

VIEWPOINT

Excellence 4.0
in the public
sector

Excellence 4.0 in the public sector: some lessons from the UAE experience

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Current times demand, more than ever, for organizational excellence to be updated as a concept and implemented with ambition for addressing many critical societal challenges. Among such challenges, digital transformation forces us to consider new paradigms, such as Quality 4.0 or Excellence 4.0 (Zairi, 2018; Saraiva *et al.*, 2019), with the public sector playing a major potential role in leading the way and driving organizational excellence efforts (Saraiva, 2018).

Under this context, from the many international initiatives and results that are taking place across the world (Saraiva, 2016; Saraiva *et al.*, 2019), what deserves recognition is that the events happening in the UAE, under the leadership of its government, is really inspiring and establishes a strong platform of best practices, with strong and impactful results, from many points of view.

Among many other programs that have been designed and deployed, in the next paragraphs, I will briefly outline some of the key features related with my analysis and experience with both the Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence Program (www.skgep.gov.ae/en) and the Abu Dhabi Award for Excellence Program (www.adaep.ae/en).

The underlying models and approaches adopted are quite innovative, including a sound, deep and updated view of what quality and excellence mean in the present century and worldwide environment (Sampaio and Saraiva, 2010). Broad and rather complete views are assumed, together with a consistent set of pillars and criteria for assessment, where it becomes quite easy to connect what is being done (capabilities) with the performances being achieved (results).

But rather than just relying on a very sound excellence model, in the UAE, we are witnessing improvement that takes place in a consistent and persistent way, through a really ambitious Government Excellence System (www.skgep.gov.ae/en), with a number of interesting features:

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- It is supported at the highest levels of leadership in the country, covers all the areas of the public sector, achieving high visibility and recognition levels.
- It covers a comprehensive set of ways, at the individual, organizational and territorial levels, aimed at recognition and promotion of excellence.
- It is conceived and implemented under a multi-level and multi-sectorial perspective, with both local and federal entities being involved.
- It is built around a powerful combination of self-assessment and external evaluation, conveying both UAE and international contributions.
- It is structured under a very pragmatic approach, with a permanent focus on the practical implementation of improvement opportunities and efforts as the key goal to be accomplished.
- It leads to targets and ambitions that try to bring UAE to the highest levels of achievement from an international and worldwide perspective.
- It helps align in a clear way the accomplishment of organizational excellence in the public sector with the overall UAE national agenda.
- It is supported by a good IT-based platform, thus simplifying the process and focusing the entities on improvement efforts, without the needs of putting together long application documents and avoiding as much as possible unneeded bureaucracy.
- It brings into the table refreshed views about what excellence means and how it should be implemented nowadays, such as future shaping, happiness, customer-centric processes or the full exploration of IT tools and the inclusion of innovation as a strong pillar of organizational excellence.
- It involves the contributions of hundreds of worldwide highly qualified and selected subject matter experts who bring international views and benchmarks, at the same time that they help build capabilities at the UAE level, namely, by also including local experts in the different assessment teams.
- It has been implemented and revised across the years, but under consistency of purposes and approaches, including both short- and long-term views, that provide a well-defined and pursued road map for quick and sound accomplishments of organizational excellence.

Last, but not the least, the accumulated experience of over one decade now does show that indeed very impressive results are being obtained. Every new cycle of assessment has been providing unquestionable evidences that significant improvements are being achieved, leading to new generations of ambitions, targets and results with regards to excellence.

If one wants to learn from best practices and benchmarking opportunities about how to promote and implement national and organizational excellence, UAE and its Government Excellence System deserve close attention and can provide an important source of visionary inspiration and insights.

After having reached this status of accomplishment, now may be the appropriate time for further promoting and diffusing the experience acquired and results achieved at an international level, namely, by enlarging the number of events where such experiences are shared and creating other spaces for knowledge development, as is the case of journals.

The twenty-first-century societal challenges demand new interpretations, discussions and implementations of excellence (Carvalho *et al.*, 2019), and the communities or countries

that will lead the way in this agenda are the ones that will end up building better societies and, in the end, assure increased levels of quality of life and happiness for their citizens, customers and employees. It is worthwhile to keep in touch and learn from what is being done and achieved in this field across the world, and when doing so, one should take into account the past decade of accumulated well-succeeded experience coming from the UAE!

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