



Baldrige Framework – A Silent Force! ... A Race without a Finish Line

by Sunil Sinha

“ I have indeed been fortunate to be part of the Baldrige Foundation, serving the cause of this pathbreaking initiative that has positively changed the United States and benefited people and organizations in many corners of the world.”

I have been fortunate to play a significant role in the business excellence journey of the Tata group, an organization composed of over 100 companies operating in over 100 countries with a revenue of over \$100 billion. The group is celebrating its 150th year in 2018.

The association of Baldrige to Tata began in 1990, when the Baldrige Framework was adopted by Tata Steel, and continued when the Tata group adapted and adopted the Framework in 1994, christening it the Tata Business Excellence Model (TBEM). The objectives of TBEM were to establish milestones for the achievement of performance excellence by companies that would vie for the coveted JRD QV Award, celebrating the memory of JRD Tata, the late Chairman of the Tata group, and establish standards for performance across Tata companies to sustain the Tata brand.

The timing could not have been better: the Indian economy was undergoing remarkable transformation and liberalization, and TBEM was considered an important component of the transformation that Tata companies needed to survive and thrive.

The group leadership had an appetite for change and the courage to execute its vision linking the TBEM journey to the Tata brand, changing the trajectory of the Tata group forever. Ratan N. Tata put the spotlight on TBEM as a process of performance excellence and not as an award program, by continually referring to it as “Our Journey to Excellence.” He said, “...the true objective of setting these criteria, however, was never meant to use them as an assessment for an award, but more importantly, to utilize them for an institutionalized approach to drive performance and attain higher levels of efficiency in everything that a corporate entity does.”

I had the privilege of leading Tata Quality Management Services (TQMS) which was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing TBEM in all Tata companies across the world. The challenge was to implement a system that would deliver consistent training and assessment across all 100 Tata companies which had varying degrees of process centricity, maturity, and commitment to the adoption of the model. TQMS presented myriad opportunities for engaging the different Tata companies in the TBEM movement.

Fortunately, the advantage of the Baldrige/TBEM Criteria was that they were generic enough and industry agnostic, which was important for the Tata group whose companies operate across multiple industries. The Criteria helped us to challenge senior leaders and managers by asking fundamental questions about their business, spurred planning and the implementation of meaningful changes, and created a cycle of assessment and improvement.



At TQMS, I focused on the reinforcement of the process of assessments that supported the JRDQV award program, and our companies continued to progress in their excellence journeys. Senior leaders of our companies served as mentors for the assessments, and the assessors (examiners), drawn from across the group, were trained with great rigor. The TBEM assessment process provided them with unparalleled exposure to the scale and diversity in the Tata group, and provided a unique opportunity for professional development. Involvement in this process also instilled in the assessors a strong sense of ownership and pride at a group level, beyond what they experienced for their own companies.



Baldrige Foundation Board members Sunil Sinha (left) and David Spong.

The TBEM assessment process prompts CEOs and their senior leaders to respond to questions about their thinking on the long-term sustainability of their companies and holistic management. My focus was on building the commitment of the companies that were part and parcel of the Tata group for decades, as well as of newly acquired entities like the Corus group and Jaguar Land Rover in Europe.

The Baldrige criteria and its adaptation in TBEM to suit the Tata context played a very important role in the Tata group's transformation over the last two decades. It is gratifying to see the Baldrige Program recognizing the Tata group as an example of institutionalizing excellence. It is not a surprise that the Baldrige Framework has been able to keep itself relevant by continuously improving and adapting itself over time. Continuing that process will be important as changes in customer tastes and technologies create new opportunities and challenges for organizations.

My exposure to the TBEM helped me crystallize some key learning points that have helped me throughout my career.

1. Visible engagement of top leadership to lead and recognize the excellence movement is the pre-requisite.
2. Organizations need an overarching framework such as Baldrige, complemented with other initiatives such as Cost Reduction, Six Sigma, Lean, ISO Certifications etc., to drive performance excellence.
3. Focus should be on the process of promoting excellence and not on an award.

These lessons were reinforced when I visited many Baldrige Award winning companies in later years.

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