

Tapping quality award expertise in California

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) is a US scheme established by Congress in 1987 to recognize business excellence practices of businesses and nonprofit organizations. Many APO member countries have undertaken their own national award programs on business excellence, of which five are currently based on the MBNQA model.

To learn from the experiences of US enterprises during their quality journey and examine the applicability of ongoing challenges and successes of US quality management systems in the Asia-Pacific context, an APO study mission was conducted 13 to 17 September 2010, with the assistance of the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Foundation for Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards Inc. The program brought together 17 participants from 11 APO member countries, all of whom were involved in national quality award programs in their countries. It was held in Newport Beach, CA, so that the participants could also attend the official MBNQA Regional Conference held at the same venue.

The study mission was intended to create an awareness of quality management practices outside the APO region by gaining knowledge of the MBNQA criteria and evaluation processes. It also aimed to allow participants to absorb lessons learned from past MBNQA recipients in their own progress toward business excellence. The MBNQA Regional Conference provided the participants with the opportunity to attend various network and open-microphone sessions and hear presentations by executives of previous MBNQA recipients. Motoki Shirai, a member of the Japan Quality Award Council of the Japan Productivity Center, commented, “We are having a Japan Quality Award Winners Conference in February, so I am adopting some ideas and concepts I learned at the regional conference into our event.”

The group visited Sharp Healthcare, a 2007 recipient, and had the chance to hear about how the MBNQA experience had turned the organization around into being recognized as the best healthcare provider in the region. The participants also visited production sites of Solar Turbines Incorporated, a 1998 recipient, and learned how, more than 10 years after receiving the award, the strategies and

core business principles of the MBNQA experience are still deeply integrated into its business practices.

Two leaders of MBNQA-receiving companies were also invited to speak to the group, followed by Q&A sessions. Mr. E. David Spong spoke of his own experience and role at Boeing Airlift and Tanker (A&T) Programs in 1998 and at Boeing Aerospace Support in 2003 in their respective MBNQA journeys. Boeing A&T developed a seven-step approach to its process-based management methodology used by its more than 100 integrated product teams and the even more numerous self-directed work teams that support them. Mr. Richard Norling shared his experience in leading Premier Inc. to receive the MBNQA in 2006. Premier Inc. is the largest healthcare alliance in the USA, serving 1,700 hospitals and more than 43,000 other healthcare sites. Its MBNQA efforts focused on the “Big Hairy Audacious Goal” of delivering “the best, most cost-effective care in the nation and for the alliance to have a major influence on reshaping healthcare.” By concentrating on ethics and leadership, customer satisfaction, and keeping the focus on people, Premier Inc. continues to make improvements.

At the end of the study mission, the group took time to recap what they had learned from the various MBNQA recipient organizations and to determine how those experiences could be applied to their own countries and to the APO region. In extensive group discussions and presentations led by resource person Thomas Schamberger, Executive Director of the Foundation for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards, Inc., the group identified key best practices in the area of leadership, innovation, customer focus strategies, and the development of specific measurement and analysis tools, which they found to be common to many MBNQA recipients.



Resource person Schamberger moderating a lively Q&A session. APO/Yumiko Yamashita



Thai participant Ekkawit Jitrada summarizes discussion results on MBNQA applicability in Asia, Newport Beach, 17 September. APO/Yumiko Yamashita

Resource person Schamberger suggested that future missions on quality award programs should be divided into two groups with separate objectives: “I would not include country award administrators with organizations wanting to learn from US organizations (i.e., best practices, lessons learned, etc.). The administrators are more interested in the award process rather than best practices.” Despite a lengthy preassignment completed by all participants before embarking on the mission, some believed that a prior national workshop would have been helpful to discuss some of the more advanced elements of attempts to meet quality award criteria. Pham Quang Thang, Deputy CEO in charge of SME Business, Vietnam Technological and Commercial Joint-Stock Bank, echoed many participants when he said that a similar mission “should be organized yearly.” All hoped that the APO would continue quality award-related projects, especially to train assessors, and agreed that the MBNQA continues to be an example of a national initiative to promote innovation and recognize the best practices of performance excellence in industry, healthcare, and other sectors. ☺