leadership in competitiveness and excellence. To this end, the UAE has established various private and government sector quality awards to foster and increase organizational performance. Furthermore, the announcement of a fourth generation excellence award for the government sector in March 2015 (www.gulfnews.com) is yet again a continued commitment to organizational excellence. However, how the companies achieve and sustain a competitive advantage has remained an open question (Kern Pipan et al., 2014). Research aimed at insights of award winning organizations in the UAE is still sketchy (Ahrens, 2013) and research on how

organizations prepare for excellence is rare too (Gomišček and Pibernik, 2011).

Various authors have proposed step-by-step road maps with best practices, from which organizations gradually benefit (Zairi & Alsughayir 2011; Gomišček and Pibernik, 2011). However, these cannot be generalized for any context. Different subsets of TQM practices are determined by different types of cultures (Prajogo and McDermott, 2005). The organizational culture therefore should have an impact on the way how an organization prepares for implementation of business excellence. The research on business excellence implementation in UAE context reports that there is a distinct difference, or even a conflict, between the characteristics on the cultural dimensions and some of the tenets of TQM or business excellence (McAdam et al., 2013). They further established that from practical perspective, there is a need for UAE organizations to develop adapted culturally based approaches for implementing business excellence (McAdam, 2013). This research reinforces above context and makes an assumption that the Business Excellence steps might be different and there are different set of actions the UAE organizations need to focus upon.

That is why we believe that the implementation steps for the Business Excellence could show some specific actions due to a different power distance leadership culture and context culture - where UAE should belong to the high power distance leadership culture and high context culture – as well as the multinational mix of the employees.

Excellence is a combination of many factors and it is essential to understand them from the perspectives of award-winning organizations. Therefore it is of key importance that national role models (the award-winning organizations) are studied in pursuit of extracting the best practices for excellence. Thus the objectives of this study were to explore the practices and steps that

these organizations experienced on embarking upon the journey of excellence. The initial exploration of key practices should provide a roadmap on embark upon excellence path. The aspiring organizations will benefit from a step-by-step path as a provision to implementing the excellence framework. It will provide guidance as to the order and importance of each key factor that needs to be taken into consideration, based on the experiences of local organizations in regard to possible context specific practices/steps. This should help in the implementation of an effective program for UAE organizations, especially the organizations intending to take the path towards business excellence.

Background

Business excellence, in its simple sense, means doing things better and constantly improving human resource, systems, processes, and organizations in a competitive environment (Arasli, 2012). Organizations throughout the world adopt business excellence frameworks to guide their business strategy and continuous improvement; some seek and receive awards which recognize high levels of achievement against the criteria of these frameworks (Brown, 2013). Result of research studies carried out in the USA, Europe, New Zealand and Australia among companies applying for NQA have confirmed the positive effects of the long-term systematic use of TQM tools and approaches on the development of QM system (Oakland and Tanner, 2008), companies' performance (Angell and Corbett, 2009; Araujo and Sampaio, 2013) and financial results (Hendricks and Singhal, 2001; York and Miree, 2004; Boutler et al, 2013): Hendricks and Singhal (2001) investigated NQA winners in the USA and reported on significantly better financial results in the value of common stock, operating income, sales and return on sales, number of employees and asset growth as compared with a control group of

companies. Boutler et al. (2013) performed similar empirical research in Europe, and their results showed that higher performance was achieved by the TQM-oriented award winning companies which also confirmed the findings of Hendricks and Singhal (2001). Araujo and Sampaio (2013) studied Portuguese organisations recognised against EFQM model and their results showed links with management commitment and positive effects on organisational performance. Mann et al. (2011) investigated the use of BEM in Asian organisations and reported on significantly improved processes and business results performance as compared with industry average. According to Jimenez and Costa (2009), Vouzas and Gotzamani (2005) and Lee and Lee (2013), human resource practices play a key role in the TQM implementation process. An analysis of these findings shows that in a number of cases applying for NQA and the systematic use of continuous improvements indirectly shows positive effects on financial and non-financial results among companies participating in NQA.

NQAs play an important role in promoting and rewarding quality and business excellence (Xie et al., 1998). National quality awards or business excellence frameworks therefore aim to promote quality awareness, understand what is required for quality excellence, and to share information on successful strategies and their benefits (Lin and Su, 2013). Business excellence models most often are developed or supported by national bodies as a basis for award programs (Dahlgaard et al., 2013). On the other side, just few studies on business excellence conducted within the UAE context highlight issues relating to excellence implementation (MacAdam et al., 2013).

The more specific characteristics might be the power distance leadership culture and context culture. Power distance is one of the five dimensions of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 1991). Power distance describes how people who are part

of a specific culture understand and accept power relationships in a distinct organization, including the power inequality among the employees. Individuals in cultures demonstrating a high power distance are very deferential to figures of authority and generally accept an unequal distribution of power, while individuals in cultures demonstrating a low power distance willingly question authority and expect to participate in decisions that affect them.

High-context culture and the opposing low-context culture indicate a culture's tendency to use high-context messages over low-context messages in routine communication (Hall, 1976). Words and word choice become very important in high-context communication, since a few words can communicate a complex message very effectively to an in-group (but less effectively outside that group), while in a low-context culture communication style strongly depends on explicit and direct language and the value of a single word is less important.

MacAdam et al. (2013) aimed to explore the implementation issues of the business excellence model and the process of self-assessment from both management and employee perspectives in a large

government organization in the UAE. Rowland-Jones (2012) investigated the use of an 'action modalities approach' to conceiving and delivering a healthcare management development program in the UAE. Ahrens (2013) conducted a study tracing the evolution of the Dubai Government Excellence Program (DGEP) with the purpose to report on the development of the DGEP awards. The findings suggest that DGEP exhibited three key rationales since its inception and it showed some of the ways in which excellence awards can respond to changing political and contextual imperatives by adopting changing rationales.

However, there is a paucity of studies relating to business excellence in Middle Eastern organizations where a critical cultural perspective is adopted, even though there has been considerable resources expended by Government in initiatives such as the Dubai Government Excellence Program (McAdams et al., 2013). Further, the few studies stated above only focus on the government sector when shedding light on implementation perspectives. Recent studies of national quality award winning organizations in Table 2.

Table 1: List of Recent Quality Award Studies

Sr no	Year	Country	Award	Reference
1	2004	Sweden	Swedish Quality Award	Eriksson, H. (2004).
2	2005	Greece	EFQM	Vouzas, F. K., & Gotzamani, K. D. (2005)
3	2007	Turkey	EFQM model	Tutuncu, O., & Kucukusta, D. (2007)
4	2008	Jordan	Jordan Quality award	Rawabdeh, I. A. (2008)
5	2008	Kenya	National Quality Award	Marwa, S., & Zairi, M. (2008).
6	2008	Australia	Australian Quality Award	Grigg, N., & Mann, R. (2008)
7	2009	Fiji	National Quality Award	Djerdjouri, 2004
8	2009	Brazil	Brazilian Quality Award	Cauchick Miguel, P. A., & Campos, L. M. D. S. (2013)
9	2010	Spain	EFQM model	Santos-Vijande, M. L., & Alvarez-Gonzalez, L. I. (2007)
10	2010	China	China Quality Award	Yong Xiang, J., He, Z., Ho Suh, Y., Young Moon, J., & Fen Liu, Y. (2010)
11	2011	Slovenia	Slovenian Business Excellence Prize (EFQM)	Kern Pipan, K., Gomišček, B., Kljajić, M., & Jesenko, M. (2011).
12	2011	New Zealand	New Zealand Business Excellence Award	Angell, L. C., & Corbett, L. M. (2009)
13	2013	Taiwan	Taiwan National Quality Award	Lin, C. S., Chen, L. F., Su, C. T., & Kon, T. C. (2013).

The proposed this study aims at identifying steps for embarking upon quality journey that will serve as a map for those UAE organizations setting out on their own excellence journeys considering the characteristics in the light of the UAE context of the organizational culture in private organizations.

The Dubai Quality Awards

The Dubai Quality Award is based on the excellence model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). It has been one of the most popular quality and organizational performance excellence awards in the UAE. The awards have been in existence since 1992 with the main purpose of:

- Recognizing the achievements of those companies that improve the quality of their goods and services and provide an example to others;
- Providing specific guidance for UAE organizations that wish to learn how to achieve high quality performance.

The award eligibility expanded to include all sectors of the economy. The award applicants undergo rigorous and thorough evaluation and scrutiny from teams of experienced examiners and a national panel of judges based on a rigorous set of criteria, called the DQA Award Criteria based on the EFQM Model (www.dubaided.gov.ae).

There are three different categories of the Dubai Quality Award: (i) The Dubai Quality Award Gold (DQAG) presented to organizations from all sectors of the economy that have been previous winners of the Dubai Quality Award (DQA); (ii) The Dubai Quality Award (DQA) presented to enterprises in different sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, services, tourism, construction, finance, professional, and trade. Winners may apply for the Gold category three years from the date of receiving their feedback report; and (iii) The Dubai Quality Appreciation Program (DQAP) is presented to winners as

appreciation for quality effort and in acknowledging the work on an organization's journey toward excellence (www.dubaided.gov.ae).

Methodology

This study used a questionnaire survey that was carried out among the Dubai Quality Award winners. The survey comprised two parts. First part included a set of questions focused on description of the organization and the second part was related to actions that were undertaken by the organization on their journey to excellence. The questions also included whether the organizations had adopted any quality management approaches. The two main open ended questions were "What were the steps taken by your organization?" and "What factors do you consider as the most important?". The sampling method used was purposive sampling as the idea was to capture the experience of award winning organizations. The questionnaire was thus distributed to the winning organizations with the help of Dubai Quality Award office. A total of 110 responses from 36 organizations were recorded. The questionnaire analysis mainly included qualitative methods. In the qualitative non-formal method, through the reading of the answers, repeating actions were noted. Simultaneously frequency of repetition was noted and depicted numerically. In doing so, care was taken not to neglect other important data in the selection process. Further in formal way content was analysed qualitatively.

The following section presents the analysis of these key questions and related discussions based on the data analysis.

The Results

The survey data provided many rich insights into the question: *What factors require the most effort for implementing a business excellence framework ?* The responses mainly concentrated around the TQM

principles as shown in the brief excerpts below:

[...spreading the culture across the organisation.. leadership commitment and belief. Understanding the framework and aligning to the framework in terms of processes and initiatives to be implemented .. Aligning the people towards a common goal 3. If the people are trained to do improvements before we go for the award then things are in place to go for the Business award. commitment of the Senior Management .]

[.A strong and qualified group of managers who are willing to drive the organization to achieve the required level of success ... Open minded Departmental Managers 4. a clearly defined organizational Vision/Plan. Resources at right time and right place..]

[...management commitment to excellence and able to accept changes stakeholder engagement and supporting developing competencies and encouraging creativity and innovation...leadership commitment continuous improvement strategy...awareness about what you are doing cross functional teams and employment aspiring to take the next level of incentives linking of tasks end to end ensuring that innovation is key aspect sustaining continuous improvement]

innovation and sustained model ..innovation creativity and sustenance improvement

[..excitement and team work. Employee engagement ...society results, bring in all employees and their engagement; team work; commitment at all levels of organization training on the framework review of existing systems change management. innovation-focus team-implement ideas...vision of leaders and active participation of leaders; BSC, vision mission, CSR, employee locus employee satisfaction retention of key employee implementation of process...]

[..process improvements and documentation ..CQI - continuous quality improvement

processes to be measured and employees available to educate and train people for all importance

leadership support and team work...commitment to quality interest and leadership create excellence culture achieve 95 percent of customer satisfaction.]

[preparing team for change acceptance of change...understanding the model...support from management focus company vision, mission and core values align to the award model and achieve award top management involvement revising standards and procedures...strategy...align people and process collecting and analysing the right data for 3-4 years buy-in of leaders at all level

[..developing a work culture is the most important factor and to maintain consistency in the area is very challenging. Organizational culture. Convincing the model will achieve results ad after convincing working them believe and live it]

[collecting information. Vision values key aspirations...involvement of cross functional teams involvement of leaders at all levels...commitment persuasiveness....consistent quality and process implementation. Willingness from leaders effort from leaders....involvement of key stake holders

[change from within the organisation to strive towards business excellence and alignment of all staff to achieve that standards ...organisational commitment clarity and ethical standards long term practices...]

[consistency...involvement of all employee's workers commitment...Innovations Efficiency Balancing Benchmarking]Further the responses received for the implementation factors are shown in figure 1-9 below.



Figure 2 : Top Management Commitment

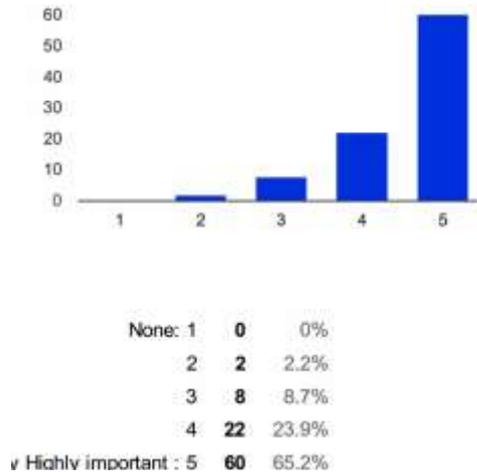


Figure 6 : Policy and Standards Documentation

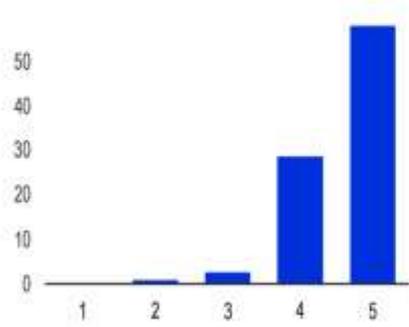


Figure 3 : Training

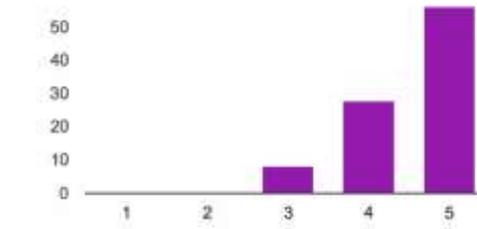


Figure 7: Documentation

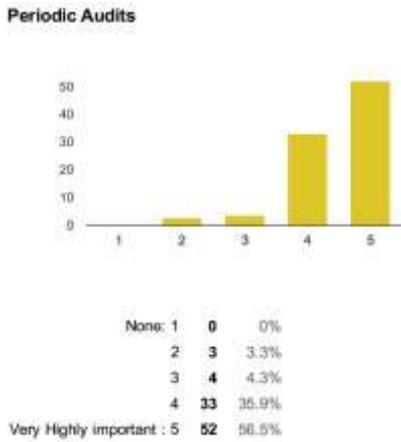


Figure 4: Periodic Audits

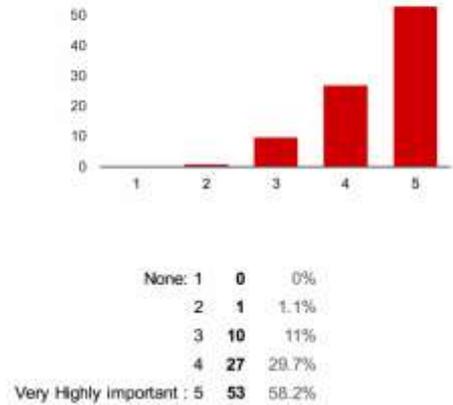


Figure 8: Workers Commitment

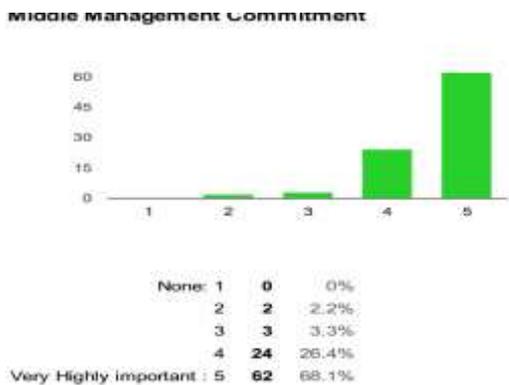


Figure 5: Middle Management Commitment

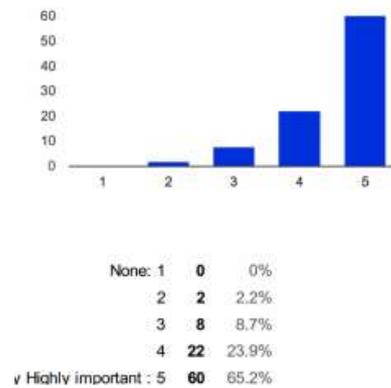


Figure 8: Workers Commitment

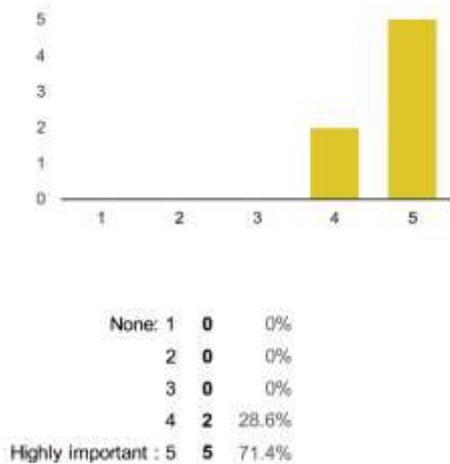


Figure 9: Customer Focus

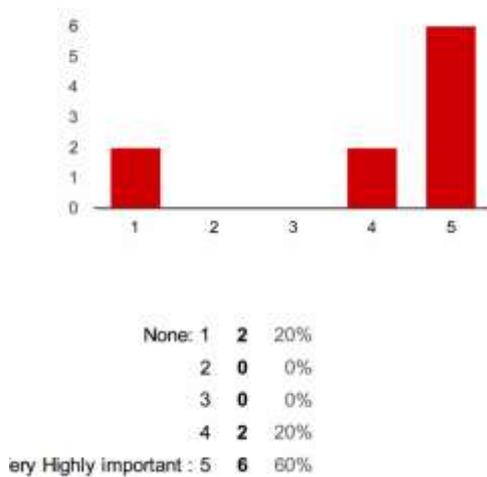


Figure 10: Strategy

Discussion: The Road Map of UAE Organizations

This section presents the main activities that were reported by the participants on their way to business excellence in light of proposing the steps for embarking on excellence journey. Based on the questionnaire replies to the open questions posed, we extracted the frequency of activities and their importance levels. These findings were then projected into substantial and chronological sequence and thus formed the steps that should provide a direction and support in consideration, planning and implementation of the activities on the journey of introducing the model of excellence. These steps are conceptualized as guidance to organizations that are beginning to take the path of excellence in

terms of learning from the experiences of the DQA winners.

Table 2: Best practices on the way to Business Excellence

Step #	QA Actions	Practices
1	Top management involvement, commitment and support	Determine and understand the purpose Create awareness Strategy and strategy planning Form a core team & assign responsibilities and reporting structure
2	Involvement of employees & planning	Employee engagement and involvement Meetings and communication Defining targets Prepare action plans
3	Adaption of the model	Understanding the model in depth Model adaption Fine tuning and/or process improvement Training for employees as needed Setting measures Process and procedure alignment Review of the model with employees Model deployment
4	Self-Assessment	Self-Assessment workshops at department level Mentor support Gather evidences Gap analysis
5	Continuous improvement	Audits and checks Corrective actions External feedback/external help Benchmarking
6	Preparing for the award	Documentation Planning for site visits; mock sessions Providing support to the assessment team

Top Management Involvement, Commitment and Support

72% Winning organizations as shown in Figure 1 pointed out that their journey towards excellence began with the *commitment and support*, of the leadership. *Leadership determined the purpose* and

exhibited their willingness to embark upon the excellence journey, to this end they *ensured to engage employees* and took stock of current scenario to determine not only the readiness but to spread across the *real awareness and purpose of adopting an excellence framework*. The focus also remained to prepare an action plan, assign responsibility, reporting structures and formed a core team to action the project.

Nevertheless, many authors reported that management commitment, organisational culture, team work, values and communication had a significant influence on the successful introduction of TQM in the companies (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Robinson and Schroeder, 2004; Dahlgaard-Park and Dahlgaard, 2007; Jimenez and Costa, 2009; Mann et al., 2011, Choi et al., 2012; Nasim et al., 2013, Lee and Lee, 2013). Furthermore Araujo and Sampaio (2013) who studied Portuguese EFQM recognised organisations reported on connection between the level of management commitment and successful TQM implementation the companies.

The key activity that organizations included in our research analysed with their leadership was to determine and understand the purpose of the excellence journey. Indeed leadership is the important driving force in EFQM implementation (Doeleman, Have & Ahaus, 2014). Specially, the top management plays a crucial role in propagating values in the organization (Savolainen, 2000).

Our observation complies with the findings of Angell and Corbett (2009), who determined that, for a successful implementation of the business excellence principles into an organization, it is necessary to consider the approach »from top to bottom« and the integration of the top management.

Similarly Dahlgaard et al. (2013) reported on integration of BEM with management tools and the organisational culture for guiding an organisation towards business

excellence. Calvo-Mora et al. (2005) noted 'Leadership and Commitment' have a strong, significant positive influence on 'Policy & Strategy' and a significant positive influence on 'People'. Moreover, adopting a business excellence framework is a task that requires commitment, communication, and co-operation and therefore a clear vision, an appropriate culture as well as willingness to change can facilitate the implementation of excellence framework (Metaxas & Koulouriotis, 2014).

Involvement of Employees & Planning

Following the step 1, winning organizations engage employees to consult and seek feedback on the initiative. They enlist the approaches needed; prepare plan and hold gatherings and meetings as necessary. Although the results don't echo the presence strongly, but does acknowledge the presence of employee involvement in the process. However, involving employees and their satisfaction are factors that are identified as two very important drivers of continuous improvement and customer satisfaction (Eskildsen and Dalgaard, 2004; Pina and Selles, 2008; Sit et al., 2009). According to Robinson and Schroeder (2004) stimulating employee ideas (proposals for improvements) is crucial part of TQM implementation. It is further noted that winning organizations emphasis on developing an effective people strategy (Brown, 2013). According to Jimenez and Martinez (2009), Vouzas and Gotzamani (2005) and Lee and Lee (2013), human resource practices play a key role in the excellence journey.

Adaption of the Excellence Model and its Alignment to the Organization

This step is the major developmental stage for the organization. It is now necessary to understand the model and begin to align the existing practices to the DQA enablers and find ways to fine tune the operations to meet the requirements. Organizations consult the DQA offices for deeper understanding of the model and hold workshops and trainings

to prepare their organization in the direction of excellence requirements. A list of approaches that are needed within the units to comply by the model criteria are needed to be identified at this stage. *Fine-tuning and prosing changes to the processes in line with the criteria of the national quality award or the EFQM framework* are some of the key actions that are necessary at this stage as illustrated by the participants of this study. These actions are crucial because, in light of a recent finding those organizations should avoid modifying the award model chosen (Zairi & Alsughayir 2011).

Self-Assessment

UAE organizations view self-assessment as an important step on their journey of excellence. These steps comprises of activities such as *gap analysis, audit and review, corrective action plan, and working on improvement of processes and procedures*. The practice of rigorous self-assessment helps organizations to work more successfully and constitutes a comprehensive, systematic and regular exercise for the evaluation of activities/results by organizations (Araújo and Sampaio, 2014). Self-assessment is a great tool that helps organizations to determine the strengths and weaknesses and to build upon them. Mann and Grigg (2004) examined companies that systematically used BEMs, and found positive effects on benchmarking and self-assessment results. Organizations' motivation for the self-assessment purpose is not just about winning a prize, but adopting a methodology to assess their progress toward TQM and excellence as found in studies other countries (Araújo & Sampaio, 2014). UAE organizations regard self-assessment as key for gap analysis and regard the assessment report as a valuable assessment to continuously improve their processes. Mønsted and Føns (2002) note that one of the most significant advantages of using the EFQM model of excellence is the introduction of self-assessment. A model of excellence can be a valuable diagnostic tool

for detecting the advantages and opportunities of an organization.

Continuous Improvement

Improvement is the key factor for businesses to move from good to better, and then further, from better to the best (Chang & Chen, 2013). *Seeking external feedback and benchmarking* are some the vital practices that were proposed by our respondents for ensuring continuous improvement within their organizations. Continuous improvement is needed due to changes in the business environment, the emergence of new management systems and the importance of quality management itself (Sanchez and Blanco, 2014). Our respondents mentioned *corrective actions are taken after the reviews or audits*. Assessment indeed is a vital procedure that results in a series of improvements (Metaxas and Koulouriotisa, 2014). Improvement areas create a focus for analysis and the establishment of improvement plans and their implementation. They enable the process of learning and knowledge conception within the organization—which helps stakeholders to understand the root causes of problems before formulating a resolution. Seeking external feedbacks and benchmarking the practices generally are good action oriented practices that help to identify opportunities for improvement.

Prepare the Documentation for Participation in the Award

The winning organizations also show their great commitment to the award process as well. Mostly the organizations ensure to gather their evidences in preparation for their application take into consideration the process very seriously and prepare their documentation and prepare for the site visit. This also emphasizes that the award process is indeed rigorous and required careful consideration. Organizations prepare themselves through mock audits, take advises and consultancies from the experienced and develop on their proposal. The three stages are indeed crucial for the

overall excellence journey and therefore indeed should be viewed as a cycle incorporating improvements in the various processes. The findings of a research among award winners in New Zealand conducted by Angell and Corbett (2009) showed that external assessment played very important role in promotion of continuous improvement and confirmed substantial improvements in non-financial results such as strategic planning, measurement analysis and knowledge management capabilities.

It is also visible from the analysis that the winning organizations begin their journey through the adoption of the quality management systems majorly as shown in the figure 2. About 88% of the organizations had implemented ISO 9001 standards while at least 285 of the organizations also exhibited other industry specific systems such as OHSAS, HACCP or JCI.

Clearly, DQA has provided a great opportunity for the organizations to embrace on excellence journey. Vokurka et al. (2000), Dalgaard-Park (2008), Araujo and Sampaio (2013), and Dahlgaard et al. (2013) argued that in the pursuit of TQM and Excellence organisations realised that the NQA also offered models and tools for implementing a quality strategy, benchmarking, best practices, performing self-assessments and achieving improvement.

However, every organization has to find its own process and an optimal selection of TQM tools, techniques and approaches (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Robinson and Schroeder; 2004) in order to exploit the advantages of their introduction. Investing in excellence however contributes to business performance (Dahlgaard et al., 2013) and also guides the business strategy and continuous improvement in organizations (Brown, 2013).

Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to conduct an analysis of winning organizations on their

journey of excellence to identify the various steps undertaken by them on the way towards excellence in the light of the context of the UAE which can be characterized by: high power distance leadership culture, high context culture and multinational mix of the employees. They represent a good start point for aspiring organizations. These actions are conceptualized into 6 steps. Each step is equally important for the success of the excellence journey in the organization.

It is notable that organizations opting for the Excellence Model have previously worked with other improvement standards such as ISO standards. We might see that the added value of the business excellence model is offering a new strategic framework for organizational improvement. Further, the model has proven to be an effective tool for comparison and benchmarking purposes, between organizations. Leadership indeed is an important driving force of quality improvement and for an effective implementation of the excellence model.

Although UAE context is oriented towards high power distance leadership culture, high context culture and multinational mix of the employees, no distinct practices or steps could be detected rather strong similarities with previous research. This might be most possibly attributed to the clear definition of the EFQM model, trainings provided in a similar way as they are organized on the basis of the “*standardized*“ EFQM trainings and organizations are using similar approaches to self-assessment which define a similar process of self-assessment as in other countries as well as the influence of the already existing quality management standards & approaches which have been widely used in the international “mother organizations”. Taking the profiles of the companies participating in the study into account, it can also be concluded that these organizations are characterized by a desire to pursue quality, given that most of them started their journey towards quality through the ISO 9001 standards and moved onto

implementing the excellence framework. It is recommended that organizations adopt business excellence frameworks for greater impact on business performance and to begin their ongoing journey of continuous improvement.

Future Research

Although the steps recognized in the first stage of the study mostly represent the international experience and standards, these similarities can be attributed to the well-established widely adaptable EFQM excellence model based on which DQA criteria is established. The emphasis of strong trainings and usage of approaches such as self-assessment and continuous

improvement, the organizations strongly tend to follow the templates. At an outset these are widely known practices from the field study, a deeper analysis as to how culture plays a role and how it depicts the course of action is a future contribution of this study for which in depth query through qualitative research using structured interviews is needed. This may then call for studying and developing a quality or business excellence model where cultural context with its values would be addressed. However, this research makes an original contribution by maiden study of the steps that the UAE organizations have taken on their journey of excellence.

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