

Government excellence

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Organizational excellence models, and related national quality awards, have been developed by many governments around the globe to make their country's organizations, including large and small businesses, health-care facilities, schools and government agencies more customer-focused and competitive in the larger economy. Although these models and awards programs vary by country, in general, they involve a robust set of criteria in areas such as leadership, planning, information systems and human capital. Organizations complete a self-assessment based on the relevant criteria and then they are evaluated and scored by a team of experts on how well the organization deploys processes in these areas, their associated results and their systems for learning and improving processes and results. Organizations that receive the highest scores are typically recognized with some level of excellence award during an annual ceremony, sponsored by the government, and best practices from honorees are promoted, shared and often incorporated into the criteria.

The UAE is currently in the fourth cycle of its journey toward government excellence. Beginning with the Dubai Quality Award in 1994, which was directed to the private sector, the current Government Excellence System, which was launched in 2015, is the first model designed exclusively for the public sector and that may be applied to any government sector. As a subject matter expert who has participated in the assessment of several local and federal government entities in the UAE and an individual who has been involved with the US model, the Baldrige Performance Excellence program, as an award recipient, Senior Examiner and Member of the Board of Overseers, I am uniquely positioned to describe the model of Organizational Excellence adopted by the UAE Government, discuss the strengths of the model and explain how it compares to other national models.

The approach to the concept of organizational excellence adopted by the UAE Government differs from the Baldrige model and models in European and Asian countries in four fundamental ways. Each of these differentiators may be considered a strength of the model. First, the UAE Government Excellence model was designed specifically for the public sector and is applicable to any entity in the government, from the Civil Aviation Authority to federally funded universities. The model was based on the UAE public sector best practices and improvement plans which translate readily among leading government



entities. Second, all federally funded entities are required to participate in the program by completing organizational assessments, reviewing the results of their evaluations and implementing plans for learning to ensure each government entity will have improved significantly by the next cycle of the program. Other government-sponsored excellence programs are voluntary. For example, in the USA, the Baldrige program attracted only 27 applicants, from all sectors, in the 2018 submission cycle. Of the 27 applicants, only six fell into the “non-profit” category that includes government entities. Third, the UAE Government Excellence program is focused on the future, aligned with the goals of the national agenda, with measurable performance indicators leading to UAE Vision 2021. The model includes innovation, future shaping and the application of “smart” government technologies. Other models, including the Baldrige model, allow the applicants to select their own goals, targets and performance metrics. And while the Baldrige award recipients receive some national attention in their sectors, the program has had relatively little impact in advancing the nation, as a whole, in specific areas of achievement. Finally, the assessors for the UAE award are international subject matter experts in their fields including government, finance, health care, education, social services, public safety and transportation. During my tenure as an education assessor with the UAE program, I have worked with education experts from Canada, Portugal, the UK, New Zealand and Hong Kong, as well as the USA. Other award programs, including the Baldrige program, select assessors primarily from the relatively small pool of interested employees from applicant and award recipient organizations.

Because the UAE Government Excellence program is intentionally aligned with the National Agenda and promoted tirelessly by the top leaders of the country, including the namesake of the awards, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, senior government leaders play a significant role in enabling the momentum of the government entities as they progress through the model towards organizational excellence. At the 2019 Government Excellence Awards ceremony, His Highness stated “we have 10 years of achievements. We want the UAE Government to be the best government in the world. This model is the standard and benchmark for the performance of government agencies in the country.” Because of the visibility of the Government Excellence Program and the obvious commitment from the nation’s top leaders, leaders of the various government entities take the process very seriously. In my interviews with senior leadership teams during the assessment process and entity leaders, as well as employees at all levels, take great pride in participating in the government excellence program, improving their organizations and contributing to the national agenda. In contrast, the Baldrige program has little visibility in the USA or support from current top government leaders. Federal funding for the program was withheld for several years during the recent recession. Although funding for the program has been restored, it has been more than 15 years since the President of the USA attended the annual Baldrige Award ceremony.

The assessment process has numerous benefits for government entities and their employees. The organizational assessment report they complete includes organizational capabilities and results, in the form of key performance indicators, in several related categories. Vision achievement includes contributions to the national agenda, main functions, seven-star service and smart government. Innovation includes future shaping and innovation management, and finally, the organization’s enablers include governance, human capital and resource and assets management. As organizations and organizational leaders work with the model to design systems and processes to achieve required results, they begin to see the alignment and linkages among the categories relative to serving

customers. As an assessor in the education sector, it has been impressive to see the role of smart technologies in helping to create a new form of organizational thinking. In educational institutions, ranging from kindergartens to universities, smart technologies have revolutionized the ways in which schools communicate, interact with and provide services to students, parents, teachers and community members, as well as the way these technologies have transformed teaching and learning through e-learning and mobile devices. Ultimately, the use of smart technologies and other innovations adds value to the services provided by the organization and increases student and stakeholder satisfaction with their school, college or university.

Finally, during the evaluation of the entity, the assessors, or subject matter experts, are asked to provide feedback in each category and also to provide external organizations that could serve as benchmarking partners for the entity that is being reviewed. These “aspirational” peer organizations may be located in the UAE or in other parts of the world. Entities receive this actionable feedback that they can apply immediately and can also begin immediate communication with organizations who are more advanced or innovative in their approaches to similar issues. In summary, the UAE Government Excellence program has been established with the specific purpose of improving all government entities. It is a carefully designed, robust and well-executed program that shares the characteristics of many organizational excellence programs, and yet is distinctive in its application to all government entities, its support by leading government officials, its alignment with the desired future of the UAE and its involvement of subject matters experts, as assessors, from around the globe. I have had the honor of being associated with this program since its inception, and I look forward to a very promising future of continued advancement in government excellence.