

Distinguished Keynote Paper:
**Behind the Fad ~ Advantages and Practicalities of the EFQM Model
for Sustainable Development in Eurasia countries**

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ABSTRACT

In an international context characterized by its enormous and increasing complexity, integrative, holistic, and at the same time flexible management models are required to establish a robust management framework, within which the knowledge and wisdom of managers could be canalised to achieve the set objectives, and do it in a sustainable way. Beyond the fads of models, methodologies and management tools, internationally recognized business excellence models such as the EFQM Excellence Model bring out numerous benefits to Eurasia organizations for sustainable development.

Keywords: Business Excellence, BE, Excellence, EFQM, Sustainability, Sustainable Development, TQM.

1. The Need for a Model

The world does not stand still; it is changing ever more rapidly. The interdependencies between organisations, communities, countries and economies are strengthening and increasing in complexity. In order to be competitive in this complex environment, organisations need to have a wise strategy and to continually innovate and improve. So they search for effective approaches to enhancing their management capabilities. Among the various approaches, Total Quality Management (TQM) and Business Excellence (BE) Models have been the most popular in the past two decades.

TQM is an approach to management embracing both social and technical dimensions, aimed at achieving excellent results. TQM needs to be put into practice through specific frameworks. Regardless of sector, size, structure or maturity, organisations need to establish an appropriate management framework to achieve competitiveness. They need to understand, balance and effectively manage the environment, the needs and expectations of their stakeholders, and the interrelations among all factors and actors. And that is what a management model does, as a framework used to understand and manage an organisation. A BE Model is a model that strives for excellence in all processes and systems, considering that excellent organisations achieve and sustain outstanding levels of performance that meet or exceed the expectations of all their stakeholders. BE models, such as the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA), the Deming Prize and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model, are used as a guide to TQM implementation by a large number of organizations. Today, more than 80 national and state/regional awards base their frameworks upon the EFQM or the MBNQA criteria (Mann, 2011).

The advantages of using internationally recognised management models are out of doubt. In a highly competitive environment, managers need proven valid, integrative and holistic management models, that help them to drive the organisation within a robust, and at the same time flexible, frameworks that provide a common language for the people within and out the organisations, to set direction and effectively share and canalise their knowledge and experience to achieve the set objectives, and do it in a sustainable way.

The use of BE Model has two main purposes: one is guiding the organisation towards BE, as the primary purpose, and the other is conducting an assessment of its performance. Considering these two purposes, an integrative and holistic BE model enables organisations to:

- Provide a basic structure for the organisation's management system.
- Integrate existing and planned initiatives, avoiding duplication and gaps.

- Provide a common vocabulary and way of thinking about the organisation that facilitates the effective communication of ideas and plans, both within and outside the organisation, and create a culture of excellence.
- Assess where they are on the path to excellence, helping them to understand their key strengths and potential gaps in relation to their stated vision and mission.

The EFQM Excellence Model is the most extensively used BE model in Europe. The model reflects the premises and the set of QM constructs most frequently used in the literature (Sousa and Voss, 2002; Bou-Llusar et al., 2009; Corredor and Goñi, 2011). Consequently, the EFQM Excellence model can also be analyzed from the perspective of the broader TQM literature, as an operational framework for TQM. The model is applied by more than 30.000 organisations in Europe (EFQM, 2017) and many more all over the world.

2. The EFQM Excellence Model

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) was founded in Europe in 1989, aimed to inspire and help organisations to achieve sustainable excellence by engaging leaders to learn, share and innovate using the EFQM Excellence Model (EFQM, 2017). The EFQM recognises and promote sustainable success and provides guidance to those seeking to achieve it.

The EFQM Excellence Model was designed by a multidisciplinary team of experts from industry and academia, as a non-prescriptive and holistic framework to manage the organisation towards excellence. It was launched in 1991, and first used to support the assessment of organisations in the European Quality Award in 1992. Since then, the EFQM is not only the basis for applying for the European Quality Award, but a robust BE model that can be used by any organisation, regardless of size, sector or maturity. It is a practical and pragmatic framework that enables organisations to gain a holistic overview of their current level of excellence and prioritise their improvement efforts to maximise their impact, with the final aim to be competitive and continuously and increasingly gaining in competitiveness.

As a model, the EFQM Excellence Model allows people to understand the cause and effect relationships between what their organisation does, named the “Enablers”, and the “Results” it achieves, in line with their strategic goals. So, the model assumes a causal relationship between Enablers and Results, since it is based on the premise that excellent Results in key stakeholders are achieved through excellence in Enablers. Based on the understanding that to achieve sustained success, organisations need strong leadership and clear strategic direction, and they need to develop and improve their people, partnerships and processes to deliver value-adding products and services to their customers. If the right approaches are effectively implemented, they will achieve the results they, and their stakeholders, expect, and will do it in a sustainable way.

The EFQM Model comprises a set of three integrated components:

- *The Fundamental Concepts of Excellence*: they are the underlying principles, the essential foundation for achieving sustainable excellence in any organisation. They can be used as the basis to describe the attributes of an excellent organisational culture. They also serve as a common language for top management. There are 8 fundamental concepts, represented in Fig. 1.
- *The Criteria*: it is the framework to help organisations to convert the Fundamental Concepts and RADAR thinking into practice, represented in Figure 2.
- *The RADAR (Results – Approaches – Deploy – Assess & Refine)*: it is a dynamic assessment framework and a management tool, that supports the scoring mechanism behind the EFQM Excellence Model (see Figure 3) and provides a structured approach to assess the performance of an organisation.

Using these three integrated components, organisations can develop a culture of excellence; bring consistency to their management style; compare themselves with the attributes, qualities and achievements of sustainable organisations and with best-in-class; identify and implement best practices; drive innovation; and improve their results. Used appropriately, the EFQM Excellence Model, with the associated RADAR logic and Fundamental Concepts, ensures that all management practices used by an organisation form a coherent system that is continually improved and delivers the intended strategy for the organisation.

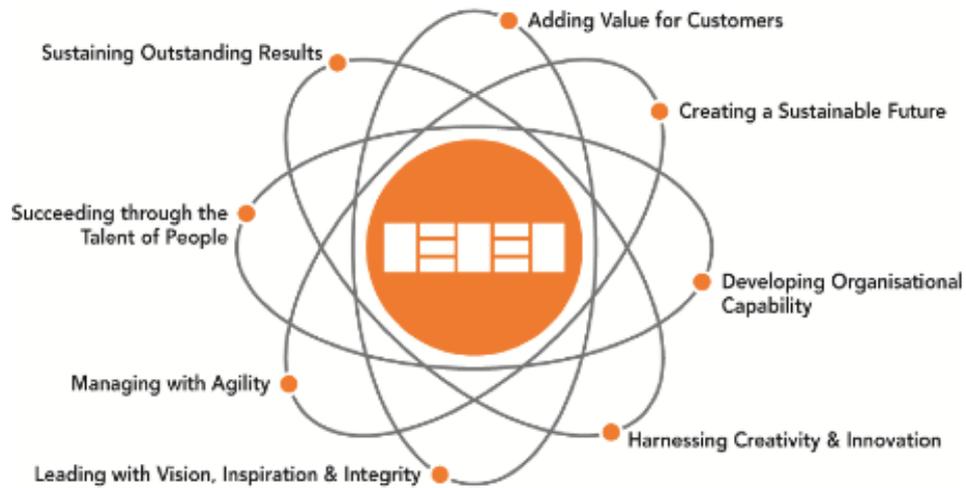


Figure 1. The Fundamental Concepts of Excellence. Source: EFQM.

The commonly named as “the EFQM Model” (the Criteria) is one component of the three integrated components above explained. It is a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria (Figure 2). Five of these are named as Enablers -Leadership; People; Strategy; Partnership & Resources; Processes, products & Services- and are four are named as Results -People results; Customer results; Society results; Business results-. The Enabler criteria cover what an organisation does and how it does it. The Results criteria cover what an organisation achieves (EFQM, 2013). Each criterion encompasses several sub-criteria, thus leading to a total of 32 sub-criteria. Criteria weighs the total of 1000 points, 500 for the Enablers, 500 for the Results (100 points each, except for Customer Results and Business Results, that account for 150 points each). In 2010 the “weights” for each criteria were reviewed, in order to achieve a more balanced weighting scheme. This revision gave an ‘equal’ value to an organization’s capacity and best practices, through the five Enablers criteria (100 points each), and the performance it delivers for all stakeholders, via the four Results criteria. In Figure 2 the arrows emphasise the dynamic nature of the Model, showing learning, creativity and innovation, helping to improve the Enablers, that in turn lead to improved Results.

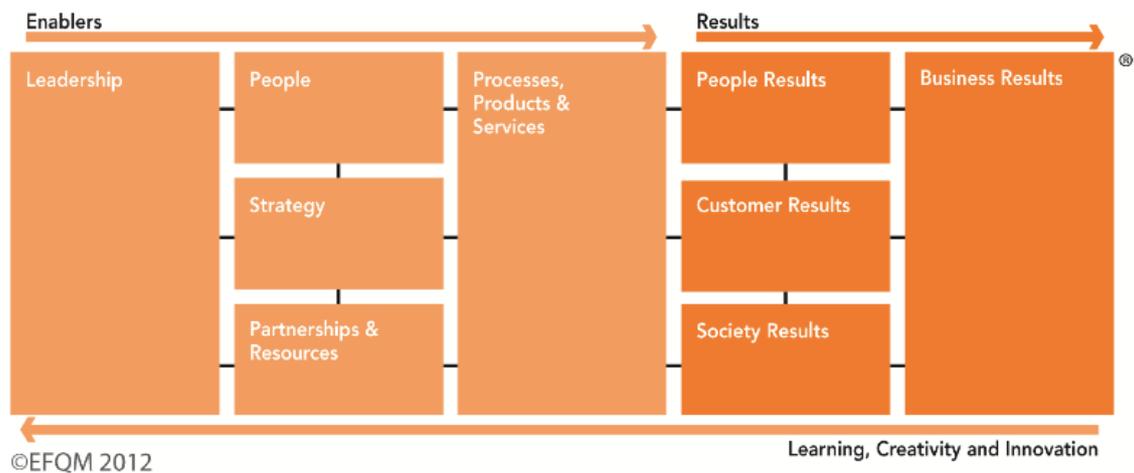


Figure 2. The Criteria (usually known as the “EFQM Model”). Source: EFQM.

Each of the nine criteria has a definition in the model, which explains the high level meaning of that criterion. As an example, for “Strategy” the EFQM Excellence Model states that *Excellent organisations implement their Mission and Vision by developing a stakeholder focused strategy. Policies, plans, objectives and processes are developed to deliver the strategy* (EFQM, 2013). To develop the high level

meaning further, each criterion is supported by a number of criterion parts or sub-criterion. The sub-criterion parts are statements that describe in further examples what, typically, can be seen in excellent organisations and should be considered in the course of an assessment. Below each sub-criterion there are guidance points. Many of these guidance points are directly linked to the Fundamental Concepts mentioned earlier (one of the three integrated parts of the EFQM Excellence Model). The use of these guidance points is not mandatory. They are intended to give examples to aid organisations in the interpretation of the criterion and sub-criterion. Figure 4 represents an example of the structure for criterion-sub-criteria-guidance points.

Enablers excellence can be interpreted as the overall approach that organizations adopt when they implement best practices within the EFQM Excellence Model, which should be reflected in the score achieved in each of the Enablers criterion. In turn, Results excellence encompasses the satisfaction of stakeholders' needs and expectations, and should be reflected in the scores achieved in each Results criterion. Different levels of excellence can then be established depending on how organizations score in the enablers and the results criteria.

The EFQM Excellence Model is reviewed and updated on a 3 year cycle, based on the learning, experience and insight of leading organisations, with the aim to align the framework with current business needs and trends. The current version is from 2013.

It can be said that the EFQM Excellence Model is a good framework to understand and manage the complexity. In the words of a CEO from an internationally recognised private company in the sector of transportation, "The EFQM Model helps us to put order in time of changes and to manage change within an order". In summary, the EFQM Excellence Model is pragmatic and practical framework, developed by leading organisations to stimulate continuous improvement and innovation. Whilst there are numerous management tools and techniques commonly used, the EFQM Excellence Model provides an holistic view, a global framework, for the organisation and allows to determine how the different methodologies and tools fit together and complement each other.

3. The scheme of recognition. A support for driving excellence and improve reputation

When the EFQM Excellence Model was designed and launched in 1992, the main aim was to serve for the assessment of the organisations that applied for the European Quality Award, in 1992. As it occurred with other BE Models (eg. MBNQA), the EFQM Excellence model soon evidenced as a very useful holistic framework for managing the organisations towards BE.

The RADAR assessment and management tool helps organisations to periodically carry out self-assessments, to identify where they are in the path to excellence. Over a decade since the EFQM Excellence Model was launched, to apply for an external recognition there was only the option of the European Quality Award. In 1999 the Primary Partner of the EFQM in Spain, Club Excelencia en Gestión, designed a scheme of recognition for organisations on the base of the EFQM Excellence Model, depending on how high each organisation is performing. Later, at the beginning of 2000s, the scheme was launched by the EFQM ("Recognized for Excellence"), encouraging organizations to be recognized through an external assessment based on the EFQM Excellence Model. A mutual recognition was established between the Spanish scheme and the one launched by the EFQM.

The scheme of recognition includes several levels, represented in Figure 5, depending on the scores achieved by the applicant:

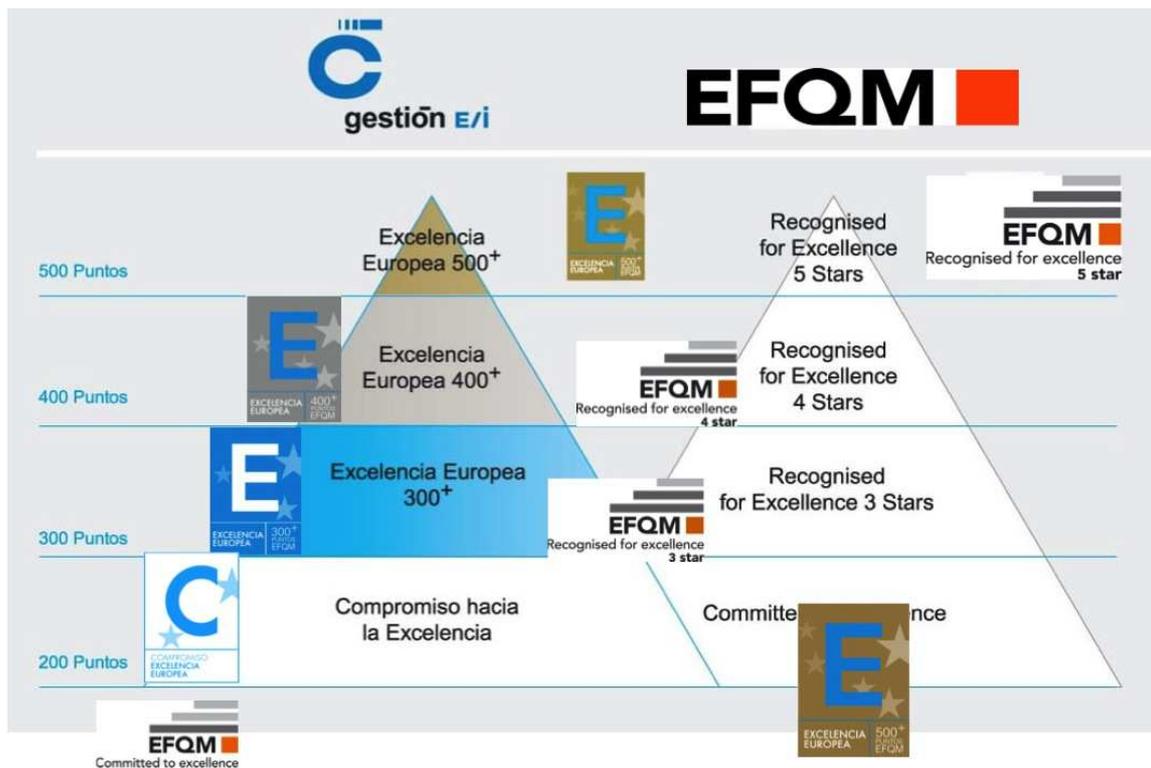


Figure 5. EFQM Scheme of recognition and comparison with Spanish Scheme of recognition (left). Source: own elaboration

- Committed to Excellence: to create passion and commitment. It was developed to introduce the organisation to BE.
- Recognised for Excellence: to provide a reference to understand how well the current management practices are delivering the results. It comprises three levels:
 - ✓ 3 stars (above 300 points): meaning that the organisation has demonstrated its ability to lead changes. It implies that some good management practices are in place and impact positively on the Results of the organisation.
 - ✓ 4 stars (above 400 points): meaning that the organisation performs well in a number of áreas, takes change seriously, gets things done and can demonstrate it has invested in some of the practices that will lead to success. At this level signs exist that some of the Results achieved are going in the right direction.
 - ✓ 5 stars (above 500 points): meaning that the organisation is a high performing organisation where change is the norm, improves, refines and simplifies the practices it uses to achieve its goals, and has ongoing Results, in the line with its strategy.
- Excellence Award: for high performers. The objective of the EFQM Global Excellence Award Programme is to recognise Europe's best performing organisations, whether private, public or non-profit. It recognises industry leaders with an indisputable track record of success in turning strategy into action and continuously improving their organisation's performance. Although there is no any statement on how many points an organisation should have to be awarded, they generally are around 700 points or above. No any organisation achieved 1000 points as, by definition, excellence is perfection, the maximum level of achievement, a certain "uthopy", a horizon that should guide any organisation in pursuing it.

The recognition for excellence is valid for two years, after which an organization would need to apply again.

Any organisation can apply for recognition, through the process of an assessment based on the EFQM Excellence Model, that is carried out by a team of external assessors “accredited” by the EFQM or its primary partners. The main benefits of applying for an EFQM recognition are:

- Create enthusiasm for improvement, through motivate people and encourage systematic improvement.
- Instil a culture of excellence.
- Receive a blue print of the results achieved by the organisation.
- Independent assessment.
- Improve competitiveness.
- International visibility and recognition.

External assessments can serve as milestones during a long term programme and demonstrate achievement to the people, suppliers and customers.

4. Benefits and practicalities in using the EFQM Excellence Model

To date, thousands of European and non European organisations use the EFQM Excellence Model as a framework for their organisational development, and much academic research have been done in the area of the implementation of the Model. Also, many articles and books have been published as trade literature, from practitioners’ experience.

So, the debate about the value of the EFQM Excellence Model has increased over time (Bou-Llusar et al, 2009). As we have learnt, success in applying TQM approaches and BE models such as the EFQM Excellence Model depends on a few critical success factors that need to be considered. Further, views on the value of the EFQM Excellence Model differ. Some scholars (e.g. Eskildsen et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2006; Bou et al., 2009; Calvo et al., 2014) have highlighted the complex structure in the EFQM criteria, where changes in one element can be related to changes in other elements, thus implying interdependence between components. But it is precisely that interdependence one of the main strengths of the EFQM Excellence Model, as a robust framework to manage organisations in the high competitive and complex environment, where the interdependencies between organisations, communities, countries and economies are strengthening and increasing in complexity. However, to be familiar with the structure of a BE Model there is a need to receive training, no doubt, and the organisation should have a certain level of maturity regarding its management practices and system.

Other researchers have focused in the benefits and indicated that organisations implementing TQM/BE models will obtain significant benefits and including both increased financial profit (see for eg. Boulter et al, 2013; Hansson & Eriksson, 2002; Hausner, 1999; Hendricks & Singhal, 1996, 2000; Jacob et al, 2004) and non-financial outcomes (Curkovic et al, 2000; Douglas & Judge, 2001; GAO, 1991; Heras et al, 2006; Hoisington & Huang, 2000; Powell, 1995). In the research made by Boulter et al (2013) on the financial impacts of implementing TQM and BE models, it was showed that award-winning companies experienced a further 8% mean increase in sales revenues 1 year after the award, which increased to 17% 3 years after the award, and 77% 5 years after the award. The award-winning companies showed further a higher mean increase of 18% in operating income, 40% in total assets and a 4.4% further reduction in cost over sales, 5 years after the award (cited by Doeleman et al, 2014). As main conclusion identified in the research conducted in the financial area we highlight that BE models and strategies contribute to business performance through increased sales and also through reduced cost and process efficiency.

However, not all findings in the literature are positive. Some research results indicate that the use of BE model does not guarantee success (Fisher et al, 2001; Jennings & Beaver, 1997; Powell, 1995; Stephens et al, 2005). Of course not; there is no any “magic” recipe to be successful in business. Just a wide range of models, methodologies and techniques or tools, which appropriateness should be identified *ad-hoc* for each organisation, considering that their needs vary over time, and implemented also *ad-hoc* for that specific organisation. Global models such as the EFQM Excellence Model provide an integrative and holistic framework to manage an organisation towards excellence, to be competitive under a sustainable way. Many factors contribute to failing in TQM or BE Models implementation. The literature has identified a wide range of barriers, which also may explain the variation/inconsistencies in results from research. These barriers are, among others: lack of top management commitment, limited resources, fear of change, work overload, lack of comprehensive quality improvement education, lack of staff involvement, organisational culture, and companies' degree of quality maturity (Corbett & Angell, 2011; Dahlgard-Park, 2008, Doeleman et al, 2014, Sternad et al, 2017).

Based on the experience of the author as Director in several organisations, and as trainer and assessor (“examiner”) of more than 40 organisations using the EFQM Excellence Model, the critical success factors that should be considered could be summarised in main three, according to what Laszlo (1999) identified for QM programs, but when referred to a BE Model they become more important:

- ***Commitment:*** as previously said, a model is a framework to understand and interpret a part of the reality, being a management model a framework used to understand and manage an organisation. So there could be as many management models as CEOs, as each of them could use his/her own principles and personally identified factors to understand business and to manage the organisation. The advantages of using internationally proven valid models are out of doubt. But adopting a certain model implies that the top managers of the organisation, especially the CEO, likes, understand and feels comfortable using that model. If not, there may be an abyss between what the CEO and other leaders say and what they do. In essence leadership and management is a matter of respect and coherence (López & Fernández, 2000). And to feel comfortable and want to apply a certain model, such as the EFQM Excellence Model, the first requirement is to fully understand it. So appropriate training for the CEO, for all the leaders and for all the people within the organisation should be the starting point. According to the experience of the author, in a considerable number of organisations that have been using the EFQM Excellence Model over years and then leave it, one of the main reasons is that the CEO changed and the new one is not committed to BE or to an specific BE model.
- ***Resources:*** any management initiative needs resource allocation to implement it. Volunteerism of people helps, but when it comes to initiatives that have a global scope to the entire organization, voluntarism is not enough. It cannot be said that the implementation of the EFQM Excellence Model is expensive, but in practice some organisations left the Model in a certain moment of their trajectory due to extreme financial constraints that force them to focus in a some peremptory objectives, such as just survive. However, there are also organisations that survived in a crisis because of using the EFQM Excellence Model (López-Fresno, 2008).
- ***Culture:*** it is impossible to implement a BE model without cultivating the appropriate organisational culture, as the third major critical success factor. Two issues arise in this respect; one is what constitutes the appropriate organisational culture/characteristics, and the other is how it can be cultivated and maintained. No doubt, the EFQM Excellence Model, if understood and used in the right way, will help the organisations to achieve the appropriate and desired culture. And we use the term “appropriate” as there is no a “right” organisational culture. As the sum of the shared assumptions, the culture may be different from organisation to organisation.

It is important to understand that the EFQM Excellence Model is a flexible model for adaptation, and all the criteria and as well as their interrelationships should be fully understood and practice in daily basis. The model should not be applied just for the sake of getting a certain amount of points, or because it is a fad. Increase in points will be the result of applying better approaches and practices. Docherty et al. (2002) pointed out that sustainability encompasses three levels: the individual, the organisational and the societal. Sustainability on one level cannot be built on the exploitation of the others. An organisation cannot be sustainable by prioritising the goals and needs of some stakeholders at the expense of others, and the EFQM Excellence Model helps organisations to do a balanced and integrated management.

5. Conclusions

The interdependencies between organisations, communities, countries and economies are strengthening and increasing in complexity. In order to be competitive in this complex environment, organisations need to have a successful strategy and to continually innovate and improve. Integrative, holistic, and at the same time flexible BE and management models are required to establish a robust management framework within which the knowledge and wisdom of managers are canalised to achieve the set objectives, and do it in a sustainable way. Beyond the fads of models, methodologies and management tools, the knowledge derived from the experience of managers and assessors (“examinars”) using the EFQM Excellence Model, supported by research indicate that it brings out numerous benefits to organizations for sustainable development, both used to guide and manage the organisations towards BE and to conduct periodical assessments of their performance. The scheme of recognition stimulates and recognised the efforts of the organisations in their path to excellence. As a flexible and “exportable” model to any culture, it is an appropriate and so recommended BE model for Eurasia countries. Several critical success factors should be considered when using the EFQM Excellence Model, among which top management commitment, resources and culture are, in practice, at the top of them.

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Dr. Palmira López-Fresno works as European Expert for International Cooperation. She is the Team Leader - International Technical Assistance Team, and Expert on Standards and Technical Regulations in PRACAMS, an International Cooperation Program funded by the European Union with the aim to strengthen Quality Infrastructure in the Central America region.

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