Views of Assessors on the Role of Awards in Creating and Sustaining a Culture of Excellence

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ABSTRACT

This research paper aimed to clarify the assessors' views on the role of awards in creating and sustaining a culture of excellence in the institutions and companies participating in the competition for winning excellence awards. It also aimed to reveal the perspectives of excellence assessors concerning the relationship between the impact of excellence awards on each of the three pillars of excellence (shaping the future and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance) and on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Outputs of one-sample T-test indicated that the impacts of excellence awards on future shaping and agility and alignment and integration are slightly below the moderate level. Outputs of one-sample T-test also indicated that the impacts of excellence awards on sustainable performance and creating and sustaining a culture of excellence are not statistically different from the moderate level. Results of correlation and regression tests supported the statistically significant relationships between the impacts of excellence awards on each of the three excellence pillars and on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. The research concluded that building a culture of excellence is the right approach for continual improvement to achieve and sustain future success and business continuity.

Keywords: Excellence, Excellence awards, Excellence culture, Future shaping, Agility, Alignment, Sustainable performance.

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آراء المقيّمين حول دور الجوائز في خلق واستدامة ثقافة التميز

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ملخص

هدف هذا البحث إلى توضيح آراء المقيّمين حول دور جوائز التميز في خلق ثقافة التميز واستدامتها في المؤسسات والشركات المشاركة في المنافسة على الفوز بجوائز التميز. وهدف البحث إلى الكشف عن وجهات نظر مقيّمي التميز فيما يتعلق بالعلاقة بين تأثير جوائز التميز على كل من الركائز الثلاث للتميز (استشراف المستقبل والرشاقة، والمواءمة والتكامل، والأداء المستدام) وعلى خلق ثقافة التميز واستدامتها. وأشارت مخرجات اختبار t إلى أن تأثير جوائز التميز على استشراف المستقبل والرشاقة، والمواءمة والتكامل أقل بشكل طفيف من المستوى المتوسط، وإلى أن تأثيراً لا يختلف إحصائياً عن المستوى المتوسط لجوائز التميز على الأداء المستدام، وخلق ثقافة التميز واستدامتها. ودعمت نتائج اختباري الارتباط والانحدار وجود علاقات ذات دلالة إحصائية بين تأثير جوائز التميز على كل من ركائز التميز الثلاث وعلى خلق ثقافة التميز واستدامتها. وخلص البحث إلى أن بناء ثقافة التميز هو النهج الصحيح للتحسين المستمر لتحقيق النجاح واستدامته في المستقبل واستمرارية الأعمال.

الكلمات الدالة: التميز، جوائز التميز، ثقافة التميز، استشراف المستقبل، الرشاقة، المواءمة، الأداء المستدام.

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INTRODUCTION

Several countries in the Middle East region, including Jordan, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, have launched excellence programs in different sectors and have established centers or assigned institutions to undertake the tasks of promoting and managing excellence activities, such as building the knowledge and capabilities related to excellence, facilitating and supporting excellence initiatives and managing the assessment processes of excellence. The main objective of launching excellence programs and awards was to improve the performance of public-sector institutions or private-sector companies (Mann, Adebanjo and Tickle, 2011; Suciu, 2017; Lasrado and Uzbeck, 2017).

Excellence programs have provided generic models that incorporate guidelines and best practices to enhance the way of doing business and thereby delivering missions and services and executing strategies. Excellence programs also introduced the mechanisms and tools related to the management of functions, strategies, resources and processes (Davidson et al., 2011; Ashraf, 2016; Suciu, 2017; Jankalová and Jankal, 2020). Moreover, excellence programs have promoted models and toolkits in the field of performance management in addition to the measurement of customer and employee satisfaction.

Problem and Objectives

After dozens of years of deployment, it is worth to examine the role of launching excellence programs and awards in creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. There are several approaches to do that, one of which is examining and analyzing the performance trend of the participating institutions or companies over time. Another approach is surveying the participating institutions and companies to have their perceptions in this regard. Most of the previous studies have adopted one of the two approaches mentioned above. This research attempts to investigate differently the impact of excellence awards in

creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. It designed to utilize the assessment expertise of assessors during several assessment cycles of different institutions or companies in several countries in the Middle East region.

This study attempted to reveal whether excellence programs and awards have succeeded in creating and sustaining a culture of excellence in ministries, departments, institutions and companies that participated in excellence programs and applied to excellence awards. It examined the impact of excellence programs and awards on future shaping and agility, alignment and integration, sustainable performance and creating and sustaining a culture of excellence in general. It also investigated the relationship between the impacts of excellence awards on the three pillars (future shaping, alignment and sustainable performance) and the impacts of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chourides et al. (2003) highlighted the implications of knowledge management in organizational innovation and competitiveness. Thawani (2004) indicated the role of strategic deployment of six sigma in changing the culture of organization through inculcating process control discipline applied in manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses. Zain et al. (2005) showed that actual system or technology usage had the strongest direct effect on organizational agility.

Coordinated systematic development of total quality management basic factors supports innovative processes towards business excellence (Mele and Colurcio, 2006). Lin et al. (2006) indicated that companies have to align with suppliers and customers to streamline processes and work together to achieve a competitive edge in the rapidly changing business

environment. Agarwal (2007) revealed that agility supports in providing the right product at the right time to the consumer.

Shaddix and Searby (2008) revealed that the system of Mountain Brook school has committed to qualify teacher leaders in a culture of excellence. Conboy (2009) highlighted the rapid grow of the use of agile methods among the community of information systems' development in recent years. Mann, Adebanjo and Tickle (2011) showed that winning business excellence awards is a key objective for many companies. They also highlighted the key barriers to long-term commitment to business excellence, which are the lack of development of a business excellence culture, the lack of resources and the failure to provide an adequate education for the majority of staff in business excellence.

The Institute for Excellence & Ethics developed an approach of culture of excellence and ethics that incorporates the principles of the excellence framework and the rationale for how the approach achieves sustainability and lasting impact in the development of character, leadership and culture (Davidson et al., 2011). Gligor and Holcomb (2012) mentioned that supply-chain agility has been explored through the focus on manufacturing flexibility, supply-chain speed and lean manufacturing. Sinha and Arora (2012) revealed that both excellence and organizational culture can be conceptualized in the same way. Brown (2013) suggested leadership support, drive and consistency throughout the company and communicating strategy and making it meaningful for people at all organizational levels.

The transformations brought as a result of globalization and modern technologies have created a discontinuous landscape that challenges traditional ways of managing small and medium-sized enterprises (Rowland-Jones, 2013). Fok-Yew and Ahmad (2014) found a significant positive relationship between the style of transformational leadership and operational excellence. Mintrom (2014) indicated a positive and sustained impact of promoting a culture of excellence among education course participants on their individual practices. Rezaeia et al. (2015) indicated that culture of excellence is a recommendable management system to effectively support organizational competitiveness.

Larkin et al. (2015) identified differences in approaches to resilience and common ground which federal agencies can use to support programs that are more effective. Rusev and Salonitis (2016) mentioned that operational excellence is a consequence of practices related to continuous process improvement, culture, alignment and results. Ashraf (2016) concluded that total quality management and knowledge management can be implemented in synchronization and their combined implementation will lead to higher performance excellence.

Competitive market, knowledge sharing and culture of excellence are the key factors for companies to thrive in the ever-expanding global market economy (Rezaei et al., 2016). Suciu (2017) suggested a shift from a perspective that focuses on the so called "hero of excellence" towards promoting the culture of excellence among the entire company in such changing and challenging business environment. Chan, Ngai and Moon (2017) revealed that strategic and manufacturing flexibilities positively affect supply-chain agility, mediating the impact of strategic and manufacturing flexibilities on company performance.

Donoso-Morales et al. (2017) indicated that coaches noted the crucial elements that led to sustained excellence in their programs, which are hard work and daily attention to detail, effective emotional management of themselves and their athletes and continuous self-assessment (self-reflection and seeking mentors). Lasrado and Uzbeck (2017) showed that the Dubai Quality Award facilitates the excellence journey of aspiring companies to win a quality award and to strengthen

their quality initiative through an informative assessment report. They also mentioned that the Dubai Quality Award model is perceived by companies as a useful approach to quality improvement.

Gourlay and Stevenson (2017) highlighted that the challenge facing higher education is to practice value teaching, enhance student learning and maintain core values of excellence. Tzvetana and Ivaylo (2017) mentioned that employee commitment contributes to the expected standard of employee performance. Wirtz and Zeithaml (2018) highlighted the importance of cost-effective service excellence and enabling culture. Kassem et al. (2018) found that organizational culture types (mission culture, adaptability culture, involvement culture and consistency culture) have a significant positive impact on achieving excellent customer-related results.
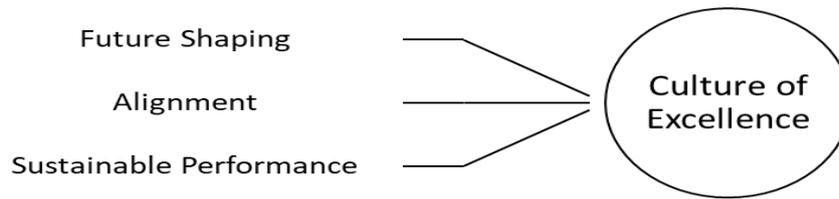
Agility and organizational culture play a major role in sustainable organizational excellence (Sony, 2019). Wirtz (2019) indicated that administrative and operational wastes are prevalent and that there is a need for more focus on service quality in many healthcare institutions. Jankalová and Jankal (2020) found that there is a relationship between business-excellence dimensions and sustainability dimensions.

Most of previous studies surveyed a sample of companies or institutions to measure the implementation of excellence concepts and criteria. Some of them highlighted the challenges and obstacles related to the creation of culture of excellence. To ensure the quality of services, previous studies promoted management concepts, such as: total quality management, knowledge management, six sigma, agility, flexibility, resilience, adaptability and alignment. Several previous studies focused mainly on operational excellence. This research attempted to determine the role of excellence programs and awards in creating and maintaining the culture of excellence with more focus on selected pillars of excellence related to the creation of excellence culture. To measure the impact of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of

excellence and avoiding any bias possibilities from the side of participating institutions and companies, data-collection methods in this research relied on perspectives of excellence assessors gained over several excellence assessment cycles.

Based on literature review, the theoretical framework of this research was developed, which focused on three pillars of excellence in addition to creating and sustaining a culture of excellence (Thawani, 2004; Smadi and Al-Khawaldeh, 2006; Al-Khawaldeh and Smadi, 2006; Shaddix and Searby, 2008; Mann, Adebanjo and Tickle, 2011; Davidson et al., 2011; Sinha and Arora, 2012; Mintrom, 2014; Rezaeia et al., 2015; Rezaei et al., 2016; Lasrado and Uzbeck, 2017; Kassem et al., 2018; Jankalová and Jankal, 2020). The three selected pillars of excellence were future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance. Future shaping and agility included foreseeing the future, resilience, agility and business continuity. Alignment and integration included integration, partnership and alignment within and between institutions and companies. Sustainable performance included promotion of sustainable good performance, balance between short-term and long-term goals and priorities, balanced performance and rational spending. Culture of excellence included the creation and sustainability of culture of excellence, an approach of how to run the business and work, a reflection of the real life situation and actual performance and the adoption of excellence practices in core functions (Zain et al., 2005; Lin et al., 2006; Conboy, 2009; Davidson et al., 2011; Gligor and Holcomb, 2012; Larkin et al., 2015; Rusev and Salonitis, 2016; Chan, Ngai and Moon, 2017; Kassem et al., 2018; Sony, 2019).

The conceptual research model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure (1)
Conceptual research model (*Source: Author*)

The following directional hypotheses were developed and tested:

The First Hypothesis

H0: The impact of excellence awards on "future shaping and agility" is moderate.

H1: The impact of excellence awards on "future shaping and agility" is below moderate level.

The Second Hypothesis

H0: The impact of excellence awards on "alignment and integration" is moderate.

H1: The impact of excellence awards on "alignment and integration" is below moderate level.

The Third Hypothesis

H0: The impact of excellence awards on "sustainable performance" is moderate.

H1: The impact of excellence awards on "sustainable performance" is below moderate level

The Fourth Hypothesis

H0: The impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence" is moderate.

H1: The impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence" is below moderate level

The Fifth Hypothesis

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "future shaping and agility" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "future shaping and agility" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

The Sixth Hypothesis

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "alignment and integration" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "alignment and integration" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

The Seventh Hypothesis

H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "sustainable performance" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the impact of excellence awards on "sustainable performance" and the impact of excellence awards on "creating and sustaining a culture of excellence".

Methodology

This study concentrated on the impact of excellence awards on three selected pillars of excellence and related practices. It also concentrated on the impact of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. Therefore, this research relied on the responses of excellence assessors on a questionnaire supported with few

interviews conducted with senior assessors of excellence.

A questionnaire was developed to measure the impact of excellence awards on the three pillars of excellence mentioned earlier and on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence from the perspective of assessors. The measurement instrument used a 4-point scale by giving a score from 1 to 4 based on the assessors' views regarding the impact of excellence awards (none as 1, low as 2, moderate as 3 and high as 4).

The questionnaire was distributed to 41 assessors who have participated several times (more than two times) in the assessment processes of excellence in both public and private sectors in the Middle East region. The questionnaire also included a question about who or what was responsible for any shortcomings or errors that occurred. Is it primarily the responsibility of the participating institutions and companies, the excellence assessors or the management of excellence program? The response rate was 73% (30 excellence assessors).

Results and Discussion

The responses of excellence assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and awards on future shaping and agility are shown in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, most of the responses indicate a moderate impact of excellence programs and awards on future shaping and agility. About 54% of the responses indicate a low impact of excellence programs and awards on resilience. In general, the responses reveal a moderate-to-low impact of excellence programs and awards on future shaping and agility.

Table (1)

Responses of assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and

awards on future shaping and agility *(Source: Author)*

Statement	None	Low	Moderate	High
Contribution to future shaping function and its means and tools	17%	30%	53%	0%
Deployment of resilience concept and related practices	3%	54%	23%	20%
Promotion of agility concept and related applications	0%	33%	57%	10%
Enhancement of business continuity through excellence initiatives and practices	13%	20%	50%	17%

The responses of excellence assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and awards on alignment and integration are shown in Table 2. Around 53% of the responses indicate a low impact on facilitation of integration with concerned institutions or companies in the areas of policymaking, service delivery or other related areas. About 43% of the responses support that the activation of partnership at the national and sectoral levels is also low. In general, the responses reveal a moderate-to-low impact of excellence programs and awards on alignment and integration.

Table (2)

Responses of assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and

awards on alignment and integration *(Source: Author)*

Statement	None	Low	Moderate	High
Facilitation of alignment throughout the entire institution or company	0%	13%	70%	17%
Facilitation of alignment at the national and sectoral levels	0%	27%	73%	0%
Facilitation of integration with concerned institutions or companies in the areas of policymaking, service delivery or other related areas	0%	53%	27%	20%
Activation of partnership at the national and sectoral levels	0%	43%	40%	17%

The responses of excellence assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and awards on sustainable performance are shown in Table 3. About 63% of the responses support the role of excellence programs and awards in enhancing the balanced performance supported with relevant stakeholders' indicators. Around 57% of the responses support the enhancement of the balance between short-term and long-term goals and priorities. In general, the responses reveal a moderate-to-low impact of excellence programs and awards on sustainable performance.

Table (3)

Responses of assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and

awards on sustainable performance *(Source: Author)*

Statement	None	Low	Moderate	High
Promotion of sustainable good performance	0%	47%	47%	6%
Enhancement of the balance between short-term and long-term goals and priorities	0%	27%	57%	16%
Enhancement of the balanced performance supported with relevant stakeholder indicators	0%	20%	63%	17%
Rationalization of spending including excellence costs through ensuring the sufficient allocation of resources within institution or company	0%	33%	50%	17%

The responses of excellence assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and awards on culture of excellence are shown in Table 4. About 64% of the responses support the moderate impact of excellence programs and awards on the creation of a culture of excellence and the adoption of excellence practices in core functions of institutions and companies. Around 47% of the responses reveal the role of excellence programs and awards in preparing documents for excellence-assessment processes exactly reflecting real-life situations. About 47% of the responses support the low impact on the promotion of dealing with excellence as an approach of how to run business, lead institutions or companies and manage functions.

In general, the responses indicate a moderate-to-low impact on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Table (4)

Responses of assessors concerning the impact of excellence programs and awards on culture of excellence *(Source: Author)*

Statement	None	Low	Moderate	High
Creation of a culture of excellence, not a winning culture	0%	23%	64%	13%
Promotion of dealing with excellence not like any other functions, but as an approach of how to run business, lead institutions or companies and manage functions	0%	47%	40%	13%
Preparation of documents for excellence-assessment processes to exactly reflect real-life situations not differing from the actual performance on the ground	0%	37%	47%	16%
Adoption of excellence practices in the core functions of an institution or a company	0%	23%	64%	13%

The responses of excellence assessors concerning the question "who is responsible for any shortages happened or mistakes undertaken?" were as follows: 57% of assessors responded, "It is mainly the responsibility of the participating institutions and companies", 33% of assessors responded, "It is mainly the responsibility of the assessors" and 10% of assessors responded, "It is mainly the responsibility of the management of excellence programs". This indicates that any gaps or weaknesses are related to implementation, which is the responsibility of institutions and companies.

The descriptive-statistics results for future shaping and agility, alignment and integration, sustainable performance and creating and sustaining a culture of excellence are shown in Table 5. As shown in Table 5, means of future shaping and agility, alignment and integration, sustainable performance and culture of excellence are above 2.5, but below 3, with standard deviations between 0.5 and 0.6. This indicates that the impacts of excellence programs on future shaping and agility, alignment and integration, sustainable performance and culture of excellence are slightly below the moderate level.

Table (5)

Descriptive statistics results *(Source: Author)*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Future Shaping & Agility	30	1.50	3.75	2.6083	0.60059
Alignment & Integration	30	2.00	3.75	2.7917	0.51730
Sustainable Performance	30	2.25	4.00	2.8250	0.50065
Culture of Excellence	30	2.00	4.00	2.8167	0.56069
Valid N (list-wise)	30				

Outputs of one-sample t test are shown in Table 6. Using test value = 3 (moderate level) and as shown in

Table 6, sig. (2-tailed) for future shaping and agility = 0.001 and for alignment and integration = 0.035. Both of them are < 0.05, which means that the impacts of excellence programs and awards on these two excellence pillars are significantly below the moderate level. On the hand, sig. (2-tailed) for sustainable performance = 0.065 and for creating and sustaining a culture of excellence = 0.084. Both of them are > 0.05, which means that the

impacts of excellence programs and awards on these two excellence pillars do not significantly differ from (less than) the moderate level. Therefore, the impacts of excellence programs and awards on the selected excellence pillars and creating and sustaining a culture of excellence are closer to the moderate level than to the low level.

Table (6)
Outputs of one-sample t-test *(Source: Author)*

One-sample Test						
	Test Value = 3					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Lower**	**Upper**
Future Shaping & Agility	-3.572	29	0.001	-0.39167	-0.6159	-0.1674
Alignment & Integration	-2.206	29	0.035	-0.20833	-0.4015	-0.0152
Sustainable Performance	-1.915	29	0.065	-0.17500	-0.3619	0.0119
Culture of Excellence	-1.791	29	0.084	-0.18333	-0.3927	0.0260

Correlation results are shown in Table 7. As shown in Table 7, correlations are higher than 0.86 and significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The results indicate statistically strong positive correlations between the impact of excellence awards on each of the excellence pillars (future

shaping and agility (r = 0.887), alignment and integration (r = 0.911) and sustainable performance (r = 0.865)) and the impact of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Table (7)
Correlations results *(Source: Author)*

Correlations					
		Future Shaping & Agility	**Alignment & Integration**	**Sustainable Performance**	**Culture of Excellence**
Future Shaping & Agility	Pearson Correlation	1	0.880**	0.775**	0.887**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	30	30	30	30
Alignment & Integration	Pearson Correlation	0.880**	1	0.845**	0.911**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000

		30	30	30	30
Sustainable Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.775**	0.845**	1	0.865**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	30	30	30	30
Culture of Excellence	Pearson Correlation	0.887**	0.911**	0.865**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	30	30	30	30
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Multiple-regression results are shown in Table 8. As shown in Table 8, multiple correlation = 0.942 and R-square = 0.887 (coefficient of determination). Adjusted R^2 = 0.874, which indicates that 87.4% of the variance in the impacts of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence can be explained by the variance in the impacts of excellence awards on the three pillars of excellence (future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance).

Table (8)
Multiple-regression results *(Source: Author)*

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R-square**	**Adjusted R-square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	0.942ᵃ	0.887	0.874	0.19922
a. Predictors: (Constant), Sustainable Performance, Future Shaping & Agility, Alignment & Integration.				

ANOVA results are shown in Table 9. As shown in Table 9, sig. value of F-test = 0.000, which means that there is a statistically positive relationship between the impact of excellence awards on excellence pillars (future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance) and the impact of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Table (9)
ANOVA results *(Source: Author)*

ANOVAᵃ						
	Model	**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	8.085	3	2.695	67.905	0.000ᵇ
	Residual	1.032	26	0.040		
	Total	9.117	29			
a. Dependent Variable: Culture of Excellence.						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Sustainable Performance, Future Shaping & Agility, Alignment & Integration.						

Coefficient results are shown in Table 10. As shown in Table 10, sig. values of T-test < 0.05 for the impact of

excellence awards on the three excellence pillars (future shaping and agility = 0.025, alignment and integration = 0.034 and sustainable performance = 0.026). This supports the statistically significant relationships between the impact of excellence awards on each of the three excellence pillars

(future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance) and the impact of excellence awards on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Table (10)
Coefficient results (*Source: Author*)

Coefficientsᵃ					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		**Standardized Coefficients**		
Model	**B**	**Std. Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
1 (Constant)	-0.044	0.220		-0.199	0.844
Future Shaping & Agility	0.312	0.131	0.334	2.385	0.025
Alignment & Integration	0.401	0.179	0.370	2.240	0.034
Sustainable Performance	0.329	0.139	0.293	2.361	0.026
a. Dependent Variable: Culture of Excellence.					

The results of this research show the growing understanding of companies and their realization that building a culture of excellence is the right approach or tool for continuous improvement to achieve and sustain future success and business continuity. Improving the results is not achievable without reviewing and developing systems and processes. Individual interviews were conducted with five senior assessors regarding the impact of excellence programs and awards on creating a culture of excellence. One of the interviewed assessors said:

"Delivering excellent services encouraged business companies to have good people, systems, processes, resources and work environment."

Enabling a culture of excellence ensures efficiency of spending, especially on medium and long terms. This is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Mele & Colurcio, 2006; Adebanjo & Tickle, 2011; Sinha & Arora, 2012; Fok-Yew & Ahmad, 2014; Rezaeia et al., 2015; Rusev & Salonitis, 2016; Suciu, 2017; Lasrado & Uzbeck, 2017; Wirtz & Zeithaml, 2018). One of the interviewed assessors

said:

"Institutional-excellence models helped public institutions in managing resources, processes, services and relations with stakeholders."

The results of relationship tests support that future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance are key pillars for creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. In the same context, previous studies highlighted the importance of agility, flexibility, resilience, adaptability and continuous improvement (e.g. Zain et al., 2005; Lin et al., 2006; Agarwal, 2007; Conboy, 2009; Gligor & Holcomb, 2012; Rusev & Salonitis, 2016; Kassem et al., 2018; Sony, 2019).

As most of the key areas of improvement are associated with implementation, participating institutions and companies need to realize that excellence is not a destination that they try to reach or an award to win, it is a continual journey, where they need to learn more and improve more and more

accordingly. One of interviewed assessors said:

"Some institutions and companies did not realize that excellence is a tool for improvement to build and then sustain future success."

The issue is how institutions and companies perceive the value of excellence programs. Therefore, the right understanding leads to good results, whereas misunderstanding leads to poor results. One of the interviewed assessors said:

"Many institutions are unfortunately interested in winning awards and focused on short term more than long term and future."

One of the key concepts of excellence is achieving balanced results through ensuring a balance between needs and expectations of all stakeholders, short-term priorities and long-term strategies, financial and non-financial performance measures and objectives' achievement and best utilization of available resources. One of the interviewed assessors said:

"Many institutions and companies really practiced and maintained the balance between achieving the goals and at the same time efficiently managing resources. Sustained excellence is based on both effectiveness and efficiency."

Building a culture of excellence requires investment at the beginning and this investment has a value added, because it reduces and prevents errors, deviations and corrective costs and ensures better use of available resources. The cost of the absence of excellence is hundreds of times larger than the cost of building excellence.

Conclusion

Creating a culture of excellence is the best sustainable solution to manage performance in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. In conclusion, the results of this research support the contribution of the three pillars of excellence (future shaping and agility, alignment and integration and sustainable performance) to creating and sustaining a

culture of excellence. The results indicate that excellence is an organizational cultural aspect, where excellence leaders evaluate the past, manage the present and plan for the future. This means that they measure, learn and accordingly improve. Thus, building a culture of excellence is practically the best sustainable solution for business continuity.

One of the implications is that excellence programs and awards in general aim to improve the performance of institutions and companies. Awards are just a means or a tool to encourage and enhance employee performance and institutional excellence.

Institutions and companies are recommended to deal with excellence models and practices as a management approach to achieve sustainable results. New management concepts, such as future shaping, agility, resilience, alignment and integration are key enablers to achieve radical improvements and then a leading position in terms of performance. Findings showed a strong association between these concepts and excellence culture. Another implication is that institutions and companies should pay more efforts to ensure the optimum utilization of excellence practices. Excellence assessors also should upgrade their assessment processes, mechanisms and tools to sharply and obviously distinguish between good and poor implementation. Moreover, management of excellence programs should direct their assessment rubric to culture of excellence and its related pillars.

There are potentials for future research in excellence-related topics, such as the association between governance and excellence culture, comparative studies on the creation of excellence between countries or between public and private sectors in these countries and the moderating role of digitalization and artificial intelligence in creating and sustain a culture of excellence.

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