



The Swedish Quality Award: a model for excellence

The Swedish Institute for Quality (SIQ) was founded in 1990 with the support of the Swedish government via the Ministry of Industry. In addition to the governmental commitment SIQ is also supported via its Members' Association which includes approximately 100 companies and institutions.

The SIQ has the task of promoting quality development and spreading knowledge in the field of quality and business excellence. Its mission is also to promote business excellence and total quality management in all sectors of the Swedish economy.

Since 1992, the Swedish Quality Award (*Utmärkelsen svensk Kvalitet*) has been an incentive for companies and organizations throughout the country to do top-quality work and be passionate about it. The vastly diverse organizations evaluated over the years have become a unique foundation of role models, not only to admire but also to learn from. The Swedish Quality Award was established by the SIQ to stimulate continuous improvement in all types of organizations. As a national institute, the SIQ developed the SIQ Model for Performance Excellence, which has become a fundamental tool for all enterprises wishing to monitor and evaluate their improvement and progress. "As a national institute, our mission is not only to support but also inspire all types of organizations, small as well as large, to develop their way of working and become successful," explained SIQ Managing Director Jerry Karlsson.

Since 1992, approximately 210 organizations have been thoroughly evaluated and 26 received the award, most from the hands of His Majesty Carl XVI Gustaf. The award has two categories, one for large organizations with 200 or more employees and one for small organizations with fewer than 200 employees. Recognition is given to all that apply. The judgment is based on meticulous onsite inspections in addition to the required documentation. "We are represented in all parts of society and thanks to the fantastic network of scientists, entrepreneurs, quality managers, listed companies, universities, government agencies, and many more we have the broad base and experience to evaluate all kinds of businesses," pointed out Managing Director Karlsson.

In February 2015 the Swedish Quality Award 2014 was given to MTR Stockholm AB, part of the MTR Corporation. MTR Stockholm is responsible for planning, operating, and maintaining the capital city's subway system. Dr. Raymond K.F. Ch'ien, Chairman of MTR Corporation, said that there

was no higher honor or recognition that a company could receive than one for quality. He praised the dedication and hard work of colleagues at MTR Stockholm who had adopted the culture of continuous improvement and best practices with support from colleagues, management in Hong Kong, and MTR's other railway hubs. "This culture of continuous improvement is the guiding light for all operations within the MTR family. We nurture and cultivate this culture and we share our experiences in a very fruitful way across all of our railway operations in Hong Kong, mainland China, Sweden, the UK, and Australia. By learning from each other, we grow stronger together and serve our customers in better ways," he continued.

SIQ Model for Performance Excellence

The SIQ Model for Performance Excellence is based on a total of 13 core values and seven criteria, which are further divided into 27 subcriteria (Figure 1). The model is based on a three-step improvement process. Carrying out the three steps is time-consuming and demanding. However, organizations that attempt it soon find a return on investment in terms of greater customer satisfaction and more effective operations. One of the applicants for the Swedish Quality Award reported a 10-fold dividend on every krona (SEK) spent on describing and evaluating the organization and carrying out improvements, accounting for half the annual profit. The three steps are summarized below.



Chairman Dr. Raymond K.F. Ch'ien (2nd L) of MTR Corporation receives the 2014 Swedish Quality Award on behalf of MTR Stockholm from Chairman Sven-Christer Nilsson of the Swedish Institute for Quality (1st R), along with CEO Peter Viinapuu, CEO of MTR Stockholm (1st L) and CEO Jeremy Long of the European Business of MTR Corporation (back row). Photo courtesy of the SIQ.

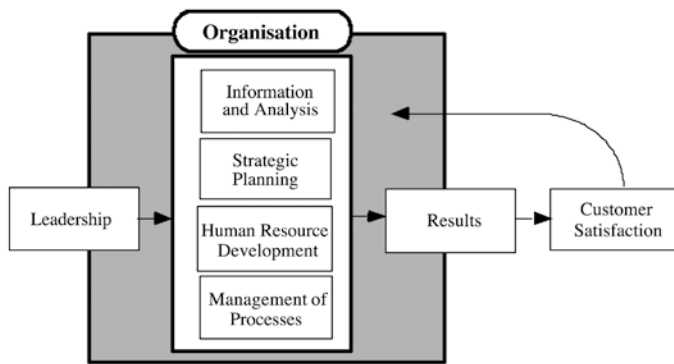


Figure 1. SIQ Model for Performance Excellence. *Figure courtesy of the SIQ.*

Step 1: Description

The first step entails making a description of the activities of your organization. The description should answer four questions: 1) How are we working? 2) To what extent are we accomplishing our goals? 3) What results have we achieved? 4) How do we evaluate results and identify areas for improvement in our work? The questions apply to all areas in the organization. In order to help find a structure and system, the award leads people to the areas that need to be described, i.e., the seven criteria. As many employees as possible should participate in working with the criteria. This promotes skill enhancement and increases the level of involvement in the organization.

The criteria can be used in different ways. Senior executives can share the working responsibility among themselves and then set up interfunctional groups to collect facts and figures and to carry out the area descriptions. These descriptions provide an overall picture of the organization, developed as a result of the joint efforts of all employees and accepted by all, which is a good point of departure for improvement.

Step 2: Evaluation

The second step entails an evaluation of the description made in step 1. The extent to which the core values of the organization permeate throughout is assessed in terms of approach, deployment, and results. People must judge how systematically the organization is working and how responsive it is in terms of preventing problems, as well as how approaches can be evaluated and improved. The extent to which the approaches are deployed and whether they are deployed in a relevant way must also be determined. The more relevant the deployment, the more positive the evaluation. The results of the approaches deployed should be judged on the basis of the targets set, as well as on the basis of the corresponding values of leading organizations and competitors.



Logo of the SIQ-Swedish Quality Award.

The evaluation is carried out in groups of four to six people, who work both individually and in a group as “examiners.” Their overall skills should be as broad as possible, and the examiners may come either from the organization itself or from outside. Organizations often share examiners with one another. The outcome of the evaluation is a feedback report, highlighting the strong points and the potential for improvement. This report may serve as a plan for improvement.

Step 3: Improvement

The strong points and the potential for improvement highlighted in the feedback report can provide the basis for the quality improvement process. The measures the organization needs to take are determined by the unique conditions of each workplace. The process of describing and evaluating the organization gives people a basis from which to determine which improvement goals should be developed and where resources should be invested. 🌀



Anna De Geer is the Communications Manager of the SIQ. The SIQ is responsible for promoting quality development in Sweden by creating, collecting, and spreading knowledge within the field of quality and business excellence. As a national institute, it strives to support and inspire all types of organizations to work with continuous improvement and learning from others. The SIQ is a nonprofit organization founded in 1990 with the support of the Swedish government. Currently, the SIQ Members' Association includes approximately 100 companies and institutions. These stakeholders constitute an important national network with unique conditions for sharing knowledge and exchanging experiences in the field of quality and business excellence.