

Other Nations Adopting America's Criteria for Excellence

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I receive routine information updates from the administrators of our nation's highest quality award. A recent announcement explained that 80 international quality and performance excellence awards either use the American criteria outright or have derived their standards from portions of our criteria.

Many organizational leaders are not aware that a National Quality Award exists. Having no idea what the criteria are, they've never used the standards for evaluating their own organizations. That's a lost opportunity! If you are similarly uninformed, please allow this article to begin your education.

To start, imagine that you have been appointed as the person in charge of inventing a way to measure your organization's progress from where it is now to something closer to genuine excellence. Stated another way, how would you and everyone else in your organization know that you were making progress? Pause for a moment and think about how you'd approach that responsibility.

Maybe you're thinking, "Oh, I'd know excellence if I saw it!" But suppose you were also charged with teaching everyone in your organization what genuine excellence looks like.

You might start by asking people to focus on "improvement." Whatever they measure currently, you'd like to see that today's results are better than past results. And you'd like to see everyone doing whatever they could to make future results better than what currently exists.

Folks might think initially about obvious results like increasing sales and decreasing costs. But other measures, though indirect, heavily influence the bottom line. For example, customer satisfaction and retention are important--it's easier to keep a satisfied customer than to convert a prospect.

Also, employee retention might be a productive result to measure. If your hiring systems bring you high-quality employees, every person who resigns (or who was a hiring mistake) represents experience that's expensive to replace. (You might look at how you can improve your hiring systems, too.)

To enhance the quantity and quality of improvement over time, you'd probably increase the respect that "learning" has in your organization. New insights that people transform into more productive behaviors, breakthroughs that occur through experimentation, and small refinements in existing systems all contribute to that elusive yet desirable "improvement."

You'd probably find reliable ways to deploy both innovative and small improvements to all portions of your organization. Too many establishments allow departments to "do their own thing," when sharing ideas and best practices might be more productive. Independence is valuable, but may retard organizational improvement. Reapplication of good ideas is inexpensive and can be very effective.

As you become more skilled at measuring results and the processes that generate those results, you'll want to start comparing your organization's performance against that of your competitors and similar organizations. You'll likely look for companies already respected for their systems and good results, and you'll use them as benchmark opportunities.

All of these expectations and more are written into the "Criteria for Performance Excellence," an 80-page pamphlet that has been continuously refined since the National Quality Award was established in 1987. Although I've been a believer in the value of these criteria for many years, the news that 80 different countries have adopted all or a portion of the standards is huge verification.

Quoting from the news release I received this month, "I would say that the worldwide acceptance of the Criteria and their principles is a good indication that they are validated and relevant for organizations in any country!"

If you have a desire to enhance what your organization is accomplishing, begin to educate yourself on these criteria. You can obtain a free copy of the "Criteria for Performance Excellence" by calling 301-975-2036 or by sending an e-mail with your mailing address to nqp@nist.gov.

“Excellence” is easy to proclaim as a marketing phrase. Actually making the move toward genuine excellence requires much more than provocative talk. Your customers, your employees, and your organization’s owners will be astounded at the progress which is achieved. I strongly encourage you to begin the journey of learning more about genuine excellence.

Based on the judgment of 80 different countries around the world, you have a framework for making improvements readily available to you!

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