



Journey to Excellence



The excellence agenda in the Gulf countries is increasingly changing the context in which governments operate and serve their citizens. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), for example, is seeking to position its economy among the most successful economies of the world by 2030. The UAE government is setting its Excellence Programs as a key priority in order to improve their overall performance, quality and customer experience and become more competitive.

To this end, several initiatives were set up in the 1990s, such as excellence awards, recognition programs, excellence standards and e-government initiatives that have improved service quality, efficiency, customer

experience and most importantly, competitiveness. Excellence awards in the UAE are being awarded to entities demonstrating a consistent engagement to good practices and promoting sustainable organizational excellence across the emirate.

Most of the excellence awards and frameworks in the UAE are based on the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM), which is a practical, non-prescriptive framework that provides a holistic view of the organization and allows leaders to understand the cause and effect between their actions and the results they can achieve.

The EFQM Excellence framework is based on nine criteria, five of which are 'enablers' (what the organization does) and four are 'results' (what the organization achieves.) The five enablers are leadership, people, strategy, partnership and resources and processes, products and services.

Objectives of "excellent" public sector organizations

Excellence has several objectives that are embedded in the economic and social visions of the public sector. These are: achieving balanced results, adding value for customers, creating a sustainable future, nurturing talent and developing competencies, managing with agility, harnessing creativity and innovation, and leading with integrity.

Organizations perceive excellence as their ability to reach their fullest potential using their human, financial and physical resources. These organizations are successfully able to meet their mission and vision statements by planning and achieving balanced results that meet and exceed the short- and long-term expectations of their stakeholders.

A modern yet "excellent" public sector organization is one that identifies, categorizes and prioritizes its customers. In fact, this activity allows for a better understanding of customers' needs and expectations that the organization has to consistently understand, anticipate, fulfill, meet or even exceed by striving to be innovative and create value for them.

Increasingly, governments are asked to think of sustainability. When making an impact, a public sector organization needs to ensure that it does so in the long-term while advancing the economic, environmental and social conditions in the ecosystem it operates in.

The public sector has come to be known for its bureaucracy and rigidity. However some government entities have proven their agility and ability to effectively manage change. In fact, they respond in an effective and efficient manner to opportunities and threats and are able to adapt to increasingly demanding citizens.

Over time, "excellent" public sector organizations have successfully demonstrated their ability to build on lessons learned to derive continuous improvements. Furthermore, they have built an environment that nurtures and harnesses creativity and innovation, a crucial element for leading with vision and making things happen. Additionally, it nurtures a culture in which people are empowered, rewarded and recognized for the balanced achievement of both personal and organizational goals.

Excellence in the public sector

We have identified the following enablers to be common among the most efficient public sectors across the globe.

Leadership

Every organization requires strong leadership. An "excellent" organization requires leadership that shapes and helps achieve its vision. Leaders act as role models mainly in their ability to adapt to the various situations their organization faces. Additionally, they have the capacity to adopt change and always be ready to embrace it. While leadership is only one of the enablers, it definitely is a key success factor for other enablers as well. In fact, leaders are a great source of inspiration to move organizations forward and to ensure that people are building on any potential failures and extracting lessons learned.

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Public sector leaders have a great task to demonstrate possibilities and opportunities. They have the power as well to create the future. As the prominent sociologist Peter Drucker rightly said, “the best way to predict the future is to create it.” In fact, they are those who design governments’ strategies and lead their successful implementation.

Strategy

An “excellent” organization does not have a strategy only. It implements it and ensures that it is being refreshed regularly. “Excellent” organizations in the UAE have ensured the alignment of their strategy with their key stakeholders’ needs and expectations and, most importantly, with the emirate’s strategy.

A strategy is not only a vision, a mission and a set of measurable initiatives that are documented. Excellent organizations have the ability and, perhaps more importantly, the agility to implement what they aim to achieve and to adapt to the changing dynamics of the ecosystem in which they operate. In its multi-year initiative, Gov2020, Deloitte identified drivers of change that shape public sector strategies. Those include, in a nutshell, the demography, the economy, the society, and the technology. Those drivers will introduce mega shifts in governments’ strategies by 2020.

People

Excellence frameworks, particularly the EFQM model, put employees at the heart of excellence. They define clearly how the people criteria can be fulfilled by organizations. People existed long before organizations did and without them, organizations would not have been built and would not have lasted.

From an excellence standpoint, the people factor is a key enabler that consists of empowering, involving, recognizing and rewarding employees and nurturing an organizational culture. Accordingly, organizations are invited to build the competencies that will allow people to produce the required results. “Excellent” organizations aim to harmonize between their goals and interests as well as their people thanks to systems that

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are well orchestrated around attraction, recruitment, selection, retention, development, deployment and remuneration. In Deloitte’s Human Capital Trends 2015 report, Middle East respondents (primarily from the public sector) said that the highest interest for organizations is to “reinvent” how people are being managed. There is a great appetite to modernize the Human Resources (HR) function and to introduce new concepts that have been successful elsewhere in the world such as employee self-service (rather than data entry), HR data analytics, and HR business partners.

Partnership and resources

From an EFQM perspective, partnership and resources are essential to an organization’s excellence agenda. In fact, they enable its strategy and the effective realization of its processes. Additionally, they ensure that the organization has the impact it hopes to have based on good relationships with those partners and on the optimal allocation of its available resources.

Partners are typically customers, the wider society, key suppliers, and non-governmental organizations that generally do not seek profit and share common interests and objectives with the organization. An “excellent” organization identifies, categorizes and prioritizes partners and seeks to build a long-lasting or sustainable relationship with them as this is mutually beneficial from

various perspectives, namely cost and reputation. Excellent organizations reassess the status and priority of those relationships regularly as they may change depending on the need of the organization, the stage of its maturity, its growth, and the context in which it operates. Moreover, excellent organizations are interested in those types of relationships as they are aware that there are things that they cannot achieve on their own or that can be achieved in a better way should they enter in a form of partnership with another organization. It is crucial to plan the exchange of experiences, knowledge and services to achieve added value for both parties, in order to support the development and institutional performance.

From a resources perspective, the one key remains the organization's financial capabilities. An "excellent" organization is aware of those capabilities thanks to parameters and measures that are constantly updated such as cash flow, turnover, cost benefit analysis, and others. There are others as well that indicate the organization's capability to plan for the future and make decisions around certain investments. The second key resource consists of assets and facilities. An "excellent" organization manages those resources in a sustainable fashion. In fact, assets are typically managed by "excellent" organizations using methodologies and

tools that aim to increase productivity, reduce throughput times, and enhance standardization.

"Excellent" organizations are not only keen on how best to utilize resources (particularly fixed assets). In fact, they are increasingly conscious about the society and the environment. Furthermore, public sector organizations recognize their societal responsibilities. Some adopt standards or frameworks that help them put things into context and gain control (e.g. ISO 14000, Eco Management Audit Scheme). However, "excellent" organizations go beyond that from a corporate social responsibility perspective.

Technology has demonstrated its ability to move things forward. It has brought information to everyone and enabled governments—"excellent" governments—to respond to a workforce that has become increasingly mobile, diverse and dynamic through e-government and m-government initiatives. What is critical for success though is to develop a technology strategy in alignment with the overall corporate strategy and ensure that stakeholders are properly engaged in its development and deployment in order to maximize the benefits of the latest digital and technological trends. Moreover, technology should be used to support the deployment of innovative and creative ideas in a digital and advanced manner (e.g. suggestions scheme.) To highlight the importance of technology, the UAE government has introduced the ISACA Excellence awards that are intended to recognize IT achievements in seven key areas, including IT Management, IT Security, IT Audit, IT Governance, IT Risk, IT Service Continuity and IT Professional Services.

"Excellent" organizations are keen on identifying, managing and exchanging knowledge in an integrated and effective manner. Developing a thorough knowledge management approach results in several benefits such as improving business decisions by increasing access to lessons learned and global expertise, increasing efficiency and productivity and avoiding cases that essentially reinvent the wheel, reducing the loss of knowledge and expertise when there is employee attrition, improving response time by reducing search time required to locate expertise, or

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enabling continuous quality improvement of services through improved access to shared knowledge and expertise.

Processes, products and services

The objective of a public sector organization is to continually increase the value it is adding to stakeholders. This objective is achieved through the organization's processes, and how it is resulting in optimal products or services in the case of the public sector.

An "excellent" organization ensures that every process has an owner with clear roles and responsibilities. They mostly revolve around developing, maintaining and continuously enhancing the process.

Public administrations are increasingly becoming innovative. Accordingly, they are introducing creative means to improve their processes such as using market research, the results of satisfaction surveys (e.g. voice of the customer), and involving key stakeholders in brainstorming exercises. This collaborative approach makes it easier to effectively promote and market services whether internally or externally and ensure that they respond to the real needs of stakeholders.

Identifying and mapping an organization's processes is a labor-intensive exercise. To achieve the required level of effectiveness and efficiency necessitates a comprehensive and detailed process mapping exercise rather than a simple block diagram. In fact, what "excellent" organizations are after is measuring time, cost and quality through standards such as ISO and techniques such as Six Sigma.

Concluding remarks

All governments and public sector organizations want to achieve their strategic plans and their economic and social vision. But "excellent" governments achieve concurrent results in four main areas that are tightly correlated to their stakeholders: their customers, their employees, the society and the business community. The realization of the objectives of the excellence agenda requires key factors that were extracted from regional and internal success stories and good practice that governments would then need to operationalize and implement.

Governments have to be confident about their future performance. This can be achieved when there is a clearer understanding about the reasons (or drivers) of the positive trends and how these trends will impact their results and their performance indicators.

Additionally, results achieved with various stakeholders need to be sustained over time (a period of at least three years.) "Good" results are those that are demonstrated over a specific period of time and have a long-term impact on the organization's results and stakeholders.

Sustaining and instilling a culture of excellence among all employees is critical for the success of such programs. This will allow all employees to understand the levers of excellence and will provide them with the required tools and thinking to overhaul their daily operations and the quality of service they provide to their customers.

Further, governments have to be confident about their future performance. This can be achieved when there is a clearer understanding about the reasons (or drivers) of the positive trends and how these trends will impact their results and their performance indicators.

Eventually, it is important that public sector organizations benchmark themselves to comparable organizations or governments and use this data (where relevant) to set targets and achieve the rising expectations of people.

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