

Update on our Country's National Quality Program

Baldrige—most of us think we know what this is: applying for an award. But that is not what this is all about. If you pick up the criteria behind the Malcolm Baldrige Award and take some time to become familiar with it, you would quickly see that it is one heck of a good framework for guiding management on organizational development and improvement. There is no need to seek an award... the journey to excellence is what it is all about.

The *Criteria for Performance Excellence* forms this framework. As a criteria that is based on research and benchmarks of high-performance organizations (you can't beat that), its purpose is to help management achieve higher levels organizational performance excellence. The Criteria and the award were instituted by Congress in 1987 to drive quality and high-performance in U.S. organizations in response to off-shore competition and momentum. Since its inception, the criteria have been updated every year to reflect new and emerging best practices.

The criteria states requirements in six key management areas: 1) how leaders lead, 2) planning short- and long-term, 3) acquiring customer knowledge and satisfaction, 4) information and knowledge management, 5) managing workforce engagement and capability, and 6) process design, management and improvement. In addition to these six areas, the criteria's 7th area looks at the results and outcomes generated from the previous six areas.

An organization can get an assessment of its practices; this produces a feedback report on current strengths and improvement opportunities, including scores for the seven areas using a scoring system with "the bar set" based on how role model organizations. There are many organizations, from all sectors (manufacturing, healthcare, education, service, government and non-profits) in Vermont and across the USA using the criteria to drive total improvement.

Commonly used practices such as lean, six-sigma, balanced scorecard, supplier management or TWI all fit nicely within this framework; the value of the framework is to make sure all such practices, current and those adapted in the future, work together in an integrated manner to strengthen the organization as a system and not functional silos.

The 2000 version of the ISO9001 standard changed and adopted some of the criteria's better features when it: added the 8 principles, put more emphasis on customer focus, took a process approach rather than a compliance approach, and included leadership into the requirements.

Whether your organization is an ISO, AS, lean, six-sigma or some other such "quality based" organization, it is worth knowing about the criteria and, on an annual basis, checking out the annual recipients of the Malcolm Baldrige Award who share their best

practices (application summaries) on the NIST web-site (<http://baldrige.nist.gov/>) and at conferences.

After all, as a quality professional one can never assume he or she knows it all!

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