

D&D EXCELLENCE
DEFINITIONS OF BUSINESS (OR ORGANISATIONAL) EXCELLENCE

At various times D&D Excellence has been asked for a definition of 'Excellence' or 'Business Excellence'. Most of us have our own instinctive ideas of what excellence means. And research companies must think we know, because consumers are sometimes asked what they think of a product or service, with an option being 'excellent'. However looking at management literature does not reveal a definitive statement.

Here are some of our thoughts on the subject.

For a meaning within (an arbitrary) 250 words, this is more of an explanation of our thinking than pure definition.

The word excellence can generate long discussions. Dictionary definitions concern 'excelling': superiority, or having an unusual degree of good qualities. This is not scientifically precise.

When we use the phrase 'business (or organisational) excellence' it is even more complicated. Is it about being best? In comparison with whom? Obvious competitors? Similar organisations worldwide? For one product? For which processes? All? For which stakeholders? You can see there are problems: the expression "it is like nailing jelly to a wall" springs to mind!

Research by the European Foundation for Quality Management has articulated a number of fundamental concepts of organisational excellence which contribute to building a sustainable organisation. It converts these into the EFQM Excellence Model[®] to help with implementation. Put simply, it's about an organisation having the right leadership; the right planning and ways to implement those plans; and managing its people and other resources effectively.

We believe it is a state of mind as well. One would not describe an organisation with a terrible record in those areas as 'excellent', but if it really wants to get better, arguably they are more in tune with excellence than a company with a great performance which thinks it need not do anything.

For us organisational excellence is about a relentless pursuit of improvement in an organisation's results and the way they are achieved. But it should not be about spending too much time debating the precise meaning - nothing actually happens until you DO SOMETHING.

In an early article/booklet on The EFQM Excellence Model, our definition of Excellence ran to 19 words.

"The relentless pursuit of continuous improvement in both an organisation's results and the way in which they are achieved"

(The article "Understanding your organisation with the EFQM Excellence Model" is available in the Downloads section of our website at www.ddexcellence.com/.)

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For another client we gave a précis in 10 words.

"The relentless improvement of results and how they are achieved"

Excellence, an analogy

For people who like something closer to an illustrative example than a definition, see how this fits.

"The Excellence Model is like porridge, and your mum would approve."

Your mum used to tell you that porridge was good for you. If you liked it, all well and good. If you thought it was boring, you probably suffered until you made your own decisions and changed to a more fashionable breakfast cereal. It may have tasted good - possibly better than porridge - and it might even have been good for you.

But you get older and the body starts creaking a bit. You read up on healthy eating, and you find that porridge really does have many health giving qualities. Your mum was right all along. Something that you thought old-fashioned and boring was very good for you!

The EFQM Excellence Model has been around now for 15 years - an age in a time when many management fads come and go rapidly. It's seen by many as too basic (or too complicated, dependent on their views!), and not the latest thing to buy so that the organisation appears up to date and fashionable. But there is research that it can work.

This is not to advocate an organisational improvement diet solely of the Excellence Model - any more than your wise mum would have fed you just porridge. But just as a breakfast of porridge can set you up healthily, the Excellence Model and its fundamental concepts can act as a foundation for a healthy organisation - and help you understand where and how other improvement activities will help you.

(With thanks to Joe Liddane of Setanta Performance International for the original idea.)

Summary

We hope this is useful. We're sure that some people will disagree with the definitions because we have not included reference to a quantitative measure of 'best'. But remember that it is thinking about the organisation - and acting constructively on those thoughts - that will deliver improvements, not debating the exact meaning of 'Excellence'.

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