
Rewarding Excellence: An International Study into Business Excellence Award Processes

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This article shares selected findings from a major international study focusing on how business excellence (BE) awards are administered across nations. In this article, the authors present findings related to the recognition and awards process, namely the BE awards themselves. The methodology they used consisted of a literature review, three surveys, a series of focus groups, and key informant interviews. The primary focus was on the Australian context, as the administrators of the Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF) commissioned the research. The study, however, involved 16 countries, and the findings draw upon a range of international sources and hence are of relevance to all Business Excellence Framework (BEF) custodians. Evidence from the study indicates that BEF custodians worldwide operate an effective awards process that both evaluators and organizations benefit from. The authors found that the awards process is perceived by custodians to be one of their highest priority activities, and that international practice varies in relation to aspects such as: the duration of the evaluation process; the number of evaluators on a team; the level, number, and focus of awards conferred; the documentation required; and the costs to the organization. The authors describe the practices in relation to these areas of difference. A key finding was that custodians, in general, have an effective recognition and awards process. However, the process has in many cases become the prime focus of the custodians to the detriment of other processes focussed on creating awareness of BE and how to apply it. The findings from the project were used to redesign the ABEF, and are expected to help inform national BE strategies worldwide.

Key words: business excellence, empirical research, international study

INTRODUCTION

Since their beginnings with the first Deming Award in 1951 and the first Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) in 1987, national quality awards (NQAs) and business excellence awards (BEAs) have been a primary means of formally and publicly recognizing the efforts of organizations that have achieved significant improvements or world-class performance against a framework based on a set of core quality management principles. There are now more than 80 countries that administer a national award. The Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF) was established in 1987 as one of the original four frameworks, and was administered by the Australian Quality Council until 2001, at which point custodianship was taken over by SAI Global Ltd. In 2005, SAI Global commissioned the Center for Organizational Excellence Research (COER) to conduct a study with the aim of helping to further develop the ABEF and achieve higher levels of engagement of BE in Australia. The project examined the structure and design of the framework itself, and the activities of SAI Global and 15 other international framework custodian organizations in terms of: ongoing framework development; promoting and creating national awareness; facilitating deployment and use by organizations; and recognizing organizational progress through evaluation and the provision of annual awards. In this article the authors present findings with respect to international recognition and awards processes only. That is, the process of judging BEA applicants and conferring awards upon the successful organizations.

Key Definitions

Certain key terms occur variously within the BE literature that have synonymous meaning and require distinction in this article. First, the words “model,” “framework,” and “award” are used in describing a set of criteria (BE constructs) and items (the indicators intended to provide a scoring basis for conducting organizational self-assessment or applying for an award). Examples include the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence (MBCPE), the ABEF, the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model, and the Malaysian Prime Minister’s Quality Award (PMQA). Second, some countries refer to their national recognition mechanisms as NQAs in contrast to others that refer to theirs as BEAs, despite the similarities. In this article, the word “awards” generally refers to the application processes and ceremonial events through which the organizations that have implemented a BE framework are formally and publicly recognized—that is, the annual awards process—and not to BE frameworks (the scoring mechanism) unless otherwise specified.

A REVIEW OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF NQA/BE FRAMEWORKS

Various studies have been conducted since the mid-1990s comparing the structures of NQA/BE frameworks at a global or regional level. Laszlo (1996) compared the award frameworks of Japan, the United States, Canada, and Europe. Like many authors at the time, he viewed these NQAs as effective proxy indicators of TQM maturity, stating in support of the frameworks that “survival in global competition requires improvement to world-class status.” The use of NQA/BE framework scores to represent total quality management (TQM) maturity is an approach used in much of the empirical research that followed, as outlined later. Puay et al. (1998) compared nine NQAs, concluding that they “represent a country’s efforts to enhance transnational reputation.” Vokurka, Stading, and Brazeal (2000), comparing five NQAs (Laszlo’s four plus that of Australia), caution that

the awards do not represent a panacea but rather “a foundation for assessing and encouraging TQM in the global marketplace.” Chuan and Soon (2000) chart trends in the development of 17 NQAs, but make no explicit comment on the wider benefits or disadvantages of adopting such frameworks. Tan (2002), comparing 16 NQAs, discusses the awards’ key roles in raising the performance and competitiveness of their countries, adding that they represent a means of promoting quality awareness at a national level. Mavroidis, Toliopoulou, and Agoritsas (2007), comparing 31 European awards, make reference to the “ultimate goal” of improving the competitiveness of small- and medium-sized firms. These studies mostly concentrate on comparing the theoretical structures of the awards in terms of scoring and underlying principles, and of these only Chuan and Soon (2000) explicitly contrast the annual award processes of different nations. With the exception of Mavroidis, Toliopoulou, and Agoritsas (2007), who focus on the European context, none of the studies discussed previously involved the direct contribution of national BEF custodians in the primary research. This study is unique in obtaining primary data from 16 international custodians, as discussed in the methodology section.

ADVANTAGES OF NATIONAL AWARDS FRAMEWORKS AND PROGRAMS

The appeal of NQA/BE frameworks for organizations can derive from both the process of using the framework itself and from the potential outcomes of successfully improving its score, that is, receipt of a national award. In terms of outcome, winning or even competing for a NQA can bring considerable public recognition (see, for example, Biazzo and Bernardi 2003; Laszlo 1996). In terms of process, the benefits of engagement with the frameworks can be seen in a number of studies that have used framework scores or the winning of awards as a basis for evaluating the effects of adopting TQM or BE on organizational performance. Przasnyski and Tai (2002) evaluated the stock performance of MBNQA winners using four financial analyses, concluding that while the results of the discontinued National

Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Baldrige stock survey do not tell the whole story because of large-scale trends in the stock market, the sample of 23 award-winning companies did outperform their nonwinning counterparts. Examining the empirical relationship between TQM (using the MBCPE as a key operational definition of TQM) and performance, Douglas and Judge Jr. (2001) and Curkovic, Vickery, and Droge (2000) found significant relationships with competitive advantage and firm performance. Easton and Jarell (1998) examined the impact of TQM on the performance of 108 U. S. firms using a Baldrige score of 450 as a dichotomous and proxy variable to differentiate advanced from not-so-advanced firms in relation to TQM. They reported a significantly increased stock return after five years in the advanced group. Hendricks and Singhal (1997) used the winning of a quality award as a proxy variable representing the effective implementation of TQM, and concluded (N = 463) that award winners significantly outperformed the control group (N = 394 nonwinners) over a 10-year period in terms of operating income and sales growth. Jacob, Madu, and Tang (2004) also examined how 18 MBNQA winners performed with respect to several accounting and financial metrics, reporting performance significantly better than industry medians in terms of profitability and asset use. Elsewhere, Hausner (1999) demonstrated a strong positive correlation over eight years between BE score and improvement against a range of key performance indicators of 22 firms that applied for the Australian Business Excellence Award. Hansson and Eriksson (2002) report a significantly improved financial performance from organizations that won the Swedish Quality Award. In a similar study to Hendricks and Singhal (1997), sponsored by the EFQM and British Quality Foundation of 120 award winners, it was found that the winners outperformed companies of similar size in the same industries over an 11-year period (CQE 2005).

Other researchers have reported little or no evidence of any such improvement (Adams, McQueen, and Seawright 1999; Williams et al. 2006; Wilford 2007; Tuck 2005a; 2005b). Dean and Tomovic (2004) argue that studying the performance of MBNQA award winners is conceptually flawed, as their NQA scores

contain results criteria scores in addition to enabler criteria scores. While the financial and operational benefits that accrue from winning or competing for awards is thus debated, there can be little doubt that the strategic decision to compete for an award focuses an organization on its processes, measurements, and performance against a variety of indicators, and that winning an award brings valuable national and international acclaim and publicity.

THE AWARDS PROCESS

The normal awards process consists of the following key stages, as documented by Laszlo (1996); Kristensen and Juhl (1999); Chuan and Soon (2000); Vokurka, Stading, and Brazeal (2000); Tan (2002); Leonard and McAdam (2003); and Tuck (2005a; 2005b). Full details of assessment processes can be found on most custodian Web sites. Applicants begin by applying for an award. They submit an application that describes how the organization operates and the results that were achieved. The award administrators begin the process by picking the evaluator teams that will review the applications, and providing training (or top-up training for those previously trained). The organizational applications are then reviewed by the evaluator teams against the BE model criteria and principles, and then they usually select the finalists. The finalists are then visited by evaluator teams, who prepare a feedback report on the application and site-visit evidence. Finally, the winners and runners-up are selected by a panel of judges. The awards are presented at an annual awards ceremony.

Key issues/considerations for the administrators of the national BEF in this process are the selection and training of evaluators; provision of advice on the application process to prospective applicants; the choice of level at which the award will be made for the winners; and the organization and publicizing of the award event. International practice varies in relation to the duration of the evaluation process; the number of evaluators on the teams; the level, number, and focus of the awards conferred; the documentation required; and the costs to the organization. In this article, the authors address practices in relation to these areas of difference.

Evaluator Training and Selection

Thorough, consistent, and fair evaluation of applications is key to the integrity of the process (Chuan and Soon 2000; Laszlo 1996). Evaluator training needs to be equally thorough to ensure that the awards maintain quality and consistency from year to year. The training is repeated annually to ensure that evaluators keep current with their knowledge of the national BE criteria, since these are subjected to minor and major review at regular intervals. Leonard and McAdam (2003) state that evaluators are usually selected on the basis of “experience, qualifications, and expertise, [although] not necessarily related to BE.” After following a short training program, the evaluators “have a detailed understanding of identifying areas for improvement, strengths, and using guidelines for determining scores,” and are equipped to assess the applicants.

Levels of BE Award Recognition

Generally, the awards are divided into categories, which vary from country to country (Chuan and Soon 2000). They may be tiered by point-score improvement into gold, silver, and bronze awards (for example, the New Zealand Business Excellence Award); awarded by industry (public, private, education, healthcare, or nonprofit, for example, the MBNQA); based on size categories (micro, small, and large enterprise, such as the Australian Business Excellence Award); regionally based (such as the UK Business Excellence Award); or based upon a combination of these.

Government Sponsorship/ Ministerial Presence

Some countries, recognizing the importance of the awards in promoting BE nationally, secure ministerial presence at the quality awards or on the evaluation committee. This has been the case in

Malaysia (Tuck 2005a), Denmark (Kristensen and Juhl 1999), and Ireland, among others. It is widely recognized (for example, Chuan and Soon 2000) that government involvement is paramount in emphasizing that the awards are nationally valued and high profile, particularly given the resources and effort that an organization must expend to prepare a submission.

Advice Provision

Most BEF custodians make available documentation with guidelines on the application process for organizations to follow in preparing their submissions. This is available via Web sites and is often free of charge. There is commonly a flowchart to guide organizations through the various stages.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this study consisted of three major stages, as more fully discussed in Mann and Grigg (2007), and Grigg and Mann (2005a; 2005b). Stage 1 comprised reviews of: published literature on international trends and practices in BE and comparative studies of national excellence models; the Web site content of BEF custodians; published guidelines from BEF custodians for 2004–05; and Australian-context research on drivers of organizational excellence.

In stage 2, six Australian focus groups were conducted, each made up of experts (primarily evaluators) with in-depth knowledge of the ABEF and its deployment. Participants were asked for their views on framework development, design, promotion, application, and the recognition and awards process. In relation to each they were asked to identify perceived strengths, opportunities for improvement, and solutions/recommendations with respect to those opportunities. The focus groups were conducted prior to the surveys in order to inform the survey design process and maximize the content validity of the resulting questionnaires.

The final stage (stage 3) consisted of three surveys:

1. *A telephone-based national awareness survey* with the objective of reliably assessing the current

Table 1 Responses obtained from focus group workshops.

Feedback area	Responses obtained
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prestige of awards/ceremony • Quality of the feedback reports • Quality of the site visits and follow-up visits
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are variable levels of detail in feedback reports. • Awards dinner has previously attracted only the award winners and evaluators and, therefore, there has been a lost opportunity in terms of attracting a wider audience. • Nonprofits don't have the resources to participate in the awards process. • Profile of the award can be increased. Currently there is a "so what" attitude if you win an award—it needs to be recognized that it leads to long-term advantage. • Award applications are currently via self-nomination. There is the potential to explore awards by nomination. • There is the opportunity to give best-practice advice as part of the feedback report or other means. • There is the opportunity to recognize all award applicants.
Solutions/ recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better reports (improved selection of evaluators/training?) • Awards ceremony to attract a wider audience to raise the profile of the awards. • The award applicants should be involved in selecting/designing the award recognition process. • Raise the profile of the ABEF award itself through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Providing multiple awards for different sectors/business categories, e.g., for education/public service ◦ Getting the government (prime minister) to be involved in the award ceremony ◦ Changing the name of the Gold Award to the Prime Minister's Award • There is the potential to invite organizations that are perceived to be outstanding to apply for the awards (and perhaps given assistance in applying). If these organizations perform well, the profile of business excellence will be raised and they will become ambassadors for the process. • An additional step to the feedback report could be added where best-practice advice is given to the applicant. This advice could be given by SAI Global after considering the findings from the feedback report and after consultation with the evaluator team (a fee could be charged for this service). • Produce a short-list of potential award winners and then announce the winner. This gives everyone recognition.

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awareness of the ABEF throughout Australian businesses as an indicator of the impact of SAI Global's promotional strategies.

2. *A national user survey* designed to be completed by BE evaluators who were very familiar with the design of the ABEF and SAI Global's services used to promote its use. The purpose of this survey was to obtain in-depth feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the ABEF and SAI Global's associated BE services. Forty-six questionnaires were completed from a sampling frame consisting of 100 BE evaluators in Australia.
3. *An international custodian survey* with the aim of identifying best practices in terms of how BEF custodians internationally develop and deploy BEFs. This survey was intended to enable SAI Global to benchmark its key processes against other BEF custodians and obtain innovative ideas on how they could improve their services. The survey was followed up with telephone interviews

to clarify the information given and obtain further detail on those practices that were considered as innovative or better practices by the BEF custodian. Sixteen international custodians took part, representing Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Europe, India, Ireland, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Scotland, Singapore, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This article reports the results of the international survey.

FINDINGS

In this section the authors present findings in relation to the major themes identified from the literature review. They also present selected examples of good practice from various international custodians from an extensive database of such examples obtained during the study. These were used to advise SAI Global as to what changes to make to its awards process.

Table 2 Value of the awards process in relation to the time/resource investment of organizations and BE evaluators.

Perceived value	Organizations		BE evaluators	
	count	% responding	count	% responding
Excellent	10	23.3	8	21.1
Good	18	41.9	13	34.2
Average	10	23.3	15	39.5
Poor	4	9.3	2	5.3
Very poor	1	2.3	0	0
Total (N=46)	43	100	38	100

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Stage 2 Focus Group Findings (National)

Table 1 summarizes the comments received by Australian focus group participants on the Australian award process. As shown, the prestige of the ceremony, the quality of feedback given on applications, and the quality of site visits and follow-ups to these were all well regarded. There were views that the whole process should be widened to be more inclusive, especially for nonprofit organizations. The issue of public recognition and of leveraging off that recognition for dissemination of best practice among award winners was apparent. The importance of government/ministerial involvement was also recognized. These observations were included in recommendations given to the custodian of the ABEF.

Stage 3 User Survey Findings (National)

ABEF users provided data on their perceptions of the ABEF and the awards process and related activities of the custodian, SAI Global. Forty-five percent thought that the ABEF was viewed as a “run-of-the-mill” (standard) award, and would prefer to see it as being Australia’s premier business award. Asked about their views on a name change, 25 respondents (54 percent) were in favor of changing the award title to the Prime Minister’s

Table 3 Most important award-related activities for SAI Global to focus on over the next few years.

Rank	Awards-related activity	Top 3 count
1	Publicity surrounding the awards	16
2	Feedback report to the applicant	8
3	Application guidelines	7
4=	ABEF guide (restrict your thoughts to how it is presented and not the design of the framework itself)	6
4=	General management of the awards process by SAI Global	6
6=	Launch event for the award	5
6=	Site visits (process followed and its effectiveness)	5
6=	Opportunities for applicants and evaluators to suggest improvements to the awards process	5
9	Award ceremony	4
10=	Evaluator selection process	2
10=	Evaluator training	2
12	Consensus meeting (process followed and its effectiveness)	0

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Quality Award or something similar, to reflect its relative importance. Of these, eight (19 percent) favored changing only the name of the top “Gold” level award. Twelve (28.6 percent) favored keeping the current name, of which two suggested engaging the Prime Minister’s involvement to increase the award and framework profile. Additionally, one respondent commented that there should be tiered national, state, and regional awards.

Users were asked for their views on the value of the awards process in relation to the time and resource investment of themselves and applicant organizations. The results are summarized in Table 2, showing a positive perception that the awards process is a worthwhile activity. Roughly two-thirds of Australian evaluators viewed their national award program as good to excellent value for participating organizations in relation to the time and resources invested. Fifty-five percent of the evaluators rated the awards process as providing

good to excellent value for the investment of their own time. Five percent or fewer indicated that the awards program offered poor value to organizations and evaluators.

Twelve award-related activities were identified from discussions with SAI Global, evaluators, and users, and respondents were asked to indicate the top three priority activities for SAI Global to concentrate on over the next five years. A simple count was obtained of the frequency of ticks for each activity, which was used to rank the activities from 1 to 16. The resulting ranking is summarized in Table 3. "Publicizing the awards" emerged as the most important activity as perceived by users and evaluators. This echoed comments from the focus groups about the need to increase the award's profile. The second most important was the provision of feedback to applicants, and third was the availability of application guidelines.

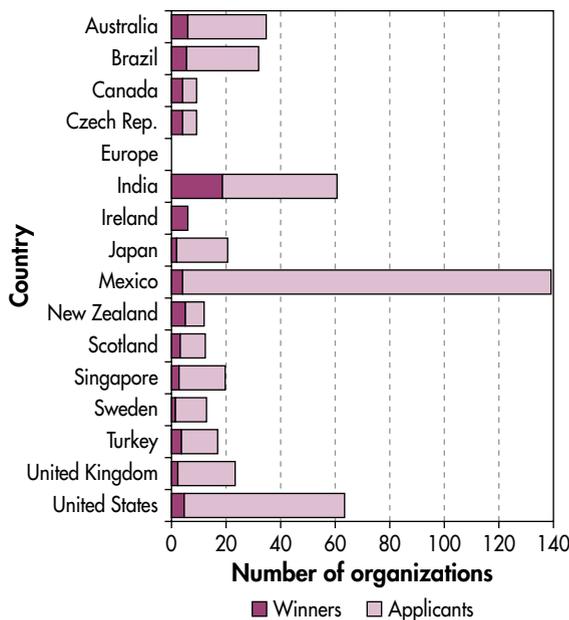
Stage 3 Custodian Findings (International)

Figure 1 shows data resulting from the authors' study on the number of applicants and award winners in the two-year period between 2002 and 2004, across 15 countries. Internationally, seven custodians (United States, Brazil, Mexico, Czech Republic, India, Singapore, and EFQM) claimed that their country's award is probably viewed as the premier business award across all regions and industry sectors.

Custodian Perception of the Effectiveness of Awards-Related Activities

To provide a basis for selecting the more effective practices from those of the international custodians, the custodians were asked to rate their perception of their own effectiveness in relation to 16 award-related activities, on a scale ranging from 1= poor to 4 = excellent. The activities and the resulting distributions of respondent ratings are summarized in Table 4. The authors

Figure 1 Number of applicants and award winners, 2002-04.



Note: EFQM requested its data not be made public

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examined the practices of those custodians rating themselves "good" or "excellent." Additionally, a weighted mean score was calculated for each activity using the following formula:

$$weighted\ mean\ score = \frac{\sum (score \times frequency)}{total\ frequency}$$

The resulting weighted means for each activity are also shown in Table 4, together with standard deviations around each mean. This weighted score was used as a basis for: a) ranking the activities in order of perceived effectiveness; and b) comparing custodians' perceived effectiveness in award processes with their perceived effectiveness in relation to other areas of operation.

Comparison of Custodian Effectiveness with Respect to Recognition, Awareness, and the Application Processes

A similar process was followed in developing a weighted mean score for other areas of custodian activity, namely: how custodians develop awareness of their model

Table 4 Self-rating (effectiveness) scores for award processes, with weighted average, ranking, and standard deviation.

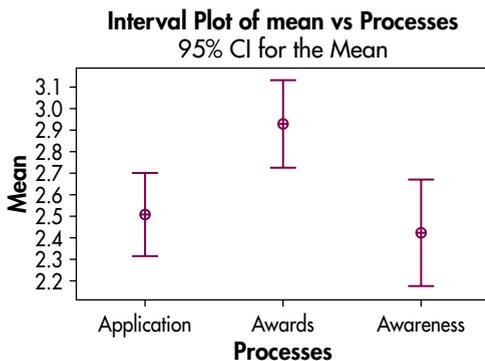
Rank	Award processes/activities	Scale				Weighted mean	Standard deviation
		Poor 1	Average 2	Good 3	Excellent 4		
1	Provision of an award ceremony		1	6	8	3.47	0.62
2	Undertaking site visits by evaluators on award applicants		2	6	8	3.38	0.70
3	The judging process		2	7	7	3.31	0.68
4=	Provision of evaluator training	1	1	9	5	3.13	0.78
4=	Undertaking consensus meetings by evaluators		3	8	5	3.13	0.70
6=	Evaluator selection process		3	9	4	3.06	0.66
6=	General management of the awards process		4	7	5	3.06	0.75
8	Provision of a launch event for the award	1	1	7	3	3.00	0.82
9	Providing opportunities for applicants and evaluators to suggest improvements to the awards process	1	5	5	5	2.88	0.93
10	Provision of senior evaluator training/instructions (for example, for the leader of an evaluation team)	1	2	10	2	2.87	0.72
11	Determining the eligibility criteria for applying for the awards		6	7	3	2.81	0.73
12=	Provision of guidelines and assistance for potential applicants on submitting an award application		5	10	1	2.75	0.56
12=	Provision of support to ensure evaluator teams follow due process	3	2	7	4	2.75	1.03
14	Provision of feedback reports to applicants	1	6	4	4	2.73	0.93
15	Provision of a guide to explain the BE model and criteria		5	8	1	2.71	0.59
16	Publicity surrounding the awards	8	3	5		1.81	0.88

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(awareness process, measured by scores against 14 questionnaire items), and how they assist organizations with applying their model (application support processes measured by scores against 21 questionnaire items). To determine whether there was a significant difference between the self-rating scores for awards processes and those given to awareness and application processes, a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted. This standard test ranks the 51 (= 16 + 14 + 21) final weighted means across all three categories, and then compares the median ranks obtained for each group. The nonparametric test was appropriate given the ordinal nature of the raw data and the lack of an underlying

normal distribution of scores. In this case the authors were comparing the median of the weighted self-rating means for award processes against those obtained for awareness creation and application processes. The test results are shown in Figure 2 and Table 5, which show that the self-rating scores (ranging from 1 = poor to 4 = excellent) given for effectiveness in award-related activities were significantly higher than those given for awareness or application support-related activities. This finding from the study indicated that custodians believe they are most effective in relation to the awards processes. During interviews, this area was where custodians reported concentrating most of their operational effort

Figure 2 Comparing custodians' perceptions of the effectiveness of different operational activities.



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Table 5 Kruskal-Wallis Test comparing median ranked scores based upon weighted averages.

Processes	n	Median	Average rank	Z
Application	21	2.50	23.1	-1.16
Awards	16	2.94	36.6	3.45
Awareness	14	2.31	18.2	-2.31
Overall	51		26.0	
H	Degrees of freedom		p	
12.84	2		.002	

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and resources. They do this not necessarily because they think it is the most important activity, but because of the high level of resources required to manage a BEA process.

INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

Table 6 contains comparative statistics obtained from the 16 custodians involved in the study, in relation to the award and recognition processes and activities. This table is discussed in the following sections.

The Duration of the Awards Process

Table 6, column 1 shows the duration of the awards process, from receipt of application to conferral of award, for each of the custodians. As shown, one custodian (Ireland) takes two months to complete the process. Six (Canada, Japan, Sweden, Scotland, New Zealand, and EFQM) take between four and five months. The remainder take between five and seven months to process applications. This gives a modal duration of six months from application to award. Recommendations from custodians for reducing this time included the following:

1. Reduce the time for study and development of the individual evaluation.
2. Generate electronic mechanisms and long-distance training modules to recertify competencies and new reached levels.

EFQM has recently moved to a new process that radically shortens the time to process award applications.

The Launch Event

Three international custodians (United States, Czech Republic, and Ireland) rated their own launch event for the awards as excellent. As the Czech Republic custodian reported: "Our launch event and award ceremony are the same. The process runs one year—when we award the winner at the same time we open the next year award process. The ceremony takes place at Prague Castle (one of the most famous monuments in Prague, the seat of the Czech Republic president), winners are awarded by the president. Many people are interested in the ceremony; it is a big social event." They report that about 500 people attend the event, which includes an award dinner. Representatives of the government give a short speech before they give the awards, which is reported in the newspapers.

The Award Ceremony

As the following comments from various custodians illustrate, the award ceremony itself is regarded as the key event of the year. Custodians reported the presence of a head of state or VIP of similar standing.

- Japan: "The award ceremony is most effective in terms of high publicity value in promoting and expanding the Japan Quality Program. It also generates many positive points. Award winners cherish the memories

Table 6 Comparison of key award process statistics for international custodians.

Column	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Country	Evaluation process duration (months)	Application document length	Typical evaluation team size	Is there always a site visit?	Length of site visits (days)	Training days required to become an evaluator	Do evaluators pay for training?	Is the training the same for new/returning evaluators?
Australia	6	6+44	2-6	yes	1-3	3 days (Cert III in BE) + 3 days annually	Travel & accom	no
Brazil	6	75	10	no	5	40 hours (20 e-learning and 20 presentations)	yes	no
Canada	3.5	50	3-4	Depending on score	2-3	N/A courses are numerous	yes	no
Czech Rep.	11	74	3 (SME) 4 (large)	no	3	3	no	no
England		75	4	yes	5	2	yes	no
Europe (EFQM)	4	75	4-8	yes	2-4	5	yes	yes
India		75	6	yes/no	5	4	yes/no	
Ireland	2	75	3	no	1	3	no	yes
Japan	4	50	5	no	3	Assessor training: 8 days Annual refresher: 1 day Training course for examiner selection: 3 days	Assessor training & refresher only	yes
Mexico	7	125	3	Only those in third stage	3	4	no	yes
New Zealand	4.5	50	6-8	yes	2-3	3 + case study completion	no	no
Scotland	4	45	3-5	yes	1	4	yes	no
Singapore		90	6	yes	3	New = 3 days; Experienced = 2 days	no	yes
Sweden	3-4	75	6	no	3	3	accom costs	no
Turkey	6	75	6-8	no	3	3 days	Yes	yes
USA	6	50	7-8	no	5-7	4 days for new/senior; 3 days for all others	no	no

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of the ceremony for a long time. The ceremony also provides the members of the Japan Quality Award Committee with the opportunity to exchange ideas and opinions on BE with each other [...]. Approximately 500 people attend the award ceremony. The chairperson of the Japan Quality Award Committee presents the award. As VIPs, we invite H.I.H. Prince Tomohito

of Mikasa and Parliamentary Secretary for Economy, Trade, and Industry. The ceremony is not combined with any conferences. We also invite the press, and the award winners are profiled in three newspapers.”

- Ireland: “[We] publicize the awards before and after, making sure a high-profile name is giving the awards and chairing the awards. Last year the

deputy prime minister was the guest of honor and presented the award.”

- Singapore: “The award ceremony is held annually and is the culmination of the award cycle. This ceremony is typically a grand affair and the guest of honor is usually a senior cabinet minister, the prime minister, deputy prime minister, or the president himself. Guests typically include business leaders and prominent figures.”
- Sweden: “[The] award ceremony [is] very high profile, attended by His Majesty the King and other VIPs.”
- United Kingdom: “Generally 500 to 600 people attend [the ceremony]. Usually we have a business speech and entertainment [...]. We always aim to have high-profile business leaders or ministers in attendance and our patron the HRH Princess Royal.”

Application Reports

As shown in column 2 of Table 6, application report length is typically either 75 or 50 pages.

Notably, the EFQM reported moving toward an innovation that: a) eliminates the need for a 75-page submission; and b) postpones judgment until the end of the site visit, enabled via the introduction of a 15-page “acceptance” file to be completed by the organization that wishes to apply for the award (results plus key factors). This is similar to Ireland and Australia’s current processes of using short application screening documents.

Application Guidelines and Assistance

Only one international custodian organization (Canada) rated itself as “excellent” in relation to provision of guidelines and assistance with application. Canada provides a Progressive Certification Program, providing clear guidelines and guidance to help organizations from BE awareness to proficiency. Scotland described its use of a submission writer’s workshop, which includes presentations from previous winners and lead assessors to help applicants understand the process from a number of perspectives.

Evaluation Process

The evaluation processes are broadly described in the literature section, with minor variations. Brazil summarized its process as follows: “Volunteers of the board of examiners, who have undergone a strict qualifying process and who strictly follow the Foundation Code of Ethics, perform confidentially the management report critical analysis. The evaluation process takes place in three phases:

- Phase I—individual review, by 10 examiners
- Phase II—consensual review, by four examiners, one writer examiner, and a senior examiner
- Phase III—site visit of candidates that were successfully evaluated in Phase II, by a group of four to six examiners (one senior examiner, one writer examine, and two to four examiners)

“The judges decide the winners based on the evaluation reports received from the board of examiners and based on further information given by the foundation. The decision is forwarded to the board of trustees for announcement. An expert monitors all phases. He or she is responsible for ensuring the process is consistent and a quality report is produced. Each one of the candidates receives an evaluation report, which has been prepared based on the management reports that were turned in by the candidates and, for the organizations considered as finalists, that is, those who successfully went through Phase II, a more complete report, based both on the management report submitted by them and also on information collected during the visit, is offered.”

Evaluator Selection

In some countries, evaluators are selected annually from the pool of trained evaluators, and new ones are trained. In other countries, the evaluator pool is fixed. In Australia, for example, there is a consistent pool of 75 to 100 evaluators who remain as evaluators year after year, and are only replaced through natural attrition (for example, they retire from the panel). This means that “these evaluators become extremely knowledgeable about the criteria and

committed to it.” Generally, 10 to 20 new evaluators are recruited per year. Active evaluators are allowed to take two years leave from being an evaluator, but must reapply if they take longer. The level of ownership fostered through this process means that the evaluators themselves, for the most part, design their training with guidance from SAI Global and have become intrinsically involved in most aspects of the awards process. Having such a panel of highly committed and knowledgeable people who volunteer their time means that the high standard of the awards process is assured.

Evaluator Training

The number of evaluators completing training courses for different custodians in 2004 alone is highly variable, ranging from two in Ireland, to 1534 in Brazil. Training courses typically last three days. This may exclude additional work such as prereading or case study work. Nine stated that the training is not the same for new evaluators as it is for experienced ones. Custodians were asked to rate their level of confidence in the consistency of their own evaluation process. Eleven custodians reported being confident that scores from different teams rating the same organization would range within plus or minus 75 points. The following comments were provided in relation to evaluator training:

- Czech Republic: “We cooperate with (an organization) that runs licensed courses for European assessors, so the quality of the training of the national assessors is equal.”
- New Zealand: “An established process utilizing an international trainer with relevant Baldrige experience and supported by the alignment of local requirements by New Zealand Business Excellence Foundation staff.”
- EFQM (Europe): “For 2005 we introduced into the process the following innovations: the use of Belbin to identify individual’s profiles/roles in relation to team-working; experienced assessors need only attend two days of training; a specific 0.5 day for senior assessor/team leaders.”

- India: “A four-day training course similar to the training provided by the EFQM. Refresher courses are also held (for earlier trained assessors, to understand the changes, if any in the model, it is once in a month at different locations in India).”
- Singapore: “Assessors who have been selected to assess for the year are required to attend compulsory training. The training duration is three days for new first time assessors and two days for experienced assessors.”
- Scotland: “All award assessors must previously have passed the accredited assessor training course and have to be reaccredited every three years as well as attend annual award training.”

Recommendations for improvement of the training process internationally related to the provision of more assistance with templates and assistance with specific stages in the process. Custodians are continually looking at how to increase the value for evaluators and reduce the workload while maintaining the quality. For example, in New Zealand, the level of case-study work in the training has been reduced, and last year an innovation was introduced whereby the foundation itself produces the final feedback report for the applicant organization. This role of synthesizing the feedback from the evaluation team was previously the role of the evaluator category leaders. This was done to reduce the workload of the evaluation team and to ensure consistency of the final product. Other innovations included a custodian working with the national qualification body to get the accreditation certificate and the award assessment graded to a national standard.

Support for Evaluators

Canada provided an example of support mechanisms for evaluators. “We designed a tool kit for verifiers—very comprehensive, covering everything. This is a 60-page document and ensures consistency. It has been in use for three years. We also have very experienced mentors to support lead verifiers. This is essential for us as we do not have any dedicated verifier/assessor training. The training is always part of another program.”

Evaluator Team Size

Asked whether a team always evaluates all applicants, 10 custodians (Canada, Japan, United States, Sweden, New Zealand, India, Australia, Singapore, Scotland, and Ireland) responded positively, while Mexico, Czech Republic, Turkey, EFQM, and the United Kingdom responded negatively. Column 3 in Table 6 shows the size of evaluation teams for different custodians. Among the comments that were received, Scotland indicated that it introduced desktop review to reduce the number of low-score applicants moving to next stage; Turkey and EFQM indicated having one team for each applicant.

Length of Training

Column 6 in Table 6 shows the normal number of days of training required by evaluators. As shown, this is typically about three days, or one day for top-up training, and often involves pre- and post-course work, such as a case study.

Site Visits

In response to the question of whether all applicants receive a site visit, only New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Scotland, EFQM, and the United Kingdom responded in the affirmative. The following comments were received:

- Canada: “Only if they score high enough, and small business usually does not.”
- Mexico: “Only those in the third stage, around 50 organizations.”
- Turkey: “Those that score above 450 points after consensus qualify for a site visit.”
- United States: “One of the primary stages of the award process is the site visit (stage 3). A team of six to eight examiners, along with one program representative, spends approximately seven to eight days at the applicant’s location to verify and clarify what was provided in the application. This time includes the time for the examiners to meet away from the site and reach consensus on

their findings. Not only do the examiners verify and clarify information by interviewing employees and reviewing documents, the team completes a site-visit scorebook (up to 150 pages) that is then used by the judges to recommend possible award recipients.”

Six custodians (Mexico, Sweden, Australia, Singapore, Ireland, and Europe) rate their site visits as “good,” while eight rate themselves as “excellent” (Canada, Japan, the United States, Brazil, New Zealand, India, Turkey, and the United Kingdom).

Consensus Meetings

Five custodian organizations (Canada, the United States, Brazil, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom) rated themselves as “excellent” in terms of consensus meetings. The United Kingdom indicated undertaking excellent consensus meetings—a refined process over many years following the EFQM process. As the Japanese custodian reported: “We are able to deliver very high-value feedback reports to award applicants as a result of the consensus meetings, which are attended by many experienced evaluators who evaluate award applicants from various perspectives [...]. The consensus meeting is a face-to-face meeting. And this meeting lasts three days. If applicants go on a site visit, the team of evaluators adds one or two days.”

CONCLUSIONS

Evidence from the study indicates that BEF custodians worldwide operate effective awards processes that evaluators and organizations benefit from. The awards process is considered by custodians to be their most effective process (compared to the other activities and services they provide). The literature also suggests that effective engagement with an NQA/BE model, as evidenced through the winning of awards, brings a range of financial and operational benefits for organizations.

The award process has become the major activity of BEF custodians. This is not necessarily because the custodians view it as the most important activity, but because the time it takes to run a BE program

is considerable (requiring substantial planning, management, and resources). These award programs have become recognized for their rigor, and many processes have been developed to ensure that the rigor is maintained. While this is commendable, for those custodians with low resources it means not being able to spend as much time or resources on other activities that they were often set up to perform. It also means that the awards process, in many cases, detracts from other important custodianship activities, such as promoting the BE framework; developing case studies and other materials to help organizations understand BE and apply best practices; organizing site visits to previous winners or best practice organizations; or providing tools and online services to help with self-assessment. The authors' research has identified that custodians and evaluators perceive that more effort should be directed toward these activities to increase awareness, understanding, and use of BE concepts and methods (these issues are discussed in detail in other outputs from this research, including Mann and Grigg 2007).

Because of the perceived complexity/difficulty of the awards application process, there is a move in some countries toward shorter screening application documents, and away from the traditional 50-to-75 page full-report format. This, coupled with enhanced guidance documentation, may make the process more attractive to businesses and encourage a greater number of applications, and greater engagement with the national NQA/BE framework, so that it can better achieve its primary aim of enhancing national levels of quality.

As a result of the authors' findings, many changes were made to the ABEF and its administrative processes. Primarily changes were made to the ABEF design, and the awareness and application processes, as these were the processes that required attention. Overall, the awards process worked well. The main changes involved increasing the number of awards so that separate awards could be given to the public and private sector and for different organizational sizes. In addition, new awards based on the individual categories of the ABEF were launched. These changes were introduced to increase the interest in BE and

the number of applications to the awards. The use of tiered and sectoral awards has already been effectively addressed in the MBNQA program.

In terms of further research, while the authors' evaluator survey provided useful data at a national level to assist SAI Global in redeveloping its framework and practices, there is a need for similar surveys involving BE evaluators at the international level to determine whether the views expressed by the Australian sample are reliable at an international level, and to provide more generalized feedback to the wider community of custodians and evaluators, in terms of the effectiveness of the services provided by custodians. There is also an increasing need for standardization of terminology used in relation to BE and NQA frameworks, given the ongoing evolution of terminology in the field.

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