

The Availability Degree of Excellence Management Standards and Their Impact on the Performance Results in Kuwait University

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This study aims to identify the availability degree of Excellence Management criteria, and their impact on the performance results at Kuwait University from the perspective of the academic college leaders using a descriptive correlational method. A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of the academic college leaders at Kuwait University ($n = 104$). Using the appropriate statistical methods, findings show that: (a) the perceptions of the academic college leaders regarding the availability degree of Excellence Management criteria were generally moderate. Moreover, their perceptions about the reality of performance results at Kuwait University were moderate. (b) There were no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the academic college leaders about the availability degree of Excellence Management criteria with regard to college classification and job title variables. On the other hand, some significant differences were found with respect to the processes and services criteria with regard to the gender variable. (c) There were no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the academic college leaders of the reality of performance results with regard to college classification, job title, and gender variables. (d) The criteria of Excellence Management (combined or separated) have statistically significant impacts on the performance results according to the academic college leaders' perceptions. The study came up with some recommendations chief among which: (a) the need to enhance a culture that supports excellence among university leaders and Kuwait University staff, (b) taking advantage of performance results as a feedback to build policies and strategies that meet the needs of the beneficiaries.

Keywords: excellence, management, standards, performance, results and performance results

Introduction

Excellence management, as a modern administrative concept, is considered the ideal solution through which institutions can meet the challenges and respond to the requirements of the modern era. This is because it provides a comprehensive and integrated input that enables institutions to coordinate among its members and invest their capabilities and resources to cope with the surrounding variables on one hand, and achieve superior results on the other hand as it is based on an intellectual framework that is committed to the logic of systemic thinking which holds that an institution is an integrated system whose components interact and its mechanisms intertwine for its outcomes to be the output of its combined capabilities (Al-Salmi, 2002).

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Historical Background of Excellence Management

The emergence of the concept of Excellence Management in the science of management dates back to the early eighties of the last century. At the time, the real interest in excellence came to the scene in various institutions as when Peters and Waterman offered in their famous book *In Search of Excellence* eight basic principles used by US outstanding companies in order to remain at the top. They stressed therein the importance of paying attention to innovation, and the ability to change and lead. This was followed by a model suggested by Austin and Peters in their book *The Passion of Excellence*. In this book, they pointed out that distinguished institutions depend mainly on human resources and pay attention to customers to achieve their success (Anninos, 2007; Conti, 2007).

Several models for Excellence Management have appeared since then. Chief among which were the Baldrige Excellence Framework, and the European Model of Excellence. These were concurrent with what Seng called for in 1990 when he pointed out that excellence could be achieved through a common vision, relying on well-defined models for work, and stimulating thinking mechanisms and organizational learning within the organization.

At the top of all these developments came the foundation of the Global Excellence Model Council in 2000, which comprises vast geographical areas including the United States, Europe, Australia, Singapore, and India. Its goal was to deepen the concept of Excellence Management around the world, develop its models, and disseminate information and exchange experiences around the world. It is worth mentioning that attempts are still underway to develop this concept (Anninos, 2007; Adebajo, Mckenna, & Crawford, 2008).

The Concept of Excellence Management

Oakland (2001) defines Excellence Management as the ability to reconcile and coordinate the various elements of the organization as well as operate them in an integrated and cohesive way to achieve the highest levels of efficiency so as to reach an output level that satisfies the desires, benefits and expectations of the organization's stakeholders. It also means "planning, coordinating and organizing the efforts, and operating them through the administrative processes to achieve continued excellence, stakeholders' satisfaction through the optimal use of available resources" (Al-Lugan, 2011, p. 11). It therefore successfully combines the proper use of internal and external resources to achieve a positive long-term performance (Ionicá, Báleanu, Edelhauser, & Irimie, 2010).

Requirements and Characteristics of Excellence Management

The most important requirements are as follows (Adebajo, Crawford, & Mckenna, 2008):

(1) A strategic integrated structure that reflects the main orientations of the organization and the future outlook. This includes the following elements: (a) the organization's mission, which reflects the major outcomes that the organization seeks to achieve; (b) the future outlook of the institution; (c) the strategic goals that the management is aspiring to accomplish, which serve as the basis for planning operations and identifying resources and (d) the mechanism of preparing strategic plans, following it up, measuring its returns, and evaluating its achievements.

(2) An integrated system of policies that govern and regulate the work of the organization and guide those who are in charge of performance to the rules and principles of decision making.

(3) Flexible organizational structures which are adjustable and adaptable with internal and external variables. Structures of Excellence Management are characterized by a degree of decentralization as a result of reliance on workers' empowerment and delegation in their field, in addition to an in-depth use of information and communication techniques.

(4) A developed system to guarantee total quality that identifies the operations analysis mechanisms, the principles of specifying quality requirements and conditions and the mechanisms of control and correction.

(5) An integrated information system that includes the mechanisms to identify the information required, its sources and the means for its collection and retrieval as well as the rules and mechanisms needed to implement to support decision-making.

(6) A developed system for the management of human resources that states the rules and mechanisms for planning and attracting human resources and developing them. It also includes the rules and mechanisms of performance evaluation, and the principles of workers' compensation according to performance results.

(7) A performance management system that includes rules and mechanisms to determine the required jobs and tasks, the rules for guiding and following up on performance as well as principles to assess individual performance, group performance, team and institutional performance for the purpose of evaluating achievements in relation to the established objectives and criteria.

(8) An effective leadership that lays the foundations and standards, provides the elements of proper implementation of plans and programs, and enhances the organization's chances of achieving excellence management.

(9) A focus on those who are related to the organization and communicating with them for the purpose of improvement.

The Relationship Between Excellence Management and Total Quality Management

The concepts of Excellence Management and Total Quality Management are closely interrelated. There is a consensus among researchers on the existence of such a relationship, but there is no agreement on what it is. Some consider both concepts as synonymous. That is, Excellence Management is also Total Quality Management but under another name, Excellence Management is considered the modern approach Total Quality Management (Foely, 2001). On the other hand, others have considered excellence the end and the goal of applying quality and that excellence can only be achieved if there is a commitment to quality because of the inter-correlated relationship between them. That is, quality is a prerequisite for excellence (Hammoudeh, 2009; Ruzeeq, 2009). A third opinion is not far from these two opinions. Rather it avoids the causative relationship between the two concepts and sees Excellence Management broader and more comprehensive than quality management, and it even overrides it in terms of a greater focus on achieving superior results (Egan, 2003).

European Excellence Model (EFQM Excellence Model)

The European Excellence Model, which was founded in 1992 by the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) under the name EFQM Excellence Model, constitutes a general framework that helps organizations achieve excellence, and enhance their competitiveness. Because this model includes all the elements of an organization, it can be an effective evaluation tool. Also, its possibility to apply to organizations regardless of their size, the nature of their work, or their type makes it a worldwide used model (Ismail, Darestani, & Irani, 2011). It is also considered a practical tool that helps institutions build an appropriate

administrative system by identifying its location on the journey to achieve excellence, which can be defined according to this model as a unique and brilliant practice of managing organizations, which achieves the best results (EFQM, 2009). This model is based on nine criteria, five of which fall under “enablers” and four under “results”. In what follows is a description of the components and key criteria of this model.

Enablers (Excellence Management Criteria)

These are the supporting elements that focus on the tasks an organization needs to do to achieve the results (Sahmoudeh, 2013). This group subsumes the following 5 enablers (Al-Meleiji, 2009; EFQM, 2012):

Leadership criterion: This criterion focuses on the role of leadership in shaping the vision and mission of the organization, and how to achieve them in practice. This criterion stresses the active participation in the development and application of the organization’s work systems, and the importance of the behavior of leadership as it is a role model for employees.

Policy and strategy: This criterion focuses on the way the organization implements its vision and mission through a clear strategy backed by the necessary policies.

People: This criterion focuses on the way the organization manages and develops people’s capabilities, increases their contribution, enables people effectively and efficiently, in a way that supports policies and strategies, and fosters the organization’s operations.

Partnerships and resources: This criterion relates to the way the organization plans and manages external partnerships and internal resources in a way that supports policies and strategies, and enhances the efficiency of operations.

Processes and services: This criterion focuses on the way the organization designs, manages, and optimizes processes in a way that supports policies and strategies so as to offer outstanding services to all stakeholders.

Results

Performance results can be defined as what the organization has achieved and how that relates to people, customers, and the society (EFQM, 2009). Outstanding performance results can be achieved through the enabler’s criteria which cover what the organization does. In the European Model (EFQM) four criteria are subsumed under results, which add up to the previous five enablers (Shaaban, 2009; EFQM, 2009). They are:

Customer Results: This criterion focuses on the results achieved by the organization with respect to customer satisfaction (the target group).

People Results: This criterion reflects the extent to which results are achieved in a way that satisfies people.

Society Results: This criterion relates to what the organization achieves for the benefit of the society in which it works at all levels—local, regional, and international, where possible.

Key Results: This criterion focuses on the results of the organization compared to the set plans.

Figure 1 illustrates the criteria and the working mechanisms of the model.

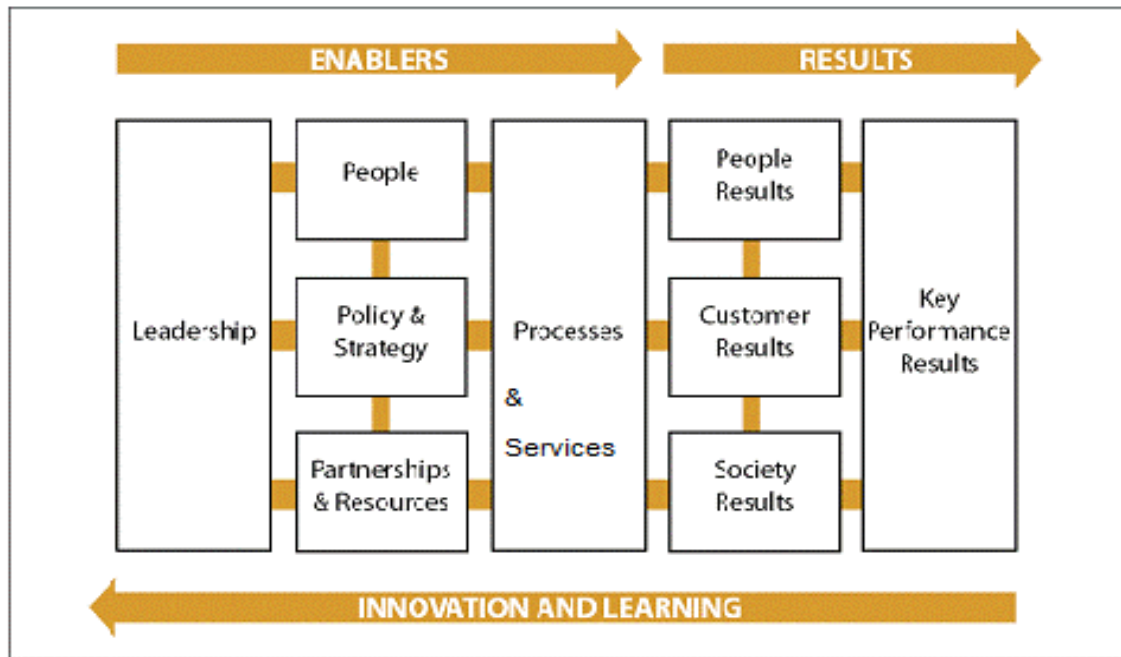


Figure 1. The European excellence model (EFQM, 2009).

As is clear, the adoption of any modern management method requires following up and measuring the results in order to create a real assessment of performance. Performance assessment is a systematic, periodical method of a comprehensive review of the organization's activities and results in relation to the Excellence Model. This is accomplished in the European Model by the RADAR logic for organizational performance assessment, which makes available the basis for assessing the success of each and every thing the organization performs and achieves. RADAR is an acronym taken from the initials of the following words: (a) Results, (b) Approach, (c) Deployment, (d) Assessment and Review. In general, the RADAR logic requires organizations to perform the following (EFQM, 2012):

- (1) Determining the required results (aims) as part of its strategy.
- (2) Planning and developing a unified set of enablers (approaches) to achieve the current and future results (goals).
- (3) Applying the approaches systematically to guarantee implementation.
- (4) Refining and assessing the approaches periodically based on achieved results and continuous learning activities.

This approach is applied to all criteria—primary and secondary—of the European Model of Excellence in relation to enablers and results. Figure 2 summarizes these steps.

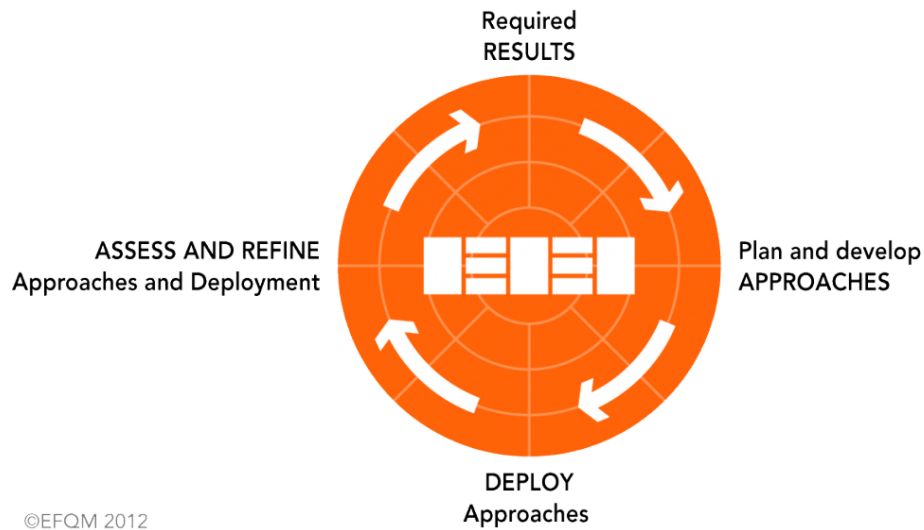


Figure 2. The RADAR logic (EFQM, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The University of Kuwait faces many difficulties that have affected, in one way or another, its classification, which dropped to 701 in 2013-2014, according to the QS Global Classification of Universities (Fouad, 2013). These challenges can be addressed by Kuwait University through reconsidering the administrative concepts and methods, understanding the inevitability of change, and focusing on adopting state-of-the-art concepts in management such as the Excellence Model based on superior principles that ensure the optimal investment of the University's resources leading to better and distinctive outputs. On this view, this study intends to determine the degree of availability of the criteria of Excellence Management (the enablers) and its impact on the results of performance in the light of the components of the European Model. This is particularly important as understanding the relationship between the components of the European Model of Excellence will detect the faults and eventually avoid them. This will also indicate the strengths that need to be maintained and enhanced. All this will reflect positively on the results of performance at Kuwait University by answering the following main question:

“To what extent are the criteria of Excellence Management (enablers) available at Kuwait University and what are their impacts on performance results from the perspective of academic college leaders?” This main question is divided into the following procedural questions:

(1) How do the academic college leaders at the University of Kuwait conceive the degree of availability of Excellence Management criteria (enablers)?

(2) How do the academic college leaders at the University of Kuwait conceive the reality of the performance results at the university?

(3) What is the predictive power of the perceptions of the academic college leaders at Kuwait University of the degree of availability of Excellence Management criteria (enablers) collectively and individually and its impact on the reality of the performance results at Kuwait University?

Methodology

Instrumentation

Upon reviewing related literature especially the studies done by Al-Jaabari (2009), Al-Lugan (2011), and Sahmoudeh (2013), the researcher developed the instrument of the current study according to the criteria of the European Model of Excellence (Appendix 1), which consists of:

(1) The first questionnaire: This relates to the independent variable: the criterion of Excellence Management (enablers). It consists of 26 items covering five criteria as follows: criterion (1): university leadership (7 items), criterion (2): strategy and policy (5 items), criterion (3): people (5 items), criterion (4): partnerships and resources (5 items), and criterion (5): processes and services (4 items).

(2) The second questionnaire: This relates to the dependent variable: performance results. It consists of 20 items covering four criteria as follows: criterion (1): people results (5 items), criterion (2): customer results (5 items), criterion (3): the society results (5 items), and criterion (4): the key results (5 items).

Responses are based on Likert Scale as follows: (very high = 5, high = 4, moderate = 3, low = 2, very low = 1).

Study Participants

The study population comprised all the academic college leaders at Kuwait University (deans, assistant deans and heads of academic departments). The sample of the study, however, had 96 participants. This was determined based on Israel's (1992) sample size criteria, which suggests a sample of 96 (and more) if the study population is between 125 to 150 subjects in order to obtain generalizable results that reach a confidence level of 95%. Following convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013), a total of 134 questionnaires were distributed, of which 104 were retrieved covering 77.6% of the original study population as laid out in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Participants According to Study Variables

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	94	90.4%
	Female	10	9.6%
Job title	Dean	11	10.6%
	Assistant dean	29	27.9%
	Dept. Head	64	61.5%
College classification	Theoretical colleges	23	22.1%
	Applied colleges	26	25.0%
	Scientific colleges	55	52.9%
Total		104	100%

Procedures

Having obtained the required permissions, the researcher administered the questionnaires among the study participants. When the questionnaires were collected back, invalid questionnaires (i.e., questionnaires with missing data) were excluded. The clean questionnaires were codified and processed, using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). All statistical tests were run at a significance level of 0.05.

Findings and Discussion

Below are the findings according to research questions.

Question 1

Table 2 shows that the perceptions of faculty leaders of the availability of Excellence Management criteria (enablers) at Kuwait University were moderate in general with a mean average of 3.32 and a standard deviation of 0.468. This is a positive result to some extent, and shows that Kuwait University has moderate capabilities in terms of the enablers needed to implement excellence management. This is a good starting point towards achieving excellence. The ranking of the Excellence Management criteria (enablers) according to the perceptions of academic college leaders was as follows: University leadership came top, followed by policies and strategies, then people (faculty members), then partnerships and resources, and finally processes and services.

Table 2

Mean Averages, Standard Deviations and Response Continuum of the Perceptions of the Study Participants of the Degree of Availability of Excellence Management Criteria (Enablers) in a Descending Order

Excellence management criteria (enablers)	Mean	St. deviations	Response continuum
Criterion 1: Leadership	3.43	0.594	Moderate
Criterion 2: Policy and strategy	3.31	0.666	Moderate
Criterion 3: People	3.31	0.602	Moderate
Criterion 4: Partnerships and resources	3.29	0.616	Moderate
Criterion 5: Processes and services	3.20	0.539	Moderate
All criteria	3.32	0.468	Moderate

Question 2

It can be seen from Table 3 that the perceptions of academic college leaders of the reality of the results of performance at Kuwait University were moderate, with a mean average of 3.34 and a standard deviation of 0.446. This is a somewhat positive result but it indicates that Kuwait University needs to exert extra efforts to achieve outstanding performance results and hence to reach a global competitiveness level. This is due to the fact that if the university achieves outstanding performance results, it will exceed customers' expectations with respect to the way it provides services, which will help the organization achieve its strategic objectives efficiently. The ranking of the criteria of performance results according to the perceptions of the academic college leaders came as follows: The people results (students) ranked top, followed by the key results, then customer results (faculty members), and finally the results of the society.

Table 3

Mean Averages, Standard Deviations and Response Continuum of the Perceptions of the Study Participants of the Reality of Performance Results at Kuwait University in a Descending Order

Performance results criteria	Mean	St. deviations	Response continuum
Criterion 1: People (students)	3.38	0.605	Moderate
Criterion 2: Customer results (faculty)	3.30	0.496	Moderate
Criterion 3: Society results	3.29	0.617	Moderate
Criterion 4: Key results	3.35	0.575	Moderate
All criteria	3.34	0.446	Moderate

Question 3

The results of a linear regression analysis given in Table 4 show that the criteria of Excellence Management account for 45.1% of the variation in the performance results. This means that performance

results can be predicted with a high level of certainty through knowing the extent to which Excellence Management criteria are available at Kuwait University. Also, the availability of Excellence Management criteria accounts for 38.8% of the variance in the results of customers (faculty members), 30.6% of the variance in the results of the people criterion (students), 28.8% of the variance in the results of the key results and finally 21% of the variance in the results of the society results.

It can be ascertained that the availability of the criteria of excellence management, combined together, by one more standard deviation leads to the improvement of the performance results, combined together, by 0.67 degree. Upon measuring the relationship between the criteria of excellence management, combined together, and performance results, taken separately, it is found that the availability of the criteria of Excellence Management by one standard deviation leads to improvement of the customers (faculty) results by 0.62 degree, 0.55 degree of people (students) results, 0.54 of main results, and 0.46 of society results. These findings are in conformity with the results of Jarrar (2013), which showed that the variance in the criteria of Excellence Management (enablers) account for 61% of change in performance results, as well as the findings of Carlos Bou-Llusar, Escrig-Tena, Roca-Puig, and Beltrán-Martín (2005), which showed that the ability of enablers, combined, accounts for 34% of the variance in performance results. These results are statistically significant, which shows that the enablers have a positive effect on performance results. Their differences may be attributed to the differences in the environment where the study is conducted. This confirms the main hypothesis of the European Model for Excellence, which holds that enablers have a positive effect on performance results (EFQM, 2012).

Table 4

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression of the Effect of the Criteria of Excellence Management (Enablers) on Performance Results

Criterion	F value	T value	Adj. R ²	β	Significance level
Criterion 1: People (students)	46.39	6.812	0.306	0.559	0.000*
Criterion 2: Customer results (faculty)	66.39	8.148	0.388	0.628	0.000*
Criterion 3: Society results	28.32	5.322	0.210	0.466	0.000*
Criterion 4: Key results	42.66	6.532	0.288	0.543	0.000*
All criteria	85.60	9.25	0.451	0.675	0.000*

Note. Statistically significant at $\alpha \geq 0.05$.

Conclusion

Results show that the perceptions of academic college leaders about the degree of the availability of the criteria of Excellence Management (enablers) at Kuwait University were moderate on the whole, which is a somewhat positive result. Results point out that Kuwait University has moderate capabilities with respect to the enablers required to the adoption and application of Excellence Management as one of the modern administrative approaches in its endeavor to accomplishing its mission to develop a human wealth that is distinctive with its knowledge, meeting the developmental needs of the state, and meeting the requirements of the modern era in terms of quality in higher education, excellence in scientific research, and excellence in the service of the community.

The study also found out that the perceptions of academic college leaders of the reality of the results of performance were moderate. This may point out to the unavailability of a general description and clear

indicators of the way of achieving performance results as well as a description of the University activities and services that satisfy all stakeholders (students, faculty, and society).

Finally, the study found out that the criteria of Excellence Management (enablers) combined together clearly account for the variance in the performance results. That is, any increase in the availability of the criteria of Excellence Management (enablers) reflects an increase in the performance results at Kuwait University. Also, it was found that the criterion of the policy and strategy was the most influential criterion in performance results.

Recommendations

In light of the above results, the following recommendations are in order:

(1) It is high time to enhance a culture that supports excellence among university leaders and employees, who constitute the corner stone for implementing the concept of Excellence Management. This can be achieved through holding meetings, seminars, workshops, and training courses.

(2) There is a need for establishing a specialized unit for Excellence Management at Kuwait University that is administratively linked to the Chancellor of Kuwait University. It should be represented by all colleges and subordinate to the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs as it will have an effective role in enhancing and promoting the application of excellence criteria.

(3) The University of Kuwait should formally adopt Excellence Management in the light of the European Model criteria as a comprehensive administrative framework. This should be enhanced through the preparation of a comprehensive guide that is distributed to leaders and employees, clarifying the standards and mechanisms of the application of the model and the roles assigned to them.

(4) Policies and strategies should be built and reviewed periodically according to the needs of the beneficiaries of the university, and according to the requirements of prevailing conditions by taking advantage of the feedback on performance results.

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