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Abstract:

Even if corporations ‘know’ that quality and business excellence increases corporate productivity, how do these corporations and their middle managers ‘motivate’ their teams to overcome the common inbred internal resistance barriers and actually ‘make excellence happen’? To assist these proactive corporations, this historical research data drills much deeper than usual into the historic, often covert, conative triggers utilized by benchmarked business excellence organizations to find the most efficient and effective triggers. These triggers ultimately could potentially increase the uptake of business excellence globally. This study of 279 business excellence based organizations from the MENA and SEAN regions unearthed 190 such triggers. Through a grouping sift using the initial data net, 115 triggers were identified and analysed. Frequency, success, and ease of learning criteria discovered 35 were the most effective ‘key triggers to excellence’ that can be incorporated into both distance and local decision making corporate cultures, but in different ways.

Author Biography:

Grant is a life-long professional scout and coach of Organizational Development, Leading Organizational Change, and Business Excellence. Over the last 39 years he has conducted first hand studies of organizations in 65 countries. His recent 8 year academic research and dissertation studied 2015 organizational change agents identifying 155 common change management techniques. His next 2 year research discovered that only 72 of these were effective in creating organizational change. The goal of this research was to accumulate successful case studies, share these with other change leaders, and encourage them to do the same. His current research is a 4 year study of business excellence promotion techniques. His focus is OD, Strategic Planning, OB, Human Technology, Innovation, Effective Change Management, and Leading Organizational Change. Grant is also a Registered Organizational Development Professional (ODI) and member of the 2010 EFQM Model of Business Excellence UAE Elite Team.

Presentation Experience:

Grant has presented his research on numerous occasions. This current research was presented at the Organizational Development World Congress in Pretoria in 2010, Benchmarking conference in Bahrain 2010, TQM Central Asian Forums Kazakhstan 2011, Uzbekistan 2012, and American University in Dubai, Zayed University, and University of Strathclyde in the UAE, and Massey University in 2011.

Overview to the Paper:

The purpose of pursuing this research is to add to the increase in the up-take of business excellence, globally. The research results, although limited to a study of MENA and SEAN corporations, will add to our global organizational development and business excellence knowledge base. Ultimately, it is to promote the continuing drive toward global excellence. This current research project has been designed to data drill much deeper than usual into the conative triggers that actually ‘make excellence happen’. The research has studied 279 organizational excellence benchmark corporations, including excellence assessment agencies, via the direct tracking of excellence promotion patterns through observations of activity records, published documented histories, interviews, and virtual interviews. Limited access to subjects and data is similar throughout the world, as trade secrets to excellence uniqueness usually only appear when the corporation is already on to a new innovative springboard to excellence. But ‘success does leave clues’ and these clues can become springboards to new levels of excellence. Toyota and Google can still learn from the Facebook and Twitter upstarts of the world. Just like we all can.

1. Introduction and Objective of Study

Making it Happen (MIH) is a study of successful organizational excellence focused conative triggers, or decision making patterns, utilized within two fast evolving regions, and in particular within both distance decision making and local decision making corporate cultures.

This research study was initiated to address an often ignored but urgently needed, empirically researched and ultimately proven, statistical resource of key ‘successful organizational performance conative technologies’ for future organizational excellence planning, development, and promotion. Our ultimate goal is to identify the most successful methods for promoting and increasing the uptake of business excellence in the MENA (Middle East North Africa) and SEAN (South East Asia Nations) regions. This could also have global value.

Conative is identified here as that final motivational ‘trigger’ that actually makes it happen (i.e. not cognitive or affective). It is a term used for a component of the mind originally discussed by Socrates and Aristotle. It is a component now researched mainly at Arizona State University (www.conativeabilities.org).

The information gained is to be utilized by the author and ADICOE (Abu Dhabi International Center for Organizational Excellence) as they assist organizations in creating, or continually improving, their leading edge learning organizations and consequently organizational excellence strategy. It will also provide a much needed base for further academic knowledge growth in the field of fast paced performance management especially in MENA and SEAN.

The key issue and biggest challenge of this research is the lack of published academic research data on definitive conative actions toward business excellence in the literature, especially within MENA. After intensive research at the federal Center of Documentation and Research (CDR), and the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) in Abu Dhabi, we find decision making reports and results plentiful, but not the conative triggers that ‘make it happen’.
This is especially crucial considering the volume of fast paced decision making happening especially in the UAE. The goal of this paper then is to add to the professional logical academic underpinnings, both theoretical and practical, that will serve major decision making, and makers, for both accuracy and cost efficiency purposes.

Accuracy, efficiency, and quality is the corporate goal of most of our consulting and organizational development targets. To reach this goal they are demanding high performance work teams and organizations, and the most effective triggers that make them so. In turn, this becomes our goal, and the purpose of this research. As academics and advisors we are called on for practical scientifically tested ‘real world’ applied research based advice. We thus need empirical evidence of what conative triggers makes high performance work teams work, and ‘what really makes it happen’. The most urgent request is for ‘local’ MENA models of excellence. Singapore excellence models are also appreciated in both regions, so our research will use the SEAN region as a form of research control.

Over the 39 years of this author’s organizational development and consulting practice, the challenge of utilizing successful organizational performance conative technologies within organizations has evolved from a simple concern, to a matter of survival within the fast evolving global context. Because organizations began asking tougher questions, we needed to find better answers, especially in “complex organizations and their demand for emergent practices, and chaos organizations and their demand for novel next practices” (Snowden, 2012).

2. The Challenge – Our Quest – ‘what triggers business excellence’?

Because the force of economic growth in our two study areas today is rapid, variable, divergent, generative and massive, organizational responses must be flexible, accurate and immediate. Management, and all staff, must learn how to quickly learn, react, and perform. Because of this, our base question then is; what organizational performance conative techniques achieve results efficiently and effectively, and most importantly why? We will need a correlation and ranking along with the reasons that these techniques are successful. Reasons arrive only from detailed analysis.

The detailed root analysis questions then are:

1. What conative triggers are utilized most frequently in promoting business excellence within successful organizations, and is there a pattern to these that others can learn from?
2. What have other similar studies found? And most importantly;
3. What do the results mean? (e.g. effectiveness patterns and scales, and replication efficiencies)
4. How easy were these technologies learned and implemented within the organization?
5. How can these techniques be quickly learned, replicated, and utilized by other individuals, teams, and organizations?

This quest is also related to the utilization of the myriad of new business excellence promotion focused technologies arriving daily. For an efficient research snapshot we first screened down to 190, and then grouped to a final 115 of the 239 promotional techniques initially identified. ISO, Six Sigma, Baldrige, and EFQM are four of the more commonly known business excellence promotional techniques, and for the purpose of this study also conative triggers.
This research also includes the indicated learning complexity of each of these technologies. This means, which of these techniques can be learned most rapidly by all appropriate staff? Which technique, or combination of techniques once learned makes individuals, teams, and their organizations take the ‘business excellence’ action step? Because of daily changes in this field, the first step then was to define for the purpose of this paper the scope and criteria of appropriate subjects and techniques, and then categorize by our matrix data net possible answers especially within the business process areas of learning, effective change management, motivational, and communication techniques.

The final questions remained, ‘what conative techniques are being utilized to ultimately improve business excellence promotion within proactive corporations?’ and ‘how easy is it for other organizations and staff teams, including the board of directors, and all individual staff members to learn these new, sometimes culturally foreign and often overwhelmingly innovative business excellence technologies?’

The study goal of this research was to ultimately discover, analyze, and assess 115 highly effective generative business excellence promotion concepts that could evolve into effective communication and learning models that could be utilized by academics, organizational performance coaches, learning organizations, and business excellence performance agencies such as ADICOE, and WBCC Forums.

Thus our quest, our refined ‘problem statement’ became; ‘what makes business excellence happen? This research is a decision making depth analysis of the successful organizational excellence conative triggers utilized by corporations that create exponential change.

Our bottom line, these answers may assist us as business excellence agencies in motivating more organizations to strive toward their journey to excellence. And in turn more may realize that, as a Singapore business man stated, ‘excellence means profit, period … awards are just a nice milepost along our journey’.

3. Background and Literature Review

The most relevant literature on the topic of empirically researching organizational performance conative business excellence promotion technologies seems to focus on either brain behaviour research or physical performance research. Arizona State University seems to be a leader in conative research. We will follow up on these. fMRI brain research relating conation to business performance is sparse so far, but increasing rapidly. Back in the 1990’s there were only a handful of fMRI related brain researchers. Today there are over 20,000 in the US alone. Only a few so far though are doing research that may relate to business excellence such as neuro-economics, neuro-cinematics, and neuro-marketing. This area will take more specific searching. New York University seems to be the leader here as some related ‘conative triggers’ are also emerging.

Fortunately however, physical performance research shows how it can quickly relate to business and economic development. In fact, the trend in using organizational and team performance development in business seems to be moving the business ‘learning space’ on to ‘physical activity learning’ through outdoor adventure experiences. It has staff relate this back to business and excellence performance. Al Shaheen Adventure Training in the UAE seems to be the leader
in MENA. This is naturally limited to physically healthy individuals, but there are some schools now focusing also on less able and over-weight staff as well. SEAN has many centers.

It appears that in our two targeted business excellence regions, as much as formalized adventure learning for ‘excellence’ performance is relatively new to both, both regions have cultural roots in outdoor survival, one in the desert, and one in the jungle, so this parallel works, and is popular now in both regions. Business performance trainers are simply re-utilizing these two extreme environments to assist in ‘speed learning’ some of the more effective past and present organizational and team performance conative technologies. These are learned in a harsh environment and translated back to business survival, one of the 190 ‘triggers to excellence’.

4. Research Variables

Considering our focused study environment, UAE and Singapore/Malaysia, both areas have a large Islamic culture base, and each are familiar to economic and security independence for around 40 years. Compared to any other young regions in the world, the growth of organizational excellence in both locations has been obviously spectacular. From its origins in 1971, by 2010 the UAE economy had grown to nearly 300 billion US GDP (Gulf News September 22, 2010). Singapore also from 1963 to 2010 has reached nearly 300 billion US dollars. This is very similar to Malaysia with a similar history. Malaysia’s GDP for 2010 is just a hair under that of Singapore. (Malaysia Insider May 12, 2011). Coincidently also, even if it is only an attitude of economic progress, first Malaysia creates the world’s tallest buildings, Singapore has their recent Marina Bay Sands development, and now the UAE has the highest building the world, Burj Khalifa. Evidence of spectacular growth is outstanding and commonplace in both of our case research regions.

Both regions are also attempting to remain on the leading edge of emerging new nations while at the same time faced with, and attempting to take advantage of, exponentially expanding world growth. For example in ICT alone, Internet traffic doubles every 100 days, Wireless capacity doubles every 9 months (nanotech.law.asu.edu), and chip performance doubles every 18-24 months (Gordon Moore’s Law www.ece.uic.edu). Both regions are focused on utilizing the business tools of ICT excellence to keep in tune with this growth.

Also, “Anything that is not personalized and responsive to changing individual needs will rapidly be replaced by something that is.” (From Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance – Roco, Michael and Bainbridge, William. Natural Science Foundation, June 2002 Arlington, Virginia). This paper suggests merging the technologies of ICT, Biotechnology, Nanotech, and Social Networks Web 2.0 and Enterprise 2.0 and Learning Science to enhance organizational performance. Following this ‘future trend’ is another pattern of successful conative behaviour slowly being identified and utilized in both regions. This ‘individualization’ ‘respect’ and ‘ownership’ is included within ‘conative trigger # 6’ in our results.

Since our goal is to study only successful organizational performance conative techniques utilized in these fast growing economies, and we are limited by time and finances, we need to define, refine, and narrow our study focus.

Certain organizational performance techniques will be directly attached to finance or ICT. These are the dependant variables and are not under our consideration. To do this study, instead of
depending on the tools of finance or ICT technology, especially where accounting or technology sometimes replace both culture and long term strategy, ‘the tail often wagging the dog’, we must study the independent variables of strategic and design thinking, decision sciences, culture, entrepreneurship, Web and Enterprise 2.0, leadership, management, and other organizational ‘key performance indicators’ (KPIs). These components are definitely the ‘human technology’ side of organizational excellence, the process, strategy, leadership, and people categories of our EFQM, Baldrige, and SPRING excellence model awards.

Our research is to discover the patterns within this perceived organizational ‘complexity’ or ‘chaos’ (Snowden, 2012), especially in distance decision making corporate cultures. There should be many common identifiable and analytically similar patterns of organizational performance techniques utilized within these two regions that are repeatable, and that the rest of the world can learn from them. Only in a future study with more finances available will we be able to ‘design in’ technical and finance ‘research control’ variables.

5. Research Methodology

This study progresses in a logical and sequential manner from the problem statement, existing knowledge, and collaborative research design, to field research, data collection, analysis, results, and recommendations. Our aim is to screen and then select individual and corporate candidates that utilize successful organizational performance strategies that can be replicated. A high replication quality allows for the potential sharing of success technology with others. This is the reason the complexity of each technique is also being assessed.

The results of this study should be a valued addition to the academic and organizational development performance knowledge base, both in theory and practice. These organizational performance techniques may in turn enable organizations to be empowered to reach their next level of achievement, and enable them to continue further along their ‘journey to business excellence’.

Due to the magnitude and dynamic nature of this research subject matter, this study has had to be limited to only two geographic and cultural areas. MENA (represented mostly by UAE) and SEAN (represented mostly by Singapore/Malaysia) regions have been chosen for this research study because of their recent great economic strides forward. As much as they were not selected for their cultural similarity, this similarity surely enables research efficiency. Although this limits the variety of subjects, the subjects will be from at least five organizational categories; traditional, governance, social, business, and proactive. This research pattern is applicable to, and could be replicated in many rapidly growing economies around the world. The MENA and SEAN regions are the most appropriate for this particular study, especially because the researcher is in direct contact with major decision makers in the course of his regular work in the MENA, and he also has many SEAN business contacts.

6. Research Design and Strategy

This historical research has been designed to be strategically flexible and efficient in core screening and assessing conative trigger techniques, all recorded in matrix format on Excel. This ‘data collection net’ or scaled matrix enables us to collect the techniques, identify and group
them, prepare them for analysis, calculate utilization frequency and success weighting and ultimately a ranking.

In ethics screening no humans were used as subjects. Our collected matrix formatted and scaled successful performance patterns have been gathered and recorded via journals and periodicals, newsletters, annual reports, books, video clips, conference presentations and papers, seminars, workshops, focus groups, corporate and individual plans and actions, Internet research, Web logs, and verified via business networking, and direct longitudinal observations.

This design allows us to efficiently and effectively answer our research questions, especially in sensitive data gathering environments such as distance decision making corporate cultures. This design also allows us to screen out un-wanted variables as discussed earlier. Our greatest threat is subjectivity in identifying techniques that are successful rather than those simply popular because they are advertised widely. This all too common subjectivity would negatively affect our validity. Objectivity is key, and fact, not opinion. Just because a technique is advertised and even utilized by most organizations, does not mean it is successful.

Sampling must also be treated in a similar objective manner. We must continue our focus on success not just because a subject is popular, or even easy to access and research. The ideal sampling is a cross section in each region and of the five organization groupings, traditional, governance, social, business, and proactive.

Because our ultimate target reader is the average business developer, manager, and business performance designer, especially in distant decision making corporate cultures, instrumentation for the data analysis will be a simplified ranking. This allows our technique recording, observations, and analysis to be the most accurate, valid, reliable, and as transparent as possible.

7. Preliminary Important Background and Decision Making Depth Findings

1. A faster and broader ‘uptake of the business excellence journey’ is logically urgent. Under the current economic crisis the world is in, and the tsunami affects of our world growth rate at about 220,000 more people per day ‘business excellence’ obviously is not keeping up with our ‘global growth’. (see the world clock at www.worldometers.com)

2. The demand for better, higher level, emergent, innovative, and novel business practices (excellence) (Snowden, 2012) naturally increases along with our global population growth. “How do we design our own ‘corporate culture’ to at least reach the basic benchmark in the latest in human technology to keep us on the ‘leading edge’ of business progress?” This question was posed by a leading Abu Dhabi corporation. This question initiated this MIH research project.

3. “Making It Happen: A Decision Making Depth Analysis of Successful Organizational Excellence Conative Triggers Utilized by Corporations that Create Exponential Change in MENA and SEAN” is a study of how leading corporations keep up with the urgent demand for better business, or not.

4. Two hundred and seventy nine (279) progressive businesses across two active areas of the world, MENA and SEAN (Middle East and North Africa, and South East Asian
Nations) have been studied, via a cross-matrix of 115 identified ‘triggers to action’ that collectively they have utilized, to determine what started them on their journey to business excellence, the ability to keep up with today’s world growth. We are learning what some of their triggers to action are and how others can learn from them.

5. This historical research project reviewing ‘upper middle management business excellence action’ has to date found empirical evidence verifying some commonly accepted theories of business excellence. It has also unearthed, literally from other historical and archaeology research, a greater understanding of the importance of knowing how to keep up with corporate cultures that have existed for centuries with ‘distant decision making’ deeply engrained in their way of doing business. Distant Decision Making in this study is very similar to Hofstede’s term of High Power Distance (http://www.geert-hofstede.com). The second grouping is of corporate cultures that are largely Local Decision Making, or for readers of Hofstede similar to Low Power Distance.

6. Here are some preliminary ‘decision making depth’ corporate culture patterns that have emerged. To date these are the leading triggers being utilized by successful corporations to promote business excellence within their organizations.

a. In Distant Decision Making corporate cultures, all of these ‘triggers to business excellence’ need to be engaged as a package. Upper Middle Managers in our most progressive corporations take action on business excellence ‘mostly because’ of this package of triggers; 1) A Sense of Belonging 2) Relationship empathy 3) Reciprocity and Fairness 4) Corporate Consistency 5) Their authority is recognized 6) Respect 7) Patriotism 8) Hospitality 9) Social proof 10) Understanding the Corporate Vision 11) Understanding of Corporate Strategy (including quadruple bottom lines) 12) Peer pressure 13) Benchmarks and 14) Business Excellence Award knowledge. (‘When BMW have 80% of staff qualified in EFQM, a pattern begins to emerge’ - Joe Schneider, a German EFQM Master Instructor).


c. The World does not stand still – neither does the demand for Business Excellence. Fortunately all our worldwide business excellence initiatives and awards are working for our 1% … we just need to work on the other 99%. Our real target with this information is our world’s ‘next billion’, those new entrepreneurs in challenging environments currently
planning and establishing their businesses, but still lack free internet access and global communication. This information aims to assist new enterprises to design-in to their business plans ‘business excellence techniques’ from ‘day one’ of their new business.

8. Conclusions

Under the urgency of our fast evolving global business climate, conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations in the full research paper discuss the data and ramifications both qualitatively and quantitatively. Because of the basic qualitative nature of the promotional triggers or processes, each result needs to be interpreted with variable consequences noted. The full research paper details, interprets, and quantifies each trigger, but of the 115 the top ranking are the above 35. Even if at the end of this study the findings are not fully implemented, at least the research will have uncovered and classified a vast number of possible techniques that can be tried by innovative entrepreneurs on a trial and error basis. This study will also add to our academic organizational performance data base, another research methodology in analyzing organizational performance technology. Regardless of our result, this study should motivate the promotion of business excellence, especially for new entrepreneurs and their enterprises and intra-preneurs who wish to initiate excellence from ‘day one’ of their new enterprise. This research is also intended to initiate further research on the topic of building ‘cultures of excellence’, especially as the ‘next billion’ businesses enter the global connectivity (internet) stage.

Reference Samples


File name gregan_makingexcellencehappen_wbccnz2012_ver02.doc

Submitted to WBCC – NZ – 2012 via submission@worldbusinesscapabilitycongress.com

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