

2005 SACUBO Best Practices

Our Quest for Quality

Charles Lee
The University of Memphis

Tanya Groves
The University of Memphis

Teresa Hartnett
The University of Memphis

Abstract

To improve performance across the organization, the Division of Business & Finance has adopted a self-assessment-feedback model that (1) is based on the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and (2) takes advantage of an annual award process offered by the local Baldrige organization, the Greater Memphis Association for Quality (GMAQ).

The first step in the process involves learning about the principles of performance excellence and how the Baldrige criteria are applied in organizations. In our context, this is an active step, not a passive one, and managers and employees must participate in learning activities. GMAQ offers a variety of opportunities, including a monthly “lunch and learn,” examiner training annually in September, a fall quality conference and a spring workshop.

All departments within the division are at some stage of the process. Because recognition and guidance are provided along the way, departments new to the process reap the benefits and knowledge of departments that have already participated.

The process consists of four phases:

Phase 1: Self-Assessment

- 1. The unit or department conducts a self-assessment of their organization using the Baldrige Criteria.*
- 2. Based on this self-assessment, the unit prepares and submits an application to the [Greater Memphis Association for Quality](#) (GMAQ) annual award program. Applications may be submitted at one of three levels; each level recognizes a greater commitment to and application of the principles represented in the Criteria.*

Phase 2: External Evaluation

- 3. An independent team of GMAQ examiners reviews the unit's application, assesses it against the Criteria, and prepares a draft feedback report.*
- 4. The GMAQ Board of Judges reviews the unit's and examining team's materials, determines an Award Level and finalizes the feedback report.*

Phase 3: Feedback

- 5. The unit receives and reviews their feedback report.*

Phase 4: Action

- 6. Actions for improvement are planned and initiated based on analysis of the feedback report.*
- 7. Progress towards these actions is monitored by the unit, and the self-assessment is repeated as part of Phase 1.*

Introduction of the Organization

Business & Finance is one of five major divisions within The University of Memphis, a public institution of higher education located in the heart of Memphis. We are responsible for the management of University fiscal, physical, and human resources, including an annual operating budget of \$302 million and 201 buildings located on 1170 acres. Our 500 full-time employees provide service and support to 20,000 students and more than 2500 faculty and staff.

The University of Memphis is a comprehensive metropolitan university committed to scholarly accomplishments of our students and faculty and to the enhancement of our community. The University offers 15 bachelor's degrees in more than 50 majors and 70 concentrations, master's degrees in over 45 subjects and doctoral degrees in 21 disciplines, in addition to the Juris Doctor (law) and a specialist degree in education.

The University of Memphis is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097, telephone number 404-679-4501) to award bachelor's, first professional, master's, educational specialist's, and doctoral degrees. Individual colleges, schools and departments are accredited by the appropriate agencies.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

In recent years, the University of Memphis and the Division of Business & Finance have experienced declining fiscal support from the state, growing deferred maintenance requirements, and encroaching crime. We realized that the responsibility was on our shoulders to address problems and provide creative solutions within our organization. The result has been a cultural change that has benefited the division and captured the attention of the remaining university.

To improve performance across the organization, the Division of Business & Finance adopted a self-assessment-feedback model that (1) is based on the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence and (2) takes advantage of an annual award process offered by the local Baldrige organization, the Greater Memphis Association for Quality (GMAQ).

Our “Quest for Quality” has enabled us to continue and even improve service to the University in spite of budget cuts, escalating costs, aging facilities, and the problems associated with an urban environment in the 21st century. Additionally, we have avoided employee layoffs or terminations.

Design

Our present day quality program had its birth a little less than ten years ago when the Division of Business & Finance joined the Greater Memphis Association for Quality. Thirty-seven of our employees received free training on the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria in preparation for our first self assessment as a part of the GMAQ award application. Although our initial recognition was only at Level I, our eyes had been opened and we never looked back!

As we gained appreciation for the many advantages enjoyed by quality organizations, our commitment grew. Each success generated others as departments shared their experiences and their accomplishments (a requirement of the Baldrige model). Because recognition and guidance are provided along the way, departments new to the process reap the benefits and knowledge of departments that have already participated. Best of all, the initiative has not required additional personnel, equipment or similar resources.

The approach begins with learning about the principles of performance excellence and how the Baldrige criteria are applied in organizations. In our context, this is an active step, not a passive one, and managers and employees must participate in learning activities. GMAQ offers a variety of opportunities, including a monthly “lunch and learn,” examiner training annually in September, a fall quality conference and a spring workshop.

Project teams and/or Work Unit Councils are frequently used to address specific administrative and support services problems. Customer surveys are used to obtain feedback on how we can improve. Standing committees composed of Faculty and Staff Senate members and representatives from other divisions provide guidance on core processes. Internally, performance is assessed based on appropriate national or state benchmarks.

Implementation

At the on-set some employees complained that they “didn’t have time” to embark on the Quest for Quality. It was only with the encouragement from our Vice President for Business and Finance, Charles Lee, that some units entered the process described below. As these units experienced success with their efforts, however, others within Business & Finance began to see the rewards (an approach popularly known as the seduction theory).

Phase 1: Self-Assessment

1. The unit or department conducts a self-assessment of their organization using the Baldrige Criteria. [About the Baldrige Program](#)
2. Based on this self-assessment, the unit prepares and submits an application to the [Greater Memphis Association for Quality](#) annual award program. Applications may be submitted at one of three levels; each level recognizes a greater commitment to and application of the principles represented in the Criteria.

Phase 2: External Evaluation

3. An independent team of GMAQ examiners reviews the unit's application, assesses it against the Criteria, and prepares a draft feedback report.
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Phase 3: Feedback

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Phase 4: Action

6. Actions for improvement are planned and initiated based on analysis of the feedback report.
7. Progress towards these actions are monitored by the unit, and the self-assessment is repeated as part of Phase 1.

Because of the Baldrige requirement that winners share their knowledge with others, we have made good progress as a division. Further, we have served as a positive model for the University as a whole. For example, we initiated a supervisory feedback survey in our division in 2000; last year it was implemented campus-wide. The purpose of the Supervisory Leadership

Feedback Process is to improve leadership by giving each employee a structured, systematic, and fair method of assessing the quality of their supervisor's leadership behaviors. The feedback gives supervisors a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Based on this feedback, supervisors and their managers plan for additional leadership training and development.

Benefits

Aside from the esteem and pride inherent to recognition as a quality organization, the benefits are quite tangible. A number of initiatives recognize and reward successful individuals and teams, and have resulted in new processes based on service to students, improved business practices, and new patterns of resource allocation; examples include the consolidation of all student services in a single location, development/implantation of an on-line applicant tracking system for Human Resources (found at: <http://bf.memphis.edu/hr/employment/status/>), and the Work Order Request Query (WORQ) for Physical Plant (found at: <http://bf.memphis.edu/pp/worq.php>). In addition, preparations are underway to implement the enterprise resource planning system; this will require a massive analysis and overhaul of all business processes and our quality applications will serve us well in this endeavor. For more detailed information, visit our quality web site at <http://bf.memphis.edu/planning/home.php>.

The state has reduced allocations to the University for the past four years while utilities, materials, and salary and benefits costs have continued to increase; in spite of this, we have been able to maintain and even improve services. Our quality centerpiece, Physical Plant, has paved the way for programs by other B&F departments, having received recent recognition by the Greater Memphis Association for Quality with its highest honor, the Pyramid Award of Excellence. Physical Plant has also received the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers Award of Excellence and the Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence Level II Quality Award.

Other departments within Business & Finance are following suit. During 2003, Business & Finance Technology and Public Safety were Level II recipients of the GMAQ award, and Business Services (Tiger Printing and Graphics) and Campus Planning & Design were Level I.

This year more entries have been added: Finance (Bursar), Purchasing, Mail Services and Human Resources as illustrated by the following chart:

Annual Goals by Department
Established in May, 2003

Department	Phase in GMAQ Award Process				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Bursar	Learning	I	II	III	
Business & Finance Technology	II	III			
Campus Planning & Design	I	II	III		
Finance	---	Learning	I	II	III
Human Resources	Learning	I	II	III	
Mail Services	Learning	I	II	III	
Millington Center	--	Learning	I	II	III
Parking	---	Learning	I	II	III
Physical Plant	Pyramid				
Police Services	II	---	III		
Purchasing	Learning	I	II	III	
Tiger Copy & Graphics	I	II	III		

Note: Award applications due September 30 each year

As previously stated, Business & Finance has experienced a true cultural change.

Additional documentation by unit (detailed in left column) is available at

<http://bf.memphis.edu/home/>.

Retrospect

We encourage other universities, particularly business officers, to enter the Quest for Quality. Don't be discouraged by some initial resistance - the culture change is worth the effort, regardless of the age of the institution, its fiscal condition, or its location. The Baldrige

categories of leadership, strategic planning, customer and market focus, measurement, analysis and knowledge management, human resource focus, process management, and business results encourage leaders and staff to excel; the by-products are success and satisfied customers!