

Strategies to Implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence

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Abstract - Only a small number of U.S. businesses have adopted the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that executive business leaders use to implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The study population consisted of six business executives and two organizations in the U.S. state of Texas, all with experience in implementing the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The theory of high performance work systems provided the conceptual framework for the study. Data were gathered from interviews and record reviews that were conducted within the organizations. Inductive analysis was used to identify words, phrases, ideas, and actions that were consistent among participants and organizations as well as patterns and themes. Triangulation of sources between the interview and record review data was used for consistency. Three main themes emerged from data analysis: organizations embedded the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into native work models; they also used robust strategy deployment systems with accountability for action plans to spread the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence; and, rather than specifically create goals to align with the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, they identified actions to reach organizational strategic goals that were molded using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as a business model.

Keywords - implementation strategies; performance excellence; Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations use various forms of performance enhancing systems in their journey to the creation of sustainability. One such model of business excellence, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award became Public Law 100-107 in August of 1987 with the mission of improving American corporations (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013d)[61]. The American economy is not benefiting as fully as intended because of low participation rates in adopting the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011)[62]. The implementation of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program is a large undertaking as it covers almost every aspect of an organization (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b)[59]. Only small numbers of businesses are adopting the criteria with the 2012 estimate at approximately 1,400 through all performance excellence agencies (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013a)[58]. The specific business problem is that some executive business leaders are not aware of strategies to implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence within their organizations to enhance organizational performance.

2. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTION

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that executive business leaders use to implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance

Excellence to enhance organizational performance. Identification of the appropriate implementation strategies could enable future increase in the number of organizations that successfully implement the criteria, enhancing the positive effects on the U.S. economy. Improvements in the U.S. economy can lead to positive implications for the community such as increased number of available jobs (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013a)[58]. The main research question was: What strategies do executive business leaders use to implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence to enhance organizational performance?

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING

A qualitative multiple case study approach with multiple data sources was used to explore the strategies in Baldrige Criteria implementation. According to Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013)[30], the use of multiple data sources increases the quality and accuracy of information. Qualitative case study methodology is a valuable tool to evaluate programs (Baxter & Jack, 2008)[7], such as implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The world is socially constructed, therefore, focusing attention towards the ways in which organizational members understand their experience would be beneficial (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013)[24]. Participants in the study were executive business leaders in two organizations that had successfully implemented the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The participant representation

consisted of middle and senior level business executives that had led the completion of Baldrige Criteria implementation initiatives. The quality of synthesis in research is heavily dependent on the participant sampling (Suri, 2011)[53]. Participants were selected using a purposeful sampling technique based on criteria to add richness and limit variation. Six participants in the study, from two organizations, were selected through purposeful criterion sampling. Six participants were interviewed and records of two organizations were reviewed. Attaining data saturation is a main concern when performing a qualitative study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013)[43]. Interviews and company documents were the research instruments used to generate research data. According to Houghton et al. (2013)[30], researchers can use multiple data sources to increase the quality and accuracy of information and reach saturation. Semistructured interviews were face to face at a convenient time for the participant in a relaxed, quiet, and private setting. Document data from the organizations regarding the strategies used during implementation and alignment projects with the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence were collected. It was assumed that the participants had in-depth knowledge of the strategies used to drive the Baldrige implementation projects within their organizations and would respond to the interview questions in an open and honest manner. Restrictive organizational policies may have limited the participants' ability to provide details. The case study design and the instruments used to gather data may have limited the findings of the study. Open-ended interview questions were used to capture thick details from the participants. This research was delimited to top management or leadership from the selected organizations and experts in the field within the State of Texas.

4. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature of this study begins with the high performance work systems and change management as the foundation for understanding the importance of implementing new strategies to an organization. The next section of the literature review addresses continuous improvement which is a management strategy to implement incremental change. The remainder of the literature review includes four sections on product, service, and project quality; human resource management theories; goal alignment; leadership and employee engagement; and business maturity and excellence.

4.1 High Performance Work Systems

Business leaders must continuously improve the performance of their organizations to remain competitive in today's markets; business leaders can accomplish such improvements by implementing business excellence models, which requires high levels of organizational performance (Kassem, Ajmal, & Khan, 2016)[35]. One of the main components of a high-performance work system

is reinforcement through appropriately used punishment and rewards (Duarte, Goodson, & Arnold, 2013). These performance management systems create an important connection between the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the organization and enable it to serve better its target community, which serves as the foundation for the organization to exist (Bryson, 2012). Employee commitment to the organizational objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013)[49]. Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for success (Bolton, Brunnermeier, & Veldkamp, 2013)[10]. Productivity systems lay the foundation for organizational success (Brown, Holland, Bokowy, & Horblyuk, 2013)[11].

4.2 Change Management

Business managers use performance excellence models to focus on continuous process improvement and provide value (Yunis, Jung, & Chen, 2013). Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for successful change implementations (Bolton et al., 2013)[10]. Employee commitment to the objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). The achievement of improved organizational results is a direct result of the linkage of organizational rewards to work performance (Hamukwaya & Yazdanifard, 2014)[27].

4.3 Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is a management strategy that includes incremental change to improve processes, products, and services (Singh & Singh, 2015). Incentives proactively persuade the workforce to make progress on the objectives given (Lam, O'Donnell, & Robertson, 2015). A main component in the creation and maintenance of a culture of continuous improvement is a lasting managerial and workforce involvement (Chattergoon, Darling, Devitt, and Klassen, 2014)[14]. Ali, Islam, and Howe (2013) stated that the creation of a sustainable system of improvement would create a sustainable competitive advantage.

4.4 Product, Service, and Project Quality

Product quality as measured by conformance, performance, reliability, features, and durability has a direct positive effect on business performance (Turner & Von Heusinger, 2014)[55]. Therefore, proactive approaches used through quality management systems to improving quality are necessary for continued competitiveness (Dahlgaard, Pugna, Potra, Negrea, & Mocan, 2016)[16]. Managers use project management processes to manage innovative projects as part of continuous improvement initiatives. The success of a project depends on the quality processes used within project plans (Rich & Valle, 2012).

4.5 Human Resource Management Theories

Human resource system outcomes are critical components in the success of overall operational outcomes (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012)[32]. How the human resource practices are bundled into the aggregated system to meet the organizational goals is what is important for organizational performance (Kase, Paauwe, & Batistic, 2014)[34]. Harnessing and aligning human capital, in the broad sense, is necessary for a firm to be successful. The definition of Human Capital is the knowledge, skills and abilities of the human resources (Molloy & Barney, 2015)[41].

4.6 Goal Alignment

Work units and individuals within an organization must align and work together when implementing best practices to achieve overall goals (Kaiser, Arbi, & Ahlemann, 2015)[33]. Goal alignment has two major effects on organizational performance: (a) it allows employees to understand their role in the strategy of the organization through their daily activities, and (b) the alignment of goals promotes the activities needed to support the strategic plan (Ayers, 2015)[5]. The achievement of increased organizational performance is the result of many factors beyond goal alignment such as key performance indicators, measurement of individual performance with varying levels resulting in actions and consequences, employee involvement with regular feedback, and development of staff with training (Ayers, 2015)[5].

4.7 Leadership and Employee Engagement

There are six generally accepted styles of leadership: Coercive or commanding, authoritative or visionary, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter, and coaching leaders (Fanimehin & Popoola, 2013)[21]. The importance of these styles revolves around emotional intelligence, defined as individuals' abilities to both manage their actions as well as their relationships with others and consisting of the following traits: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social skills (Fanimehin & Popoola, 2013). Higher in scope than leadership style, there are overarching leadership approaches to include transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional approaches have an action orientation regarding action and reward or punishment between the leader and the follower, while transformational resides at the higher scope of overall alignment between people and organization (Tyssen, Wald, & Spieth, 2014)[56]. Leaders can display a mixed profile of various leadership styles and behaviors (Antonakis & House, 2014)[3]. The appropriate leadership style changes with differing employee and work-related needs (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). A theory exists that top leaders' adherence to transformational leadership practices has positive effects on the organizational project and program performance due to the correlation between transformational leadership and staff levels of orientation towards entrepreneurial

activities to progress the organization (Engelen, Gupta, Strenger, & Brettel, 2015)[19].

Employee engagement integrates job satisfaction and organizational commitment with high performance (Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2014). One of the best predictors of overall performance is the level of employee engagement (Shuck, Zigarmi, & Owen, 2015)[50]. There is a critical link that exists between organizational offerings to employees and their performance (Bal, Kooij, & De Jong, 2013)[6]. The interconnections between organizational alignment and employee engagement are important to appropriately matching skills and knowledge to organizational processes (Alagaraja & Shuck, 2015).

4.8 Business Maturity and Excellence

Overall business maturity development and organizational progress stem from field level change initiatives that originate from day-to-day process improvements (Looy, Backer, & Poels, 2014)[39]. Organizational managers use business maturity models to provide methods and approaches for an organization to improve and grow (Roglinger, Poppelbub, & Becker, 2012)[47]. One such model of business maturity is the holistic Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence has six process and result scoring levels based on an overall holistic approach to driving organizations in the direction of maturity (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b). Five core values and concepts are the criteria base: (a) systems perspective, (b) visionary leadership, (c) customer-focused excellence, (d) valuing people, and (e) organizational learning and agility (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b). The MBNQA program includes an application and assessment process by which the applicant organizations request an evaluation of their level of maturity as compared to the criteria (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013c). Examination teams score applicants against the process criteria using four dimensions: (a) approach, (b) deployment, (c) learning, and (d) integration (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b). The teams score the organizational results by looking at levels, trends, comparisons, and integration (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b).

The concepts and theories of business excellence span the globe with various models in use in over 80 countries (Kassem et al., 2016). These models share the purpose of restoring and improving organizations. Within the United States, the leaders of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) administer the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, operating under the U.S. Department of Commerce (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013d). Conclusive evidence regarding the economic values of the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program exists. One such example is the ratio of costs to benefits estimated to be between 351:1 and 820:1 as derived from a review of 45 Baldrige National Quality Award applicants with the goal of estimating the social economic value of the program (Umpleby, 2015)[57].

5. DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Interview as well as documented brief notes were recorded during the interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim for each participant. Researchers can achieve integrity by leaving the message unaltered (Carroll, Huang-Horowitz, Weberling McKeever, & Williams, 2014)[13]. Field notes, transcripts, and reflective documents for each participant were catalogued and linked by labels rather than names. Record reviews used during the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence within the organizations were also conducted. A preliminary discussion with each of the study participants prior to the interview session was conducted. This technique enhanced the opportunity to establish trust and rapport by allowing for the review of ethical considerations and research questions so that the participants can prepare (Englander, 2012). This established an appropriate atmosphere for the participants to openly share their information, helping to improve data validity. Methodological triangulation was used to triangulate these multiple data sources by comparing the qualitative data from the records review with the interview data. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), researchers cannot define a specific sample size that ensures saturation, but rather strive for richness and thickness in the data. Multiple participants from multiple organizations selected through purposeful criterion sampling were interviewed until data saturation was reached. Researchers can gain depth and identify consistency by triangulating the data from multiple sources (Denzin, 2012). Participants read their responses in the transcripts, read the findings, and updated their responses to reflect their experience and knowledge. Member checking enables researchers to ensure that the research analysis consists of accurate accounts from the participants (Perkins, Columna, Lieberman, & Bailey, 2013). NVivo® software was used to assist with the synthesis of data into themes. Finally, themes were compared to the main ideas identified in the literature review as well as the conceptual framework.

Purposeful criterion sampling of the multiple participants, member checking of the data gathered, and an audit trail were used to improve dependability. This method of choosing the participants in the study enables the efficient attainment of saturation with variation, diversity, and information-rich sources (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015)[23]. Follow-up member checking sessions were held with all participants separately to provide them the opportunity to check their responses. According to Houghton et al. (2013), researchers can use member checking to ensure accuracy. Member checking is a main component of maintaining quality during qualitative research (Reilly, 2013). Researchers can increase dependability of a study by providing audit trails (Leung, 2015).

6. RESULTS

6.1 Business Leaders Embedded the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into the Native Work Models, Processes, and Verbiage

The business leaders of the organizations embedded the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into the native work models, processes, and verbiage used in the organization rather than undertook organizational changes to convert to the Baldrige language. Business leaders within both organizations faced initial trouble with the acceptance and buy-in from staff to take on the efforts needed to implement the criteria. Organizational transformational activities at times create misalignments between work expectations and individual definitions of self as related to work (Williamsson, Eriksson, & Delleve, 2016)[63]. When alignment does not exist within interactions with differing areas of an organization regarding a change, resistance to the change occurs (Latta, 2015)[37]. In both instances, the business leaders mitigated this resistance by systematically improving current processes, goals, and action plans using the criteria structure as a model. One executive business leader in the sample population stated within the interview response that the top 5 executives maintained knowledge of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and used that knowledge to mold the structure and contents of process steps into current systems at the time of strategic process improvement. The business leaders used this practice instead of developing new practices and verbiage for the staff to adopt. The business leaders used this practice to successfully manage changes and align the workforce to complete the implementations, almost without being aware of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence at all.

In many aspects, this theme aligns with the literature regarding change management theories. Wright, Christensen, and Isett (2013) stated that organizational change is a constant theme and that the work environment has a significant role in affecting an individual's buy-in to change. Employee commitment to the objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013)[49]. Organizational transformational activities at times create misalignments between work expectations and individual definitions of self as related to work (Williamsson et al., 2016). When alignment does not exist within interactions with differing areas of an organization regarding a change, resistance to the change occurs (Latta, 2015). The business leaders focused attention on the continuous improvement of current processes rather than the undertaking of a new system that would need change management using human resource practices beyond what they were already using. This displayed a slightly different practice than the ones discussed in the literature regarding the use of employee motivation to manage change. The organizations had strong goal alignment and

human resource practices, but specifically regarding the implementation of Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, the business leaders used practices to focus away from the change by highlighting incremental improvements in native systems. One way to reduce the resistance to change is to focus efforts on the people (Beal, Stavros, & Cole, 2013)[8]. Business managers can mitigate the resistance to change by managing human resources practices (Yon, Bloom, & Crant, 2014)[66]. A key to systemic change is to maintain the motivation of team members for the duration of the initiatives (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). One of the main components of a high-performance work system is reinforcement through appropriately used punishment and rewards (Duarte et al., 2013)[18]. The achievement of improved organizational results is a direct result of the linkage of organizational rewards to work performance (Hamukwaya & Yazdanifard, 2014). Attitudes towards change are more positive when leaders keep individuals informed, consult with them for input, and provide them with participatory roles (Yilmaz, Ozgen, & Akyel, 2013)[65]. The business leaders included in the study lessened the change management scope of implementing the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence by minimizing the initiative impacts through less obtrusive measures. The business leaders molded the practices discussed in the literature when implementing this model by meshing the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into the native business practices rather than focus on the efforts needed to manage a large buy-in to a major change. The organizational practices aligned with the literature about the successful management of continuous improvement to an organizational transformation. Continuous improvement is a management strategy that includes incremental change to improve processes, products, and services (Singh & Singh, 2015)[51]. There are two fundamental elements involved: (a) drive for continual progress with specified actions controlled by a systematic process; and (b) the creation of a continuous improvement culture within the workforce (Clark, Silvester, & Knowles, 2013)[15]. Both organizations had strong cultures of systematic improvement. Transformational leaders create the stage for organizational performance by indirectly affecting goal clarity as well as the culture of the organization (Belle, 2013). A direct link exists between organizational performance and transformational activities that stimulate learning and innovation through various means of employee engagement (Noruzy, Dalfard, Azhdari, Nazari-Shirkouhi, & Rezazadeh, 2013)[42]. Transformational leadership activities create the perception of procedural justice and influence individual commitment to the organization (Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoglu-Aygun, & Hirst, 2013). In both organizations, the leadership successfully completed the transformation by creating the perception that they were completing incremental improvement changes rather than holistic

transformational initiatives to mitigate change management buy-in.

This finding was consistent with the conceptual framework in that the executive business leaders were continuously striving to improve the performance of their organizations to remain competitive by implementing a business excellence model. Employee commitment to the objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013)[49]. Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for successful change implementations (Bolton et al., 2013). The business leaders of both organizations recognized this and had strong systems of aligning and driving improvement efforts.

6.2 Business Leaders Used Robust Strategy Deployment Systems with Accountability for Action Plans to Spread the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence

Business leaders within the organizations used robust strategy deployment systems with accountability for action plans to spread the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence to develop it as the business model throughout. Leaders in both organizations used a well-deployed and controlled strategy to implement the incremental changes through action plans aligned with the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence model. The organizational leaders aligned the criteria model into the native structure of goals and action plans. One of the organizations did not have a fully developed strategic planning and deployment process initially. The business leaders within this organization stated in response to the interview that they realized its importance and worked to implement that system prior to taking on the full gamut of alignment initiatives.

The executive business leaders of both organizations described systems and processes that aligned with the practices explained in the literature. The business leaders in both organizations described their use of the strategic plan to drive action alignment. Business leaders in both organizations stated that they molded the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into improvement action plans within the strategic plan and deployed through the system. In each organization, the business leaders stated that they directly linked the success of the implementation to their strategic plan deployment capabilities. Participant B2 stated that the business leaders used the strategy deployment process to drive Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence implementations. Participant A1 affirmed that business leaders developed a strategic deployment process as part of the implementation efforts and used the process to drive Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence alignment. Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for successful change

implementations (Bolton et al., 2013)[10]. Work units and individuals within an organization must align and work together when implementing best practices to achieve overall goals (Kaiser et al., 2015). Business leaders in both organizations discussed and displayed performance management systems and metrics to support achievement of the strategic plan. Participants B2 and B3 displayed how the strategic plan directly linked to performance measures throughout the organization. Participant A3 affirmed that accomplishment of the strategic objectives comprised most performance metrics. Leadership, management, and productivity systems lay the foundation for organizational success (Brown et al., 2013). These performance management systems create an important connection between the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the organization and enable it to serve better its target community, which serves as the foundation for the organization to exist (Bryson, 2012). Performance metrics in operational processes are imperative to translate strategy into action (Groen, Wouters, & Wilderom, 2016)[25]. Mom, van Neerijnen, Reinmoeller, and Verwaal (2015) stated that this cohesiveness results in cooperative progress towards the common goals and brings the organization together in a shared direction. Goal alignment has two major effects on organizational performance: (a) it allows employees to understand their role in the strategy of the organization through their daily activities, and (b) the alignment of goals promotes the activities needed to support the strategic plan (Ayers, 2015)[5].

One area was evident in practice that did not align with some of the literature. The executive leaders in both organizations discussed in detail and displayed the positive effects of using a balanced scorecard system. This system was the foundation tool used by both organizations to drive alignment of staff activities toward strategy achievement. Although in alignment with much of the literature, descriptions in the literature that contained negative feedback of the balanced scorecard system were found. There is high criticism for management use of measurement systems such as the BSC because of loose connectivity and lack of critical transparency between the four perspectives of the model (Hoque, 2014). The BSC in real practice does not ensure the identification of all relationship correlations in the key performance indicators (Janes & Faganel, 2013). Additionally, use of the BSC to gain formal control, along with service commitments to clients, may decrease the commitment to workload completion (Antonsen, 2014)[4]. Although the literature suggested these negative aspects of the BSC, business leaders in both organizations showed the use of the BSC was beneficial to the alignment of activities to include strategic, operational, and transformational.

As with the first finding, this finding was consistent with the conceptual framework in that the executive business leaders were continuously striving to improve the performance of their organizations to remain competitive

by implementing a business excellence model. Employee commitment to the objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for successful change implementations (Bolton et al., 2013)[10]. The business leaders of both organizations recognized this and had strong systems of aligning and driving improvement efforts through deployment of the strategic plan.

6.3 Business Leaders Did Not Specifically State Strategic Goals to Align to the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence

Business leaders within the organizations did not specifically create strategic goals to align with the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. The leaders instead, aligned the native organizational strategic goals to the business model of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. In alignment with the other themes, business leaders in both organizations embedded the criteria into the current verbiage and practices rather than focus on a separate item. Business leaders within both organizations faced initial trouble with the acceptance and buy-in from staff to take on the efforts needed to implement the criteria. Organizational transformational activities at times create misalignments between work expectations and individual definitions of self as related to work (Williamsson et al., 2016)[63]. When alignment does not exist within interactions with differing areas of an organization regarding a change, resistance to the change occurs (Latta, 2015). In both instances, the business leaders mitigated this resistance by systematically improving current processes, goals, and action plans using the criteria structure as a model. One executive business leader in the sample population stated within the interview response that the top 5 executives maintain knowledge of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and use that knowledge to mold the structure and contents of process steps into current systems at the time of strategic process improvement. The business leaders used this practice instead of developing new practices and verbiage for the staff to adopt. Participants A2 and B2 discussed how the business leaders molded the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence into the current business format and verbiage. The business leaders used this practice to successfully manage changes and align the workforce to complete the implementations, almost without being aware of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence at all. This theme coordinates with the literature regarding the drive of transformational activities using systematic improvements. Business managers can define continuous improvement as a grouping of activities in a process that drives improvements in other processes (Ali et al., 2013)[2]. In these instances, the strategic plan aligns to the criteria without separating alignment as an individual

item to attain. Business leaders in both organizations used this practice to link the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence to the native functional reasons for the organization to exist rather than identify it as a separate entity. Performance management systems create an important connection between the mission, vision, goals, and objectives of the organization and enable it to serve better its target community, which serves as the foundation for the organization to exist (Bryson, 2012)[12].

This finding was consistent with the conceptual framework in that the executive business leaders were continuously striving to improve the performance of their organizations to remain competitive by implementing a business excellence model. Employee commitment to the objectives and effective participation as a team member are essential to organizational performance (Shahid & Azhar, 2013)[49]. Appropriate and aligned incentives are necessary to stimulate the coordination, knowledge sharing, and a culture of productivity needed for successful change implementations (Bolton et al., 2013). The business leaders of both organizations recognized this and had strong systems of aligning and driving improvement efforts by embedding the criteria into other goals and deploying through the strategic plan.

7. DISCUSSION, EVALUATION OF FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings revealed in the study have two main areas of positive influence in business practice: (a) The additional information available to organizations considering the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence provides a proven method to help them succeed; (b) The increased amount of successes in implementing the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence may stimulate an increase in the number of organizations who start the journey to implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, further expanding its reach of positive influence on the American economy.

The themes provide application guidelines for future business leaders to use in the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. When combining the themes into practice processes, an organization could align current strategic goals and action plans to the Baldrige framework provided by the criteria without changing the current structure or native verbiage. Combining the themes into practice would promote the adoption of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence as a business model without the need for additional cultural acceptance of change due the embedding into current business structure. Through the combined practices, the business leaders could align the organization to the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence by spreading it through the strategic plan deployment, reinforcing the infrastructure of the organization with the proven foundation that the Baldrige

Criteria provides. A successful alignment with the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence may bring the organization the many benefits that are common in aligned organizations.

Organizations that have successfully implemented the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence experience (a) increased ability to align and provide value to their customers and stakeholders, (b) improved capabilities and effectiveness in accomplishing goals, and (c) increased workforce and organizational knowledge (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b). Nationally, this translates to overall organizational performance enhancements and results, as well as the identification and dissemination of best practices throughout the United States (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013b). Increasing the number of organizations that successfully implement the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence will further enhance the positive effects on the U.S. economy.

The themes identified provide application guidelines for future business leaders to use in the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. When combining the themes into practice processes, it would be feasible for an organization to align current strategic goals and action plans to the model provided by the criteria without changing the current structure or native verbiage. This action would promote the adoption of the business model without the need for additional cultural acceptance of change due the embedding into current business structure.

Many groups should pay attention to the results of this study because of the potential benefits gained. These groups include organizations who are currently implementing or those that are exploring the possibility of implementing the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, the consultants in the field of assisting organizations with the implementation of the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, the national and state level performance excellence system administrators such as the Baldrige Performance Excellence Program and the Quality Texas Foundation, and any of the previously mentioned groups using another system of performance excellence other than the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence.

The primary limiting factor in this qualitative study was the case study design. This design could have led to high-level data that did not identify granular detailed findings or conclusions. Further study with a phenomenological design may enable insights into the individuals' experiences within any phenomenon identified from their perspective. Capturing the individual experience in the natural environment would enable the researcher to describe and translate the occurrences (Sergi & Hallin, 2011).

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