United Arab Emirates
Journey Towards Excellence

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United Arab Emirates - Journey Towards Excellence

Diversifying Economy and Birth of Dubai’s’ Drive for Quality.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) is comprised of the seven Emirates namely, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah with Abu Dhabi as the capital of UAE. Country’s GDP (at constant prices) reached around AED 981 Billion in 2011 (about USD 270 billion).

Oil & gas was the major contributor to UAE economy. In mid 1990s, visionary leaders of UAE started diversifying the UAE economy in order to reduce reliance on oil and set up policies to encourage trade, travel, tourism, real estate, construction, services etc. In 2011, the share of the non-oil sectors in GDP was 69.5 % (AED Dhs. 674.8 billion) of total GDP of UAE. Service activities comprising of Wholesale, Retail Trade, Repair Services, Real Estate, Transportation, Storage, Communication, Financial enterprises, Government services etc. comprised about AED 440 billion of the total GDP. (Source Annual Economic Report, 2012, Ministry of Economy, UAE).

Given the context that UAE’s economy was gradually becoming a service and knowledge based economy, UAE’s leaders realized the need for organizations to improve quality and customer service to become competitive. To accomplish this, they instituted a number of strategic and far reaching macro level quality and excellence initiatives for all sectors of the economy namely the government departments, public and private sector. Within this context, Dubai’s Drive for Quality was born in the mid 1990s and government became the key driver of quality excellence in UAE and organizations started adopting best practices, international standards on Quality and Business Excellence frameworks and investing in people development.

Key milestones in UAEs journey towards excellence.

Listed below are some of the most significant Quality and Excellence initiatives launched in UAE during the last 15 years. Please note that initiatives listed below are by no means the complete list. This is only to provide my individual insights into UAE’s journey towards excellence.

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai & President and Prime Minister of UAE presenting Dubai Quality Award.
DUBAI’S DRIVE FOR QUALITY:

a. **Dubai Quality Award**: Dubai’s Drive for Quality was born out of vision of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai and current Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE with establishment of Dubai Quality Award (DQA) in 1994. The DQA, initially only for the private sector organizations, was introduced as a means of improving the standards of businesses operating in Dubai, thus boosting external and internal trade. DQA is awarded to those companies that have demonstrated a consistent commitment to best practices in their respective fields and to promote organizational excellence in business. Organizations from 11 sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, service, tourism, construction, finance, healthcare, education, and media can participate in the award program. There are three levels of recognitions i.e. DQA Gold, DQA and DQ Appreciation Prize (Refer figure 1). DQA model was initially based on US Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award framework and then switched over to European based EFQM model in 1999 which continues till date.

![Journey to Excellence](image)

**Figure 1: Organizations journey towards excellence**

b. DQA, now in its 19th cycle has made a huge contribution in building individual and organizations capacity and competence in the field of quality and enhanced (Refer figure 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>No. (since 1994)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Organizations representatives trained for DQA</td>
<td>1000 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organizations applied for DQA</td>
<td>500 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Organizations reapplied for DQA 100 +
4 Winning Organizations for DQA 250 +
5 Assessors trained in EFQM methodology 2000+ 

Figure 2: DQA Related Performance Indicators (Source DQA office)

c. **Dubai Quality Group (DQG):** Was set up in 1994 as a not for profit business organization to develop and promote Quality and Business Excellences practices in UAE. DQG continues to be the leading not for profit professional society for Quality professionals and has made positive contribution in raising the voice of quality and enhancing competencies.

d. **ISO: 9000:** Around the same time, organizations started implementing international quality management systems standards (ISO: 9000). In 1995 a total of 104 certificates were issued in UAE. And by Dec. 2012, a total of 3229 ISO 9001 certificates have been issued in UAE. (Source ISO Survey 2012 report). Growth in certification has resulted in focus on management system based working and discipline. Implementing ISO standards have helped organizations build a foundation to support and ensure sustainable institutionalization of improvements over time. Adoption of management system has also significantly increased the number of businesses offering ISO Consulting, Training and Certification services & thereby competencies of quality professionals.

e. **Masters in Quality Management (MQM):** In 1996, University of Wollongong in Dubai started MQM. To date hundreds of students have acquired formal education in quality & excellence leading to huge capacities in quality domain. These professionals are working in all types and sizes of organizations to improve business performance and create a culture of quality and excellence.

f. **Dubai Government Excellence Program (DGEP):** To improve delivery of government services to citizens, residents, visitors and businesses, Dubai Government established DGEP in 1998 to improve the performance of Dubai’s government and simplify government procedures and improve services. DGEP recognises and rewards exceptional government employees, departments and initiatives/ projects. DGEP won prestigious 2007 United Nations Public Services Award in the 'Improving of Delivery Services' category in the West Asia region.

g. **American Society for Quality (ASQ):** In 1998, ASQ, world’s largest not for profit organization of Quality professionals, appointed Sunil Thawani, Country Counsellor for UAE. Way back in 1998-1999 ASQ had just about 15 members in UAE which has since then grown to about 450 members by 2013. In Nov. 2013, ASQ opened its Middle East North Africa office in Dubai. Hundreds of quality professionals have attained ASQ Certification program in several quality related programs such as “Certified Quality/ Organization Member”, “Certified Process analyst”, Certified Six Sigma Green Belt”, etc.

i. **Dubai Human Development Award (DHDA)**: To develop employee’s abilities and emphasize their role in the future of the UAE, Dubai Government launched DHDA in 2002. DHDA recognizes and rewards the HR initiatives undertaken by organizations towards achieving the Dubai Human Development goal.

j. **Dubai Service Excellence Scheme (DSES)**: To promote excellence in customer service standards in the private sector and to make the experience of “Shopping in Dubai” a pleasurable one, DQA office launched DSES scheme in 2002. It is a membership based program wherein member organizations, primarily retail businesses, need to commit to customer service excellence standards and code of business ethics and comply. Core principles of DSES are:

- Transparency of product pricing and policies on refund, replacement, etc.
- Integrity – no fraud, counterfeit products
- Reliability of services and responsiveness
- Customer care
- Competence of staff – product knowledge and behavior
- Continual improvement

Compliance and commitment is monitored through robust mystery shopping program.

k. **Hamdan Bin Mohammad e-University (formerly e-TQM College)**: It is world’s first online (virtual) school in the field of TQM. It was set up in 2002 by Dubai Police. His Highness Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashed Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai serves as its President. Thousands of students have enrolled to learn about core principles and practices in the field of TQM and excellence.

**QUALITY AND EXCELLENCE MOVEMENT SPREADS FROM DUBAI TO OTHER EMIRATES:**

Recognizing and appreciating the positive impact and benefits of quality movement in Dubai, other Emirates and the federal Government Departments started various programs with a focus on improving efficiency, effectiveness, customer service and overall competitiveness of industry and nation. Listed below are a few major initiatives:
a. **Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award (SKEA):** established in year 2001 by Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Abu Dhabi – for private and public sector. SKEA uses framework similar to EFQM.

b. **Sharjah Economic Excellence Award:** established in early year 2000 for organizations registered with Sharjah Chamber of Commerce & Industry. They had developed their own framework and then recently adopted EFQM model.

c. **Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Business Awards:** (MRM Business Award) was launched by Dubai Chamber in 2005 to recognise and reward firms that contribute to the UAE's economic development. Participation is open to all firms that are registered with the respective chambers of commerce and industry in the UAE.

d. **Sheikh Saqr Award for Government:** by the Emirates of Ras Al Khaimah.

e. **Ajman Excellence Award:** by the Emirates of Ajman.

f. **Abu Dhabi Award for Excellence in Government Performance:** was established in 2008 for Abu Dhabi Government Entities (Departments).

g. **Emirates Government Excellence Award:** (EGEA) was established, in 2009, for federal government departments as part of the Sheikh Khalifa Government Excellence Program with the objective of federal government to better serve UAE community.

h. **Emirates Quality Mark (EQM):** The EQM was developed by The Emirates Authority for Standardization & Metrology to grant the EQM to ensure the products comply with the approved standards for local and export markets.

i. **Emirates Excellence Council:** In 2013, His Highness Shaikh Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, issued directives to set up the Emirates Excellence Council to bring together all local and federal excellence programs under one umbrella, to coordinate efforts, exchange knowledge, promote teamwork and establish excellence as a national culture in the UAE.

**YEAR 2000: E-SERVICES THE NEXT MAJOR WAVE OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT.**

Services design and delivery are being continually revolutionized by information communication and technology (ICT). Our dependence on ICT is increasing by the day as ICT is having a profound effect on the ways we live today and how customers interact with service providers. ICT continues to enable modernizing/ transforming of services thereby revolutionizing business process management, quality, customer service, and customer experience and business performance. (Refer figure 3).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improved</th>
<th>Reduced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer services &amp; customer experience</td>
<td>Errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Inconsistency in delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>Manual intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance measurement</td>
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**Figure 3: Impact of ICT on business performance**

Recognizing the potential use of information technology in transforming services, in 2002 Dubai Government announced series of comprehensive electronic transformation initiatives including e-Government thereby making government services available through internet. Dubai’s e-Government initiative led to quantum leap in service delivery and customer service. Today delivery of government services through internet has spread to other Emirates as well as to public and private sector.

**Year 2013 - UAE SMART GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE LAUNCHED.**

With high rate of mobile penetration, 14 million subscribers for population of about 7 million, extensive use of smart phones and IT tablets, in 2013 His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of UAE announced pioneering UAE Smart Government initiative in the region. Objective of the Smart Government is “to enhance the leading position assumed by the UAE in the field of e-development and to keep pace with best international practices in this domain”. Under UAE Smart Government initiative, all government services will be made available on mobile devices within 2 year period ushering in a new era of customer service and customer experience. UAE has achieved 7th rank globally in e-government services and has boosted this position by launching the mobile/smart government initiative, which is even more sophisticated.

![Figure 4: The Government Summit 2013, Dubai.](image-url)
During the Emirates Government Excellence Conference, 2013 “Shaikh Mohammad emphasized that “Excellence is a lifestyle, a government culture and a national advantage by which we can make a lot of achievements. The implementation of the UAE Vision 2021 becomes more feasible for us if we establish excellence at all government departments.”

**M-Government Service Award** was announced in mid-2013 with the objective of stimulating the delivery of government services to the public through smartphones round the clock.

**COMMONLY USED QUALITY & EXCELLENCE RELATED STRATEGIES & FRAMEWORKS IN UAE.**

To enhance business performance and competitiveness, some of the strategies and methodologies commonly used by organizations in UAE are listed below in an ascending order (Refer figure 5). As per The ASQ Global State of Quality Research: Discoveries 2013 revealed that there is, in fact, no significant indication that the use of quality practices differs by region.

1. Balanced Scorecard
2. Benchmarking & Best Practices (currently at infancy stage. Still long way to go)
3. Business Process management including Reengineering
4. Corporate Governance
5. Corporate Social Responsibility (Had a slow start but is now catching on rapidly)
6. Customer complaints management framework (ISO:10002)
7. Customer loyalty/ satisfaction measurement
8. Employee engagement/ satisfaction measurement studies
10. Financial management standards such as IFRS
11. Innovation methodologies
12. International management systems standards (ISO standards) such as 9001, 14001, 20000, 22000, 10002, 27001 etc.) UAE leads in the region in terms of No. of certificates issued.
13. Kaizen
14. Lean Six Sigma
15. Mystery shopping
16. Performance management including performance dashboard
17. Stakeholder engagement
18. Suggestion scheme etc.

*Figure 5: Commonly used strategies and frameworks to improve quality.*
OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT.

We live in a world where change is constant and improvement is continual. Though much has been accomplished in a relatively short period of time in UAE, opportunities for further improvement exist such as:

a. **Thought Leadership in Quality domain:** There is a need for independent “Think Tanks” to provide thought leadership and guide the quality profession ASQ’s Global State of Quality has made an initial pioneering effort in this direction for the region ([www.globalstateofquality.org](http://www.globalstateofquality.org)).

b. **Business leaders to make quality a top priority:** CEOs/ CFOs/ COOs still need to be convinced of the potential quality management offers to reduce cost and improve product features and thereby positively impact corporate performance. As per quality guru Dr. Joseph Juran, the return on investment of quality improvement programs is, on average, six times the investment made. That exceeds the value of any other investment made.

c. **Quality related credible research data/report:** There is shortage of credible research data in the field of quality & excellence in the region. Good opportunity exists to conduct leading edge research on key performance indicators of industries such as retail, oil & gas, hospitality, health care, logistics etc.

d. **Create a culture of sharing of data/Benchmarks:** Organizations still find it hard to access industry specific data/benchmarks to compare their performance and share best practices. Business environments need to open up to share good practices within peer industries. Best practice reports on industries, functions, processes, services etc. can be shared such as pioneering “DQA Winning Practices” report was done by DQA office in 2011 and released by H.E. Sami Al Qamzi, Director General of Dept. of Economic Development, Dubai (Refer figure 6).

![Figure 6: DQA Winning Practice Report](image)

e. **Use of advance Quality tools:** Currently application of quality tools is at basic plus level. Advanced techniques such as Quality Function Deployment, Process Capability, Run Charts, and Design of Experiments etc. are not widely used by industry.
f. **Measure the impact and benefit of TQM on corporate performance**: Potential to conduct research studies on impact of Quality & Excellence on corporate performance is a constant need.

g. **Exploiting Synergies in Quality, Risk, CSR and Corporate Governance**: To enhance transparency, accountabilities, performance & mitigate risks, opportunity exists for these specialized functions to leverage knowledge and help businesses improve performance.

h. **Quality in Design**: Applying principles and techniques of quality in design phase especially in service sector.

**JOURNEY CONTINUES.**

UAE is marching full steam ahead towards realizing its UAE Vision 2021 of “To be among the best countries in the world by 2021”. A few indicators below are

- As per The World Economic Forum, UAE’s ranking in The Global Competitive Index has improved from 37 (in 2007-2008) to 19 (in 2012-2013) out of 148 nations. (Source: The World Economic Forum)
- As per the first The World Happiness Report, released by United Nations, UAE Ranking (in 2010-2012) is 14 out of 156 nations.

Though there is no scientific evidence or credible research study to prove, but as a quality professional involved in UAE’s quality movement for over 15 years, I strongly believe, that the quality and excellence related initiatives launched by visionary leaders of UAE have certainly made positive contribution in improving the competitiveness of UAE and making UAE a happier place to live and prosper.

Though challenges remain, there is a tremendous optimism and passion in UAE about continually improving the quality, productivity, customer experience and competitiveness of organization and UAE as a nation.