

The EFQM Award: The Journey Is the Win

By Paul Grizzell

Is your organization at the top of its game? If so, maybe you're wondering how to make those incremental improvements to reach the highest level of performance excellence. Or perhaps your organization's performance is just mediocre and leaders are looking for a method to accelerate improvement efforts. Maybe performance is even poor, and you need a way to focus your turnaround efforts.

In my work with clients and as an EFQM Assessor, I've watched organizations in each of these scenarios build a positive success spiral through the structure, employee engagement, and best practices that EFQM inspires (and requires).

A Model of Performance Excellence

The European Excellence Award is the highest level of recognition of performance in the countries they serve. And, while originally developed as a business quality assessment, the EFQM Excellence Model has evolved into a comprehensive management system that includes the same criteria for excellence, regardless of industry.

Key characteristics of EFQM:

- The Criteria focus on business results. 50% of EFQM scoring is based on a balanced set of outcomes
- The Criteria are non-prescriptive and adaptable. The Criteria don't tell you what you have to do - they guide you through your own assessment of what's important and how you address those areas
- The Criteria support a systems perspective to maintaining organization-wide goal alignment
- The Criteria support goal-based diagnosis - the Criteria and the Scoring scheme allow you to assess organizational performance and improvement progress

Key Concept: *The EFQM Excellence Model criteria is an evidence-based, validated set of characteristics of high-performing organizations.*

Why the Excellence Model Accelerates Results

Organizations that apply for EFQM would, of course, love to have the recognition of winning the EFQM Excellence Award; however, the irony is that those who are only applying to have a trophy to add to their trophy case won't succeed. The extent of the application and assessment process ensures that those who win the award are truly role model examples of performance excellence in practice. At the heart of the process is the Excellence Model and the RADAR logic. The Criteria are deliberately non-prescriptive and adaptable. They ask how you address the Criteria, but don't tell you what to do. In fact, they guide you through your own assessment of what's important and how you address those areas.

Organizations that apply for EFQM recognition gain:

- *an outside perspective* that identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement. Each organization is measured against the same set of Criteria based on the characteristics of high-performing organizations.
- *aligned leaders* because the Criteria help create a single shared focus.
- *laser sharp focus on highest organizational priorities* because the Criteria offer an integrated management system that aligns performance excellence efforts throughout the organization.

Key Concept: *The EFQM process helps focus, align, and accelerate your performance excellence efforts.*

A Values-Based Model

A set of Fundamental Concepts of Excellence form the foundation of the EFQM Excellence Model. If you aspire to be an organization represented by these Concepts, then the EFQM Excellence Model is a framework that will help you accomplish that goal.

EFQM Fundamental Concepts of Excellence

Adding Value for Customers	Leading with Vision, Inspiration, & Integrity
Creating a Sustainable Future	Managing with Agility
Developing Organizational Capability	Succeeding through the Talent of People
Harnessing Creativity and Innovation	Sustaining Outstanding Results

Key Concept: *The EFQM Criteria are based on a foundation of Fundamental Concepts of Excellence. If these Concepts resonate and align with your organization's vision, mission, and values, then the EFQM Criteria are a road map to help you get there.*

Application, Assessment, and Feedback

At the most rigorous level, organizations submit a 35-page application with three parts: 1. Key Information, 2. Enablers, and 3. Results. A key to success in writing an effective application is to ensure alignment among the Key Information, the

Enabler Categories and the Results Categories. An effective EFQM application isn't simply a set of answers to the EFQM Criteria questions. Your EFQM application should be a formal description of how your organization operates. There are three components to an EFQM application:

1. Key Information (*Answers the question: "What is most important to us?"*)

The Key Information is a snapshot of your organization, including facts and figures; challenges and strategy; markets, offerings and customers; operations, partners and suppliers; and management structure and activities. Writing the key information is the first step to take in your EFQM journey.

The Key Information describes what is important to your organization. It's a snapshot of the characteristics and challenges of your organization. If you do nothing but complete the Key Information and gain senior leadership input and agreement, you will have a useful tool that helps focus your organization's efforts.

2. The Enablers Categories (*Answers the questions: "What do we do, how do we do it, and how do we improve?"*)

The responses address the six Enabler Categories:

1. Leadership
2. Strategy
3. People
4. Partnerships & Resources
5. Process, Products, & Services

3. The Results Categories

1. People Results
2. Customer Results
3. Society Results
4. Business Results

EFQM Assessors evaluate the maturity of your organization's Enablers and Results using *RADAR* logic:

R - Required **RESULTS**

A - Plan and develop **APPROACHES**

D - **DEPLOY** Approaches

AR - **ASSESS AND REFINE** Approaches and Deployment

Enablers

- Approaches - *what* do you do?
- Deployment - *how* extensively do you do it?
- Assessment and Refinement - do you *measure, evaluate and improve* your systems and processes?

Results

- Relevance & Usability – are you *measuring the right things*?
- Performance – what is your *current performance, performance over time, and relative performance*?

Key Concept: *An EFQM application is a valuable tool, even if you never apply for an award. The alignment of the application helps identify breakdowns that are keeping you from attaining desired outcomes.)*

A systematic approach to improvement

EFQM assessments are confidential. Assessors are required to maintain confidentiality and do not disclose the organizations they assess. The EFQM process is focused on helping your organization improve - results are not reported to anyone outside the EFQM program until you are recognized for your performance. At that point you share your performance excellence journey and best practices as a method of helping advance performance excellence.

Any organization that is working on continuous improvement has made progress along the EFQM journey, whether they call it that or not.

What stages can our organization anticipate in an EFQM journey to performance excellence?

- *Awareness* - a key to the success of an EFQM effort is to ensure understanding and commitment by the senior leadership team. Commitment by senior leaders isn't an option - it's a requirement!
- *Assessment* - an initial assessment can help you determine where your organization stands against the EFQM Excellence Model. Assessment can help build understanding and identify initial performance gaps. There are multiple methods to accomplish this assessment - on-line, paper, interviews, or a combination of all. This assessment can also be a great way to introduce EFQM to the organization.

- *Application* - Develop and submit an EFQM assessment. A team-based writing approach can accelerate the application process.
- *Advancement* - based on results of your application, focus your improvement efforts by determining how best to sustain your Strengths and prioritize and address your Areas for Improvement.

Key Concept: *The EFQM process is a journey. Typically, EFQM Award recipients have been engaged in the process for multiple years.*

After the Application

What happens "behind the scenes" after an application is submitted?

There are three stages of assessment before EFQM recipients are selected

Stage 1 - Individual Assessment: Trained Assessors spend 40-50 hours each assessing your application. They each compile a list of Strengths and Areas for Improvement comments for each area and score your application against a set of scoring guidelines.

Stage 2 - Consensus Assessment: A team of Assessors takes your application through the Consensus process, during which they consolidate comments and determine a score through team consensus.

Stage 3 - Site Visit: A team of Assessors visits your organization for an in-depth assessment of your organization. Site visits generally last 3-4 days, and provide an extremely in-depth assessment of your organization.

Applicants receive a feedback report detailing actionable Strengths and Areas for Improvement regardless of which assessment stage they reach. As an example of the idea of never-ending focus on continuous improvement, even award-winning organizations receive a feedback with approximately 40-50 Areas for Improvement.

Key Concept: *The journey is all about improvement. Organizations that systematically address Areas for Improvement from their feedback report generate better results, because they are able to focus, align, and accelerate their improvement efforts on those areas that are most important. And that drives improvements in next year's application!*

Conclusion

The EFQM journey isn't easy. Those who see the EFQM Excellence Award only as a trophy to add to their organization's trophy shelf will find it frustrating. But those leaders who have a vision of role-model excellence will find the EFQM Excellence Model, the application and assessment process, and the resulting feedback report to be an engaging, inspiring, and practical road map for their journey to performance excellence.

*Core Values Partners, Inc., helps organizations **focus, align, and accelerate** their performance excellence efforts through effective deployment of the EFQM Excellence Model and the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. They work in close partnership with clients to fulfill their purpose of **advancing excellence**.*

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