IMPLEMENTING THE BALDRIGE CRITERIA IN THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: LESSONS LEARNED

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ABSTRACT

In 2010 the California State University (CSU) System participated in a grant sponsored by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) to develop strategies for implementing a Baldrige-based assessment process. The Baldrige process used was organized and published by Dr. Brent Ruben of Rutgers University and is known as "Excellence in Higher Education," or EHE. It uses a workshop format to apply a simplified set of the Baldrige Criteria at the department or functional group level, requires no pre-work by attendees, and results in a set of prioritized opportunities for improvement. Although prior to this grant the CSU had done training and conducted some pilots using the framework with some initial success, the effort faded and was seen broadly as unsustainable. The grant provided the CSU team with an opportunity to study its prior use of the EHE model, as well as more fully developed uses of the Baldrige Criteria. This paper presents the lessons learned from one pilot applications of the EHE-Baldrige Model at one unit of a CSU campus. We believe that the lessons have applicability to any academic organization seeking to obtain value from organized internal quality improvement efforts and assessments. We recommend that academic institutions make a concerted effort to introduce faculty and staff to the benefits of embracing the Baldrige Criteria.

1. Introduction:

Today, higher education institutions including universities are being challenged by their stakeholders to become more efficient, improve the quality of its offerings, and deliver demonstrable results (Austin & Antonio, 2012; Arcaro, 1995). According to a recent TIME/Carnegie Corporation Survey of 540 College Administrators and 1000 US Adult households; 89% of the administrators and 96% of US adults agreed that higher education was in crisis (Sanburn, 2012).. In the same survey, 40% of the respondents from both groups thought that the crisis was severe enough to merit immediate attention. Additionally, eighty percent (80%) of US adults thought that US colleges were not doing enough to improve affordability while 56% of the college administrators disagreed. Surprisingly, seventy four (74%) of college administrators though that the average tuition of $25,250 paid by students was reasonable, while only 38% of US adults agreed! The conclusion from the survey was that: "With such a wide gulf between educators and the public, solutions to fixing what both perceive to be an educational system in crisis will be difficult." (Sanburn, 2012). Yet the Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) framework (Ruben, 2007) that integrates the Malcolm Baldrige framework principles with the standards mandated by university accreditation organizations could help to close the "gulf".

2. The Malcolm Baldrige and EHE Frameworks

The Malcolm Baldrige Framework

Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Program (MBNQA), named after Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, who served from 1981 until his tragic death in a rodeo accident in 1987, was established by the United States Congress in 1987, for the purpose of promoting U.S. business effectiveness and the advancement of the national economy. In order to fulfill its mandate, the MBNQA program developed a framework for organizational assessment and improvement after receiving input from more than 200 quality experts from North America and Asia.

The Malcolm Baldrige Framework consists of seven Categories that explain the processes and outcomes associated with high performing quality organizations. The names of Categories have changed overtime, but in 2013 included: (1)—*Leadership* (examines **how** the organization's senior leaders' personal actions guide and sustain your organization), (2)—*Strategic Planning* (examines **how** the organization establishes its strategy to address its strategic challenges and leverage its strategic advantages), (3)—*Customer Focus* (examines **how** the organization engages its customers for long-term marketplace success), (4)—*Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management* (examines **how** the organization selects, gathers, analyzes, manages, and improves its data, information, and knowledge assets and **how** it manages its information technology), (5)—*Workforce Focus* (examines the organization's ability to assess workforce capability and capacity needs and build a workforce environment conducive to high performance), 6—*Operations Focus* (examines how the organization designs, manages, and improves its work systems and work processes to deliver customer value and achieve organizational success and sustainability), and 7—Results (examines your organization's performance and improvement in all key areas—product and process outcomes, customer-focused outcomes, workforce-focused outcomes, leadership and governance outcomes, and financial and market outcomes). The main focus of the MBNQA Program is to continuously:

- Identify the essential components of organizational excellence,
- Recognize organizations that demonstrate these characteristics,
- Promote information sharing by exemplary organizations, and
- Encourage the adoption of effective organizational principles and practices

The EHE Framework

The Excellence in Higher Education (EHE) Framework has adopted the same seven categories of the Malcolm Baldrige Framework.

1. Leadership
2. Purposes and Plans (*Strategic Planning*)
3. Beneficiaries and constituencies *(Customer Focus)*
4. Assessment and Information Use *(Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management)*
5. Faculty, staff and workplace *(Workplace Focus)*
6. Programs and Services *(Operations Focus)*
7. Outcomes and Achievements *(Results)*

According to Ruben (2008), the commonality between the EHE Framework and accreditation standards organizations is that both "share in common the position that review, planning, and continuous improvement are fundamental to institutional effectiveness and should be thoroughly integrated into the fabric of every institution" p. 3.

The EHE framework can be implemented at the academic department, college, or university level. It is also applicable in administrative divisions, student affairs, and service areas involved with planning, assessment, continuous improvement, organizational development.

3. Implementation of EHE Framework at a University Organizational Unit

The implementation of the EHE Framework consisted of a two-day workshop. Focus was to assess strengths and identify areas that offered opportunities for improvement. Before the workshop organization administrators were requested to conduct an Independent Review of one of the EHE seven categories. During the two day workshop, the participants learned more about the seven categories, examined their department operations, brainstormed strengths and opportunities to improve, self-scored their organization using the Baldrige scoring guidelines, and then reached consensus on priority opportunities to improve through a structured discussion and multi-voting process. As shown in Figure 1, this process enabled the organization to (1) Assess and Identify Gaps, (2) Prioritize and Select Areas with Opportunities to Improve, and (3) Plan for the Improvement. After the workshop, the college leadership will (4) Implement the Identified Solutions and (5) Report Results.

Figure 1: The Assess - Plan - Improve Process
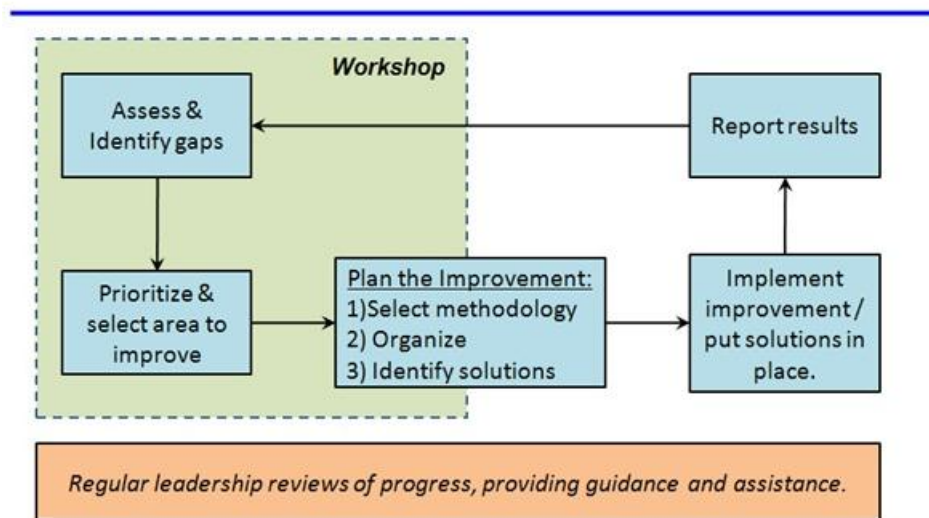
4. Gap Identification

This section provides a snapshot of some of the strengths and opportunities for improvement that were developed for each category:

1. Leadership
   Strengths:
   - *The formal administrative structure is clear.*
   - *Leadership team relatively active in local community.*
   - *Leadership team works tirelessly to avoid legal and administrative liabilities.*
   Opportunities for Improvement:
   - *Need to emphasize and reward excellence in research, teaching and service. Include publications/tier system.*
   - *Opportunities to develop an incentive system that acknowledges (recognizes) and rewards exemplary leadership.*

- *The leadership team has the opportunity to improve by enhancing the environment for informal leadership. That is, there are increasing opportunities and decreasing voluntary participation.*

2. Purposes and Plans (*Strategic Planning*)
   Strengths:
   - *Formalized and goal driven planning process*
   - *Clear mission, values and goals*
   - *Mission, values and goals are aligned with university values and missions*

   Opportunities for Improvement:
   - *Broader participation from faculty and staff in implementing goals.*
   - *More resources to support plans and implementations.*
   - *Mission needs simplification. Add a tagline.*

3. Beneficiaries and constituencies *(Customer Focus)*
   Strengths:
   - *The organization's alumni network—national and international*
   - *The support of local and regional organizations.*
   Opportunities for Improvement:
   - *Improve Complaint Management System.*
   - *Develop a systematic way to understand student parents.*
   - *Survey Methodology Issues*

4. Assessment and Information Use *(Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management)*
   Strengths:
   - *Strong metrics related to accreditation requirements.*
   - *Tradition of using data to drive decision making.*

   Opportunities for Improvement:
   - *Improve accreditation outcomes relative to problem solving and communication.*
   - *Conduct Exit assessments*

5. Faculty, staff and workplace *(Workplace Focus)*
   Strengths:
   - *Dedicated staff members*
   - *Dedicated and diverse group of lecturers*

   Opportunities for Improvement:
   - *Social programs need to be available to get faculty and staff to interact more.*
   - *Strategies to address faculty morale need to address the issue that this has been a long term issue.*

6. Programs and Services *(Operations Focus)*

Strengths:
- *We have great tradition of teaching, research and community service.*

- *We have a great administrative and clerical support system.*
- *Excellent facilities maintenance and janitorial services.*

Opportunities for Improvement:
- *Formalized training, mentoring, socialization, within the unit and across the university.*
- *Increase levels of faculty participation and service at all levels.*
- *Continuously measure performance; generate reports, and reward goal achievement.*

7. Outcomes and Achievements *(Results)*

Strengths:
- *Strong capacity to maintain the organization goals in unsteady times*
- *Strong fiscal management capabilities and ability to generate external funds*
- *Strong capacity to seize new venues for educational advancement*

Opportunities for Improvement:
- *Establish better comparison metrics.*
- *Continuously use internal and external benchmarks to compare unit performance.*

5. **Average Self Score Summary**

Figure 2 shows that categories (4) Assessment & Information Use (35%), (5) Faculty/Staff & Workplace (36%), and (7) Outcomes and Achievements (36%) had the lowest self-scores. This means, the three categories should be part of the high priority areas with opportunities for improvement.

Figure 2: Average Self Score Summary
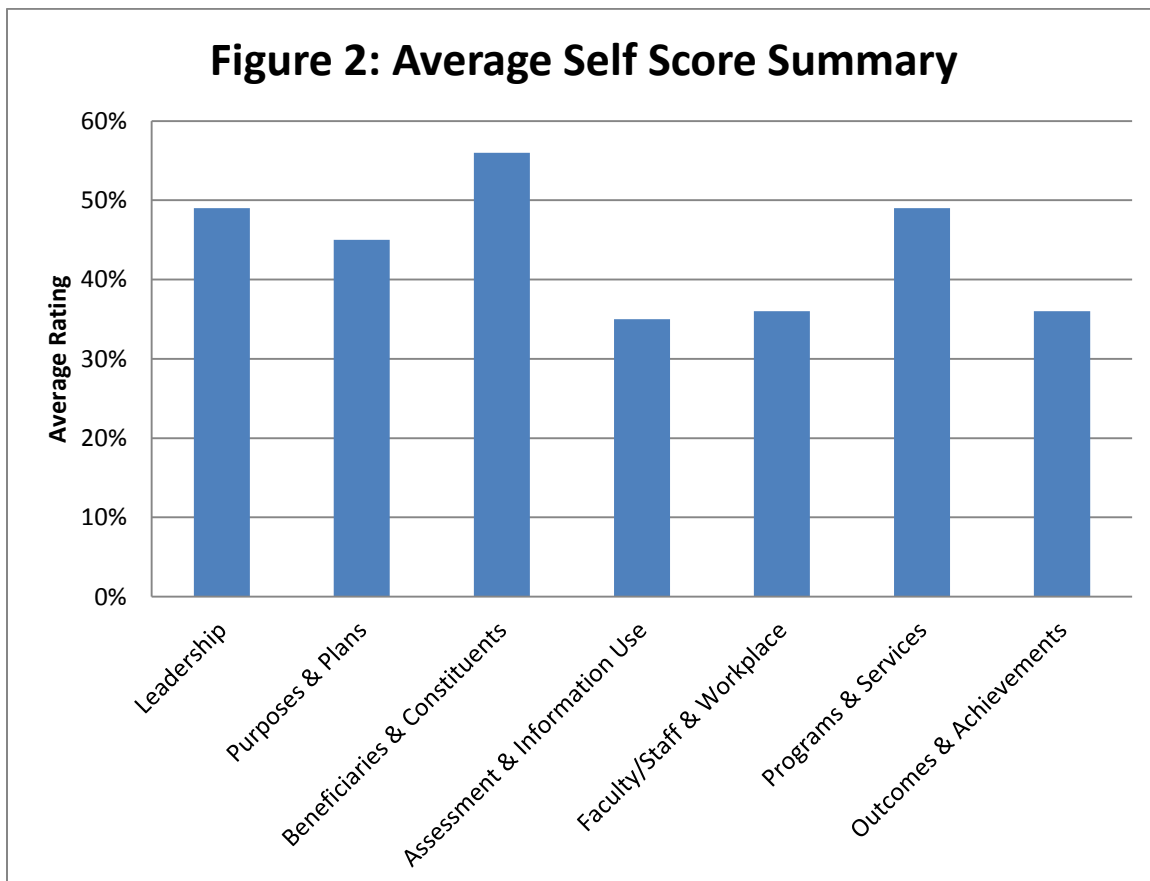
6. **Identification of High Priority Areas for Improvement**

After much deliberation by the workshop attendees, the following high priority areas for improvement were identified:

1. *Develop a system to mentor new employees. (Category 5)*
2. *Focus on ensuring higher involvement and engagement of senior employees. (Category 5)*
3. *The leadership team should focus more on problems of burnout and cynicism. (Category 5)*
4. *Continue to emphasize and reward excellence in research, teaching and service.(Category 4 & 7)*
5. *Broader participation from all employees in implementing goals. (Category 5)*

7. **Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned from our study have applicability to any organization that is seeking to obtain value from organized internal assessments. The workshop participants were able to use the Malcolm Baldrige process and results scoring rubrics shown as Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2 to assess the organizational unit. Exhibit 1 was used to assess how the organization approached, deployed, learned and integrated its business processes. Exhibit 2 was used to assess the actual performance of the organization focusing on the availability of levels data, trend data, comparison data and integrated data for the entire organization. It is not surprising that most of the items identified as high priority areas came from Category 5, one of the categories with the lowest scores.

We also learned that two most critical factors driving success involve the need to have highly skilled facilitators and for active participation by leaders throughout the process, including supporting the assessment process itself and in following up on improvement project work.

References:

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Exhibit 1: Process Scoring: *Approach, Deployment, Learning, Integration*

(Adapted from 2011-2012 Baldrige Education Criteria, and Excellence in Higher Education)

Process refers to "How" items are addressed, or the steps in the approach that is being used.

Score	Description
0	• Approaches to the category items are not systematic. • Improvement is by reacting to problems.
10 – 20%	• Beginning of an effective systematic approach in a few areas. A few items of the category demonstrate excellence. • Approach is in early stages of deployment in most areas; significant gaps in implementing. • Early stages of transition from reacting to problems to a general improvement orientation. • Some joint problem solving with other areas of organization.
30 – 40%	• Effective, systematic approach to some items in the category • Approach is deployed, although some areas are in early stages. • Beginning of a systematic approach to evaluate and improve key processes
50 – 60%	• Effective, systematic approach to many items in the category. • Approach is well deployed, but may vary in some areas. • Fact-based, systematic evaluation & improvement process; some organizational learning & innovation, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of key processes. • Approach is aligned with overall organizational needs.
70 – 80%	• Effective, systematic approach to most items in the category. • Approach is well deployed, with no significant gaps. • Fact-based, systematic evaluation and improvement and organizational learning; clear evidence of refinement as a result of organizational-level analysis and sharing. • Approach is integrated with your current and future organizational needs.
90 – 100%	• An effective, systematic approach, fully responsive to all items in the category. • Approach fully deployed without significant weaknesses or gaps in any areas. • Fact-based, systematic evaluation and improvement and organizational learning through innovation are key organization-wide tools; refinement and innovation, backed by analysis and sharing, are evident throughout the organization. • Approach is well integrated with your current and future organizational needs.

Score	General Guide
0	None
10 – 20%	Few
30 – 40%	Some
50 – 60%	Many
70 – 80%	Most
90 – 100%	All

Exhibit 2: Results Scoring: *Level, Trend, Comparison, Integration*

(Adapted from 2011-2012 Baldrige Education Criteria and Excellence in Higher Education)

Score	Description
0	• No organizational performance results and/or poor results in areas reported. • Trend data either are not reported or show mainly adverse trends. • Comparative information is not reported. • Results are not reported for any areas of importance to the mission.
10 – 20%	• A few organizational performance results with early good levels evident. • Trend data reported for a few areas but some adverse trends evident. • Little or no comparative information. • Results are reported for a few areas of importance to the mission.
30 – 40%	• Good performance levels in some areas. • Some trend data are reported, and a majority of the trends presented are beneficial. • Early stages of obtaining comparative information. • Results are reported for many areas of importance to the mission.
50 – 60%	• Good organizational performance levels in many areas. • Beneficial trends in many areas of importance to mission. • Some current performance levels have been evaluated against relevant comparisons and/or benchmarks and show areas of good relative performance. • Organizational performance results are reported for most key student, stakeholder, market, and process requirements.
70 – 80%	• Good to excellent performance in most areas. • Beneficial trends sustained over time in most areas of importance to mission. • Many to most trends and current performance levels have been evaluated against relevant comparisons and/or benchmarks and show areas of leadership and very good relative performance. • Organizational performance results are reported for most key student, stakeholder, market, process, and action plan requirements.
90 – 100%	• Excellent performance levels for all requirements • Beneficial trends have been sustained over time in all areas of importance to mission. • Evidence of education sector and benchmark leadership in many areas. • Organizational performance results and projections are reported for most key student, stakeholder, market, process, and action plan requirements.

Score	General Guide
0	None or all poor results
10 – 20%	Few - Good
30 – 40%	Some - Good
50 – 60%	Many - Good
70 – 80%	Most – Good to Excellent
90 – 100%	All - Excellent