

“It’s assessment, Jim, but not as you know it.”

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One could imagine cult TV programme Star Trek’s Mr. Spock saying this variation of his famous phrase to Captain Kirk if he knew about the Excellence Model and some of the many ways in which it can be used that were perhaps not foreseen during its development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) Excellence Model[®] has existed for about 12 years and represents a stretching generic picture of organisational excellence – one that looks to the future, not just past & present. The Model is based on total quality and represents a blue print to aid ‘systems thinking’.

One of the Model’s many key strengths is the regular review of its applicability to what’s happening now and in the near future for organisations. The extensive regular review processes involve consultations with EFQM members, academia and others about what’s important to organisations, and what’s coming down the track, to ensure that the Model remains up to date. Changes to the Model structure have been seen over the years with ‘subjects’ being repositioned, new ones being introduced and others being strengthened by clearer linkages and so on. Thus it continues to represent a very comprehensive framework for any organisation wishing to manage and improve the way it operates.

Using the Model within an organisation usually involves some form of assessment, preferably self-assessment, although not always. When the Model was launched in Europe, as well as being the framework for the European Quality Award it was seen as a tool to help organisations compare themselves against a ‘picture of excellence’ and to provide possible clues as to where improvements could be focused. The outputs were lists of strengths, lists of areas for improvement and an assessment score. Many organisations still see these as the essential reasons for using the Model and they continue to improve as a result.

However, whilst the Model itself has evolved, it is sometimes forgotten or even not known that the ways in which the Model can be used have also increased, and some organisations now find that it is an invaluable ‘multi-function tool’. It could be surmised that this is the result of improved understanding of the Model, its components and greater practical knowledge of how it works. After all, one of the themes running through the Model is innovation, which is what we have seen with some of these methods.

This paper gives a short contextual overview of the Model (section 2) and then illustrates (section 3), in a practical way, less familiar ways in which the Model can be used. In the form of two ‘mini case studies’ it highlights the actions and benefits seen, hoping to stimulate others to take the Model, shape it and to use it to suit. As the paper’s title suggests, its use is often based on assessment but maybe not as narrowly focused as many people currently understand it to be.

2. THE EFQM EXCELLENCE MODEL - OVERVIEW

The ‘fundamental concepts’ underpinning the Excellence Model reflect its total quality origin. Ample information about them is available elsewhere, so we merely list them and make the point that they are unlikely to give a major surprise to anyone familiar with desirable management approaches for the 21st century:

- Customer Focus
- People Development & Involvement
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Results Orientation
- Continuous Learning, Innovation & Improvement
- Management by Processes & Facts
- Partnership Development
- Leadership & Constancy of Purpose

The EFQM Excellence Model then takes the following structure. (The notes following the criterion titles are not part of the normal illustration, we have added them as short explanations).

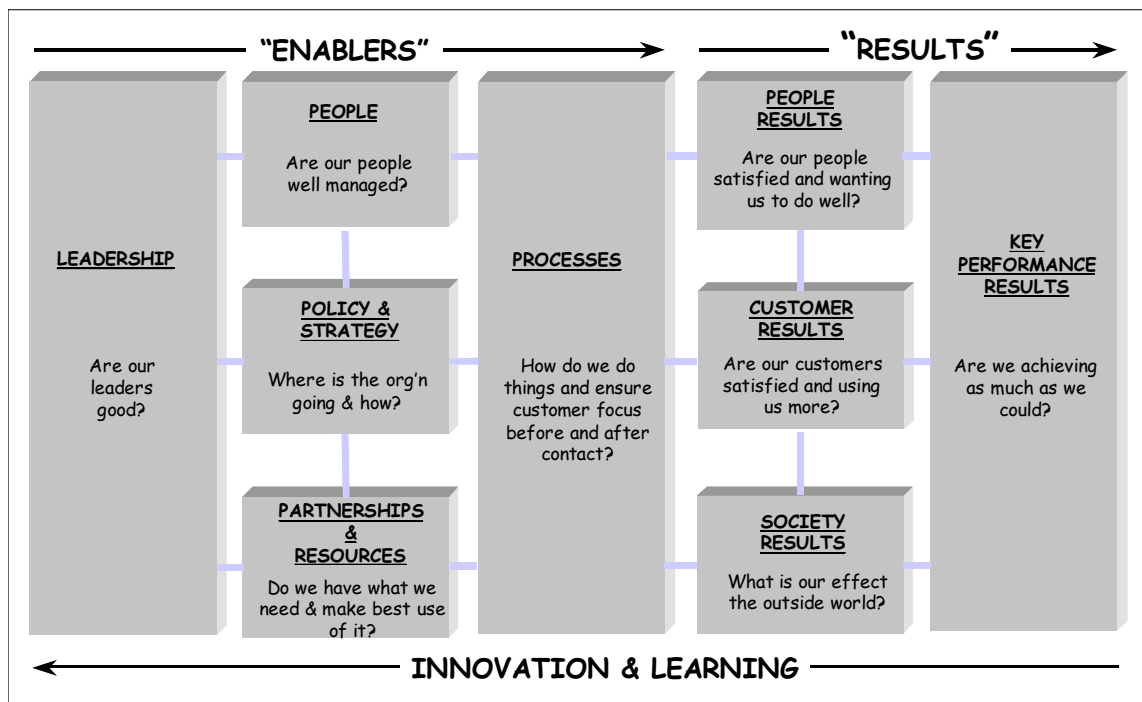


Figure 1: The EFQM Excellence Model (® A registered trademark of the EFQM)

The 9 criteria are sub-divided into a total of 32 parts, and within these there are around 300 guidance points (things to consider doing/measuring). But the Model does not tell an organisation in detail exactly what it must do and how. It encourages people to THINK about their organisation and take appropriate action – much more valuable than a mere tick list.

The arrows above and below the boxes in the diagram are an integral part of the Model, and introduce its systemic nature. The top arrows illustrate that the ‘enablers’ (the way the work is done) influence across the Model from left to right, ultimately determining the ‘results’ that are achieved. The right to left arrow along the base shows that the results achieved should be used to assess the effectiveness of how things are done. (EFQM 2003)

3. CASE STUDIES

3.1 : using the Model to assess the effectiveness of project design and implementation

3.1.1 SCENARIO:

A financial services organisation had decided to transfer many day-to-day tasks from its national network of branches to a smaller number of regional ‘back office’ centres. These different centre types were designed along function lines, such as telephone contact, accounts maintenance, lending, and so on. The centres were due to open at different times, it was a staggered opening schedule, rather than trying for a ‘big bang’ approach to open everything at the same time. The branches themselves were to become more akin to retail outlets.

The organisation was already a ‘user’ of the Excellence Model in the traditional sense of self-assessment and wanted to see whether the Model’s framework and linkages could help provide reassurance that all aspects of design and implementation had been considered effectively in support of its multi-million pound investment. It also desired a process of continual learning and maximising of knowledge from each of the centres as they were ‘rolled out’.

3.1.2 THE APPROACH:

The generic self-assessment process, as outlined below, was used to guide the design of the most appropriate process to achieve the organisation’s objectives.

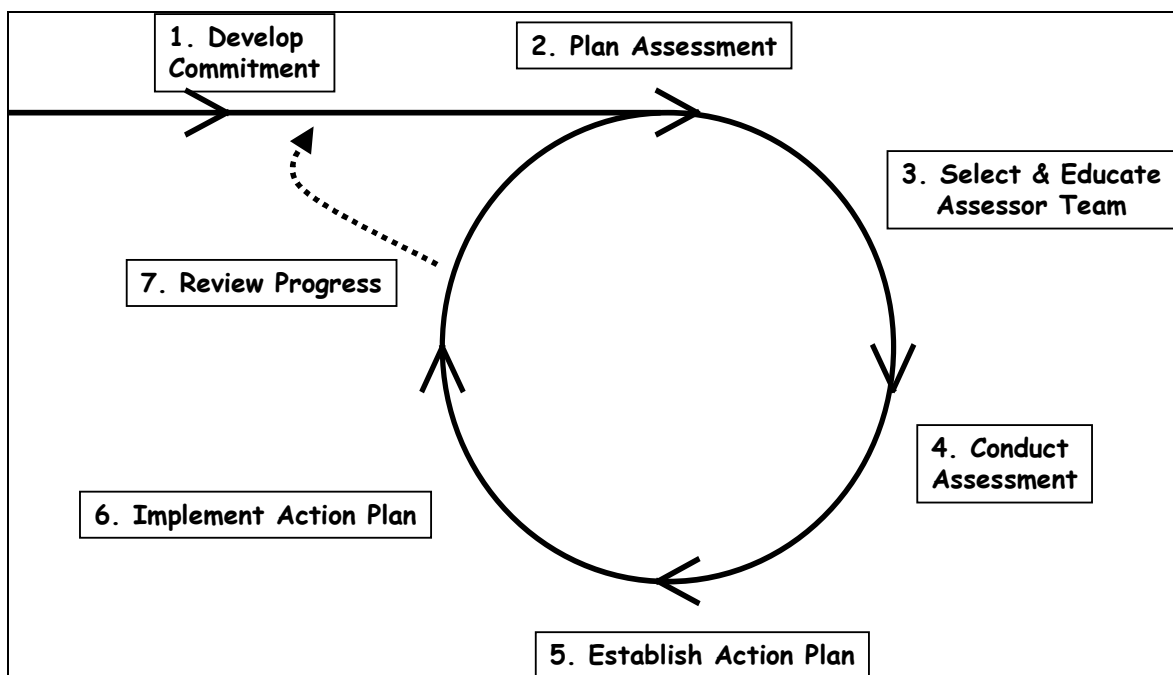


Figure 2: Generic self-assessment process

The key innovations included in this example use of the Model were the ‘future state’ assessment aspect and the subsequent identification of project design ‘gaps’ to be used in ongoing project planning and implementation. The following table outlines the stages of the self-assessment process and some of the main actions and benefits seen in this specific use.

Table 1: some key actions and benefits of this assessment method

1. Develop Commitment	
Action	Benefits
Leaders and managers involved in the design and implementation of the various centre types were given an understanding of the Excellence Model and their ideas sought on how best it could be used.	Leaders had comfort in knowing that they and their people were to be involved. Also that their projects were to be tested against world class performance represented by the Model; the independent framework would help ensure that all projects would be tested robustly on the same basis.
2. Plan Assessment	
Action	Benefits
<p>The planning of the assessment focused on education and a detailed methodology that could be replicated across each centre type.</p> <p>As the centres were at different stages in their design and implementation with some very close to being 'live' and others still on 'the drawing board' there needed to be a satisfactory plan for all.</p> <p>The result was a 'future state' assessment and site visit approach.</p>	<p>The methodology adopted allowed all centre types to be involved in ensuring that they would get benefits from the process, including good practice learnings from 'live' centres prior to additional centres being opened.</p> <p>The 'future state' view needed the project teams to envision their centres in richer detail than by project plans alone.</p>
3. Select & Educate Assessor Team	
Action	Benefits
<p>Assessor Teams were selected from all centre type design teams and an extensive programme of Excellence Model training was carried out to ensure that knowledge levels were consistent across teams.</p> <p>The assessment process was established and communicated to the assessor teams.</p>	<p>The training programme gave the assessors a thorough understanding of excellence and greatly assisted their personal development.</p> <p>There was a real enthusiasm at being able to review their own 'centre-type' designs using the Model and to compare with other centres.</p>
4. Conduct Assessment	
Action	Benefits
<p>There were several phases to the assessment:</p> <p>a) Initially, assessments were carried out using the designs and plans for the new centres (against the criteria of the Model) to identify obvious gaps: the assessment teams tried to 'predict' what the centres should look like about 6 months after opening based on their plans. Likely strengths and areas for improvement were identified and the whole assessment was overseen and validated by independent Excellence Model experts to aid consistency.</p> <p>b) Once a centre had been 'live' for about</p>	<p>Many benefits were realised during the assessments:</p> <p>A number of important 'gaps' were identified early on in the assessment phase, including some of the 'softer' issues that were able to be addressed sooner than might have been the case otherwise.</p> <p>As the assessment teams included people from other centre-types as well as the one being assessed, there was a great deal of comparison and sharing about what was working and what wasn't.</p> <p>Some design problems were able to be identified and corrected before the further</p>

<p>6 months an assessor team from different centre types site visited and assessed it in real life to determine the accuracy of their earlier ‘future view’.</p> <p>c) Learnings were captured in a Feedback Report using the Excellence Model as a very comprehensive structure, and findings consisting of strengths and areas for improvement were reported back to the project design teams.</p>	<p>rollout of some centres.</p> <p>There was greater accuracy in the implementation plans for later centres.</p> <p>Each of the site-visited centres was exposed to the Excellence Model and all confirmed it as a positive team experience. The visits had been designed and led with this in mind – carefully avoiding a ‘negatively-focused audit’ approach.</p> <p>After a variety of centre-type assessments had taken place a range of key themes were identified which were common to all of the designs. Some were organisational strengths but others were highlighted as possible issues for the organisation as a whole to review and improve.</p>
5. Establish Action Plan	
Action	Benefits
<p>Each centre-type design team reviewed the Feedback Report alongside their existing design and implementation plans.</p> <p>Priorities were established around whether, for example, a particular issue was one of design or implementation. In some cases it may have been a local issue for a specific centre.</p>	<p>A sense of sharing emerged across all the centres so that when one type of centre had a problem they could easily contact another to help resolve it.</p> <p>Whilst the centres carried out different functions, the shared site visit assessment experiences significantly reduced the project ‘silos’ that tended to develop due to their highly focused objectives.</p>
6. Implement Action Plan	
Action	Benefits
<p>Members of the assessment team were involved in making the necessary changes to design and implementation plans. Centres that were already open were ‘refitted’ with the new process as soon as possible in line with the prioritised plans.</p>	<p>Later-opening centres had the design change incorporated at the outset, rather than their inheriting any significant problems.</p> <p>Locally based improvement activities created stronger teamwork in the centres.</p>
7. Review Progress	
Action	Benefits
<p>Regular ‘all design team’ reviews were established so that learnings could be shared across teams at the higher level. Local centres tracked their own progress.</p>	<p>The foundations of a continuous improvement culture were laid in both design teams and individual centres.</p>

3.2 using the excellence model to aid selection of supplier partners

3.2.1 SCENARIO:

The following scenario highlights a further innovative use of the Excellence Model and has been created from a number of very similar pieces of our work.

Company ABC Ltd was looking to establish a key strategic partnership with a supplier to help it achieve some of its own objectives. More specifically it wished to outsource some of its services provision to another company. There was an existing supplier procurement process in place but the directors felt that this did not go far enough in ensuring the most appropriate partner was selected. Whoever was selected would need to operate with similar values and with similar strong customer focus.

ABC Ltd had existing knowledge of the Excellence Model and wanted a solution that involved the use of it as part of the selection process.

3.2.2 THE APPROACH:

The following broad phases were used to achieve the objectives.

A : getting started

- A tender document was created by ABC Ltd and their legal advisers, setting out a process for the selection of a strategic partner. It included details of the contract, the respective roles of ABC and the preferred partner, and a timetable for the selection process etc.
- One part of the process involved the provision of evidence based on the Excellence Model.
- Companies were invited to register an interest in the arrangement and a member of the Director Team was assigned as a relationship contact.

B : preparation of evidence

- Each bidding company was invited to give a presentation on their ideas for managing the business to the directors and some senior managers.
- The next requirement was for the bidding companies to produce a portfolio of evidence about themselves, including their activities and results based on the criteria of the Excellence Model.
- To ensure fairness, all bidders were offered a training session by ABC so that everyone understood what was required. The bidders gathered their evidence but the relationship contacts from ABC were available to support bidders with any issues they had.

C : assessment

- Excellence Model trained assessment teams were set up using people from ABC and each was led by an experienced 'outside' professional. Their role was to assess the evidence from each bidding company and to identify the strengths, areas for improvement and indicative scores. Each team held a consensus meeting to agree the issues and scores for a 'pre- site visit report'.
- Each report was used to develop a site visit plan so that all of the issues raised from the assessed evidence could be clarified and verified on the bidder's premises.
- A structured site visit was undertaken by the assessment team for each bidder, which included interviews with key leaders, focus groups with a range of people, etc.
- The additional information gathered from the site visits was used to finalise a Feedback Report for each bidding company. These were presented to the Director Team and copies sent to the bidding companies.
- Decisions were made based on a range of evidence of which the Excellence Assessment was one key element.

3.2.3 OUTCOMES/BENEFITS:

- The assessment teams gained a very valuable insight into what the companies were really like on the inside and helped to form a better all round view for the selection.
- ABC Ltd gained robust pictures of those organisations wanting to run services for them. These pictures covered the whole range of activities including their leadership, strategies and culture and not just the financial view. This was deemed invaluable, as they were to be dealing directly with ABC's customers.
- The whole experience provided an invaluable development opportunity for all those involved including those companies bidding for the contract. Some of those who were not successful found the process so useful that they have continued to use the Model themselves.
- The selected partner and ABC Ltd undertake an annual assessment of the partnership using the Excellence Model to identify further improvement areas and to focus joint improvement activity.

4 SUMMARY:

The Excellence Model has many applications and benefits, and these two short case studies were selected to show what might be seen as more unusual ones. There are other examples that have worked and are working for other organisations. Some we have supported include:

- A large building company, which has the structure of a number of smaller companies/divisions
 - o Its use of the Excellence Model involved deploying it as a framework by which its trained senior managers could assess each part of the business to identify all the good and less good practices that existed. This improved sharing of good practice and helped adoption of the most appropriate company wide processes.
- A small financial services company, which is part of a larger group
 - o The Managing Director used the Excellence Model as an assessment mechanism to test the organisation's culture, to make a break from existing problematic issues and to provide a springboard for an inclusive improvement programme.
- An international organisation, which is split into many business units
 - o An internal award scheme was established, based on the Excellence Model. It's a voluntary process, which has attracted more and more units each year. It is a prestigious award and has helped to embed a culture of continuous improvement.

The EFQM Excellence Model is truly is a versatile tool that any organisation can use to help it with its improvement journey. Perhaps your own organisation will find its own innovative use and share it with the world?

REFERENCES

EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) 2003: The EFQM Excellence Model. ISBN 90-5236-082-0