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The leadership criterion: challenges in pursuing excellence in the Jordanian public sector
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The Leadership Criterion:Challenges in Pursuing Excellence in the Jordanian Public Sector

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, public sector organisations have seen drastic changes to their processes, procedures and systems in response to dynamic external developments. These include speedier communication and more easily acquired information with advances in technology, plus associated changes in citizen or stakeholder expectations. This has combined with a desire to learn lessons from the private sectors, and the consequent adoption of 'business models' of management in their various guises. At the level of service and quality, public sector organisations have adopted new systems and methods, such as ISO 9000 quality systems and EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) excellence models, so that their processes, services and reputation can be enhanced. Mann et al. (2011a) noted that whilst eighty six countries were employing such models and frameworks, there was a particular reliance EFQM inspired approaches in many Arab countries. Standards of excellence have become vitally important for public sector organisations in the Arab region, especially given the negative impacts faced by bureaucracies of inflation, falls in productivity and poor job satisfaction among employees. Specifically, the public sector within Jordan faces particular challenges that have impacted upon the effective and efficient achievement of service goals. These include increased levels of foreign debt, an accumulated deficit for the yearly budget and a generally perceived fall in the quality of service provided by government bodies.

Over the course of three decades the Jordanian government has adopted a number of strategies and plans to reform their administration so that the organisational environment, structures, processes and services can be improved. In order to enhance the public sector role in providing services to the community, the King Abdullah II Award for government performance and transparency (KAA) was set up to promote excellent performance and awareness of the total quality management (TQM) improvements being made in order to help in all sectors and help to focused effort on attracting investment. Despite these efforts, the results emerging from some public organisations are still considered as far from satisfactory. This paper is based on research which sought to bridge shortage within the literature referring to Arab contexts by identifying the challenges public sector organisations face in their adoption of the best practice leadership, a criterion which is a key factor in the majority of TQM and excellence models. In doing so, this research addressed the following research question:

What challenges are faced by the Jordanian public sector in applying the criterion for leadership as a critical standard for the achievement of organisational excellence?
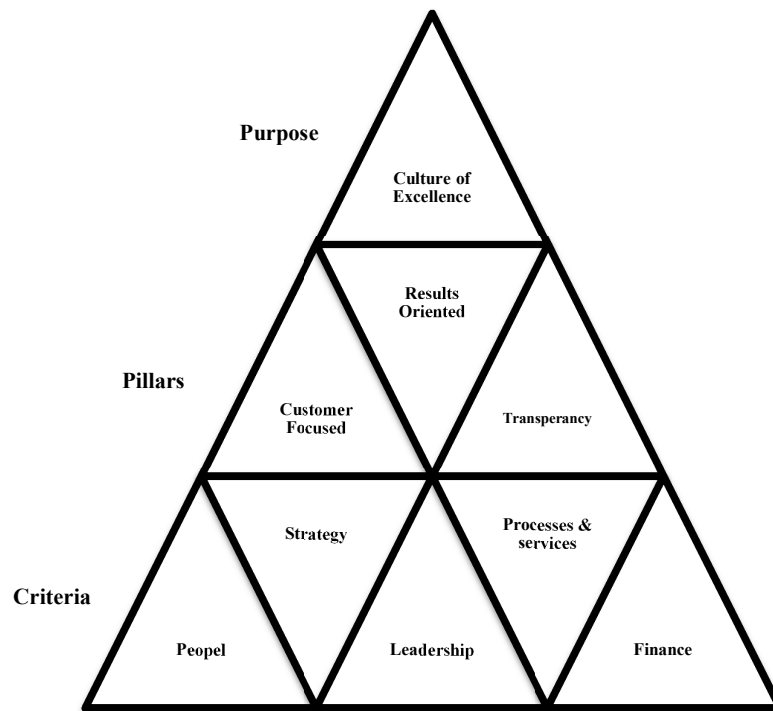
Organisational excellence as a concept

The concept of excellence does not have a single all-encompassing definition. Most dictionary definitions consider it as relating to 'high quality'. American dictionaries have referred to excellence as having a variety of meaning related to achievement, perfection, greatness and supremacy, as well as quality. The EFQM (2014) definition of organisational excellence is best practice in organisational management in order to achieve results for an institution. There are a number of elements that form the focus of organisational excellence, according to the European EFQM model, which are: continuous learning, innovation and improvement; goal clarity; a focus on the customer; leadership; an orientation towards results; development of human resources; social responsibility; management through facts and processes; and development of partnership. In the context of Jordan, organisational excellence can be considered as referring to the achievement and maintenance of superior performance levels that equal and exceed stakeholder expectations and needs (KAA Book, 2013).

Excellence criteria for the public sector in Jordan

The model for organisational excellence adopted for the public sector in Jordan is partially based on the EFQM model, but with some subtle differences. There are three levels of the excellence pyramid in the Jordanian model (see Figure 1). *Firstly*, the higher level represents an ultimate aim of embedding a culture of excellence within public sector organisations through enhancement of values for quality and excellence, letting employees have the opportunity to play a part in embedding these values. Their adoption is a key point of reference in dealings with stakeholders and customers. The *second level* of the pyramid involves basing operations on a customer focus, a focus on results and transparency. The *third level* of the pyramid includes criteria or enablers of leadership, people, processes and services, finance and strategy.

Figure1: The Jordanian Excellence Pyramid

Source: adapted from King Abdullah Centre for Excellence (KACE) 2014

Organisational excellence principles within the public sector

The King Abdullah II Centre for Excellence (KACE) adopted the basic principles of the EFQM model, but then adapted it to focus upon eight key principles for modern public organisations within Jordan, as listed below and illustrated in Figure 2 (KAA Book, 2013; KACE, 2014; EFQM, 2014):

1. *The achievement of balanced results*: an excellent public organisation is one that seeks the achievement of its vision and mission, and associated objectives, by planning effectively on the basis of sound strategic thinking and striking a balance between the interests of all the stakeholders involved, i.e. customers, strategic partners, suppliers and employees.

2. *The addition of value for the customer*: an outstanding public sector organisation is one that pays attention to citizens, customers and stakeholders, and harness capabilities in order to create value for the public by identifying their expectations and needs.

3. *Leadership with inspiration, vision and honesty*: leadership is seen as a key element for any organisation, and excellent organisations characteristically have good leadership with an ability to shape the future organisational vision, define a strategic road map, and then guide organisational members towards achieving this vision.

4. *Management by processes and facts*: a critical factor for success for an excellent organisation is management through actual facts and data. As such, there is need for organisations to manage activities for the achievement of objectives by having procedures and processes that

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are structurally and strategically connected, based on facts and relevant accurate data, so that decision making can lead to results that are sustainable.

5. *Success through people*: Organisations are social entities that can only achieve their objectives through the effective configuration of skills, abilities and talents. Therefore, an excellent organisation ought to facilitate a supportive environment in which employees are empowered and compensated, both tangibly and intangibly, with a culture of respect and appreciation that enables and encourages employees to apply their creativities and initiative.

6. *The encouragement of innovation and creativity*: Excellent organisations generate the creation of added value and the maximisation of their performance by adoption of strategies encouraging creativity and innovation, and by seeking out opportunities to innovate both externally and internally.

7. *The development of partnerships*: Excellent organisations encourage and build up effective collaborations with suppliers, customers, other organisations, the community, and universities and research centres.

8. *Having a sense of responsibility for a sustainable future*: Excellent organisations encourage core ethics and values, such as loyalty, transparency and a sense of organisational citizenship for term of sustainability in social and environmental, as well as economic, terms.

Figure 2: Organisational Excellence Principles in the Jordanian Public Sector

Source: Translated and Adapted from KAA Book (2014)

The criterion of leadership

The first criterion in the King Abdullah II Award (KAA) for transparency and government performance leadership. Boharis and Vorria (2007; 2009), amongst other authors, have emphasised differences between management and leadership from the perspective of organisational excellence. A key point to note from theirs and suchlike research is managers can be seen as individuals who are assigned managerial tasks for the achievement of specific goals, by controlling and problem solving,

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budgeting and planning, and staffing and organising. Leaders, on the other hand, set direction for an organisation and motivate, inspire and align people accordingly (Kotter, 2001). According to the Jordanian KAA model, excellent public sector organisations are those with leaders who are able to facilitate and develop achievement of the organisational vision, purpose and mission. For this research, the leadership criterion is divided up into four different sub-criteria, with each of these further sub-divided. Leadership criteria address the leaders' ability to guide organisations towards the achievement of organisational goals, through the provision of the necessary resourcing. This is illustrated in Table 1.

Table.1: The Leadership Criteria

Leadership criterion	
First sub - criterion : strategic planning	
Factor (1)	Vision, mission, ethics, and core values.
Factor (2)	Strategic plan
Factor (3)	Collaboration with the partners.
Factor (4)	Risk Management
Second sub- criterion: supportive culture	
Factor (1)	The role of leadership in excellence
Factor (2)	Empowerment of the employees
Factor (3)	Social Responsibility
Third sub- criterion: monitoring and evaluation	
Factor (1)	Outcomes of the strategic and action plans

Source: translated from KAA Book (2013)

Taking each of the sub-criteria in turn, the first refers to the importance of strategic planning, including organisational vision, mission, core values and ethics. It is important that public sector organisations work towards the development of these throughout the different organisational levels, so that there can be clarity in the priorities and direction taken and associated behaviour (Ancrum, 2007). Vorria and Boharis (2009) argue that responsible leaders should align their own ethics and values to the culture of the organisation to ensure that emergent advantages can be sustained.

The second sub-criterion concerns excellent organisations adopting SMART objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) in their strategic planning so that a corporate culture can be created with robust leadership both created and valued. In the face of the complexity by public sector organisations in the modern world, strong leadership is needed all the more (Kotter, 2001:11). The third sub-criterion calls for collaboration with strategic partners, such as suppliers, other organisations, customers and the community. The fourth sub-criterion is the realm of risk management, whereby; excellent organisations identify threats that could potentially undermine their ability to work towards strategic goals and, accordingly, have risk management plans in place.

The criterion for 'supportive culture' incorporates the role of leaders or top managers supporting and enhancing organisational excellence through, for example, training and the provision of financial resources. The employee empowerment factor refers to strategies that incorporate the delegation of

authority and power, the sharing of information. This involves all organisational members playing a part in decision making, human resource training, enrichment of the job and increasing the knowledge of employees, and the enhancement of trust between managers and followers (Aladwan and Alkhawaldah, 2008).

Social responsibility is a third sub-criterion. It refers to wider matters and acknowledges that organisations are part of the broader society. Their relationship to the external environment is critical for effective operations, and so a sense of social responsibility is increasingly being used as an overall performance measure (ISO, 2010).

Social responsibility has been defined by the World Bank (2010) as an organisational commitment to the development of economic sustainability in its relationship with employees, the community and society as a while, so that quality of life can be improved both in general, and for the organisation and its members. The sub-criterion for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) relates to organisational polices and strategies for excellent organisations that embed monitoring systems for the implementation of strategic plans and actions. KACE has established a special action plan based upon an assessment report and, through the use of benchmarking, useful targets that can be relative to the strategic plans and actions through KPIs. The provision of financial resources should ensure efficient and effective monitoring so that evaluation can be conducted (KAA Book, 2014).

The Excellence Literature

Hughes and Halsall, (2002), Tari et al., (2007), Mann et al., (2011a) and Brown (2013) are among a group of authors who believe that successful adoption of organisational excellence affects organisational performance and competitive advantage. Oakland and Tanner (2008) argued that organisational excellence and associated TQM models have benefits to institutions. More specifically, Saunders et al (2008) identify the following reasons to move towards what these various authors identify as "organisational excellence":

1. It can provide robust approach to specify the weakness and strength points in organisations.
2. It can serve as a guide for the organisations in order to plan for continuous improvement.
3. It helps to enhance and improve performance, both individually and institutionally.
4. It allows organisations to become world class.
5. It helps organisations to measure their performance and to practice self -assessment.
6. It helps to educate and evelop awareness among employees on the characteristics of successful organisations.
7. It allows managers to co-ordinate a number of quality initiatives.
8. It helps the organisation to conduct benchmarking to allow comparisons with other organisations in the same industry.

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Moreover, such studies found that the organisational excellence is considered as a tool to improve country competitiveness on a wider scale (see for example, Saunders et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2003; Mann et al., 2011b). Zaho (2004) found the application of organisational excellence models enhance the effective utilisation of organisational resources including human, financial and information technology. Various winning organisations in the American quality awards reported that the application of organisational excellence enhanced employee satisfaction and moral, enhanced profitability, and improved the quality of services (Blazey, 2008).

The numerous studies above have focused on the benefits of organisational excellence and TQM in both the private and public sectors. However, few have focused on the challenges faced by the leaders, relevant to the criteria identified above within the organisational excellence literature. Published performance improvement results following the introduction of quality management programmes appear to be promising, but practitioners and researchers have also noted varying degrees of failure in the implementation of such models or programmes. Shih and Gurnani (1997), for example, noted that whilst many quality management programmes or systems start promisingly, with much enthusiasm and encouraging initial results, they are prone to fade in terms of their impact tend to die down after about two or three years: a phenomena that widely defined as 'quality droop' (see for example, Hughes and Halsall, 2002: 258).

Garvin (1986) went as far as to argue that very few organisations actually observed improvements of much significance through TQM schemes. Choi and Eboch (1998) observed a rate of failure of 95% in TQM projects that have been initiated, though the definition of 'failure' is always contentious in such debates. Asif et al. (2009) noted that many senior managers in both the private and public sectors have invested effort in implementing TQM, whilst other managers have stood back awaiting firm evidence that the TQM approach, however defined, is effective. In the context of Jordan, a study conducted by Aldwiri (2006) into public sector application of excellence concluded that leadership style impacts significantly on the levels of organisational excellence achieved. Al-Qudah (2006), meanwhile, noted that operations, financial management and people management are the main barriers to Jordanian public sector organisations achieving satisfactory results in the King Abdullah II Award. More recently, Aladwan (2014) concluded that favouritism and nepotism have a critically negative impact upon quality in Jordanian higher education institutions. The barriers to TQM faced within the public sector have been summarised by Al-Telbani and Radwan (2013) as a lack of commitment from top management, weaknesses in training and HRM, weaknesses in the management information systems (MISs), and a non-conducive organisational culture.

Elsewhere in the Arab world, challenges faced in the Dubai programme for excellence included social norms and traditions, centralised decision- making, and the complex and routinized-nature of governmental activities (Aherns, 2013). Within the same context, Alawadi (2011) described four

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significant challenges that act to prevent the excellence award being given to public sector organisations within the UAE: namely, a fall in satisfaction amongst employees, a sense of coercion in making applications for the excellence awards, the lack of conviction of certain administrative leaders in regard to quality and excellence concepts, and dilution of the 'quality culture' amongst the workforce.

For Sotirkakon and Zeppon (2006), actual measurement of excellence is a significant challenge that acts to prevent public sector organisations from achieving it. In addition, they classified measurement failure causes as three-fold: cognitive axis that relates to insufficient knowledge; a behavioural axis that relates to factors such as a lack of values amongst employees that could drive them towards the achievement of excellence; and an axis related to ethical considerations. Other problems faced by managers have been highlighted by Vakakoupoulou et al. (2013) as issues of poor standards and tools for measurement, poor self-assessment and poor time management.

Failure within governmental excellence projects has also been attributed to weak motivation amongst personnel, a shortfall of collaborative effort, a lack of strategic goals and clarity of vision, and an overall of lack accountability (Tizard, 2012). Asif et al. (2009) considered the important issue of institutionalisation and the way it acted as a hindrance to quality management programmes (QMPs) and practice within the public sector. Whilst QMP models explain a journey towards the implementation and assessment of QMP, the issue of institutionalisation has tended to be ignored.

Jreisat (2009) identified a set of factors which impact negatively on administrative development and excellence in Arab public organisation, including: excessive centralisation, stymied institutional capacity, nebulous accountability and blurred transparency. Although they seek to apply TQM principles and programmes, many organisations around the world failed to obtain the full benefits. According to Venkateswarlu and Nilakant (2005) the reasons behind this are due to: compulsions for change, limited commitment of senior management, lack of experience and fit of the TQM champion, collateral changes and discontinuity of leadership. Mann et al., (2011a), in their study of business excellence in Asia, asserted that organisations in Asia believe that organisational excellence is key to helping them reach their organisational goals. In addition, they found that participation in, and wining, excellence awards is a key objective for many organisations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, rather than ingrained organisational continuous improvement. Organisations in the MENA region still suffer from obstacles to long run commitment to organisational excellence including lack of development of an excellence culture, a lack of resources for development, and a failure to fully educate the majority of staff in excellence concepts. In his study Brown (2013) identified challenges that face Australian companies when they adopt the business excellence projects, namely: leadership support, drive and consistency throughout the organisation, and communicating strategy making it meaningful for people at all levels within organisation.

The research problem and associated motivation

Excellence models and concepts have been employed in the Jordanian public sector for over ten years, yet most public institutions have failed to achieve significant positive results. Within the award cycle for 2012/2013, KACE expressed displeasure with the failure of public sector organisations to respond to excellence criteria and their models, with organisations neither responding to the award requirements nor having made tangible progress in the pursuit of institutional excellence within recent years. Indeed, a KACE Board of Trustees member stated that:

> *"In order for the award to have a real and tangible impact, it should become an integral part of the work of the concerned ministry or governmental institution. That's because the role of the award ends with identifying the possible areas of improvement. It is necessary that ministries and governmental institutions take advantage of the assessment reports and studies. Moreover, monitoring these results should be undertaken by the chief executive of the governmental institution, in order to enhance the participants' perception regarding the importance of the prize as a catalyst for development and improvement"* (KACE, E-Journal, 2013, p. 16).

In a speech of the forum for governmental leaders, the prime minister of Jordan, Dr. Abdullah Al-Ensour, stated that:

> *"The government body is not performing up to its best standards; there is hesitation and fear from decision-making, because of the prevailing accusatory atmosphere, which has negative effect on the level of services given to citizens. This result is contrary to the purpose of the desired reform which is supposed to be servicing the citizens, taking care of their interests, and building their confidence in the government they trusted to manage their affairs"* (KACE, E-Journal, 2013, p. 17).

In view of the challenges noted above, the implementation of excellence models within public sector organisations faces several challenges. The literature shows that a number of studies have addressed the impact the KAA has had on improving the performance of Jordanian institutions, including Shamayleh (2004), Al-Akroush (2006), Al-Qudah (2006), Al-dwiri (2006), Al-Nosour (2010) and Al-Hudaithi (2012). However, no research appears to have been undertaken that uses assessment reports in an attempt to diagnose challenges faced by public sector organisations in their participation in the KAA award. Also, non-have attempted to collect empirical evidence within Jordanian governmental organisations, as previous studies have depended upon survey methodologies.

The research that underpins this paper consequently adopted a qualitative approach through content analysis of facts reported within KAA assessment reports, combined with

the application of an evidence-based approach. The basis of the study is the question of whether leadership, as a progress sponsor within any organisations, lies at the top of the workplace pyramid and can be considered the most vital aspect in effective approaches to the management of quality and organisational excellence.

The research problem, therefore, was to unearth the main weaknesses and challenges impeding the achievement of the results within the excellence criterion related leadership. Several authors have argued that a key catalyst for achieving success and excellence in the commitment and support of the leadership and, therefore, it is a critical success factor in realising excellence. Zairi (2010), Brown (2013), McAdam et al. (2013) and Tizard (2012) have all shown that leadership impacts directly upon excellence through development of the capabilities of the employees, the provision of moral support and materials, and encouragement of their creativity, so that effective work-based relationships can be established.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted in this research as it was the most appropriate for addressing the questions raised and for the analysis of the data collected. The data analysis was conducted using a set of techniques for content analysis of the documents and texts so that particular categories and patterns can be identified in a systematic way (Bryman and Bell, 2011). One advantage of taking this approach was that it permits data to be transmitted from a qualitative form to a quantitative form. As Krippendorff (1980) noted, content analysis is a method of research that is both objective and systematic in its description and quantification of phenomena. It can be used to analyse documents, and test theories in allowing a researcher to enhance of the data acquired (Elo and Kyngas, 2007).

In analysing content, text can be distilled into fewer words, phrases and categories (Cavanagh, 1997). For the achievement of the research objective this research chose a sample comprising the ten government organisations in Jordan that had scored the lowest marks for evaluation in the KAA process for three consecutive sessions in a row. Further criteria were also used to select the study sample. *Firstly*, the governmental organisation had to have participated in the KAA more than once; and, *secondly*, those selected had to have failed to achieve any progress both within the final results and with the application of the excellence models. A third criteria for the selection of these organisations was the focus on what challenges were encountered and how they dealt with successful organisations rather than those who had experienced failures or demise of excellence and TQM initiatives. So as to adhere to these sampling criteria, the researchers liaised with KACE to acquire a list of participating organisations and their progress, or rather lack thereof, over more than one cycle of evaluation for the award. The organisations concerned were then contacted to acquire copies of their assessment reports. As noted in the introduction above, a vital role is played by the leadership

criterion in the fulfilment of the other criteria as it is a reflection of the impact that top leaders have on the adoption of excellence for their organisation. To ensure confidentiality, the names of the government organisations were removed from reports. Additionally, the researchers made a written pledge that no data would be disclosed and that the statistics acquired from the assessment reports would be used solely for the purposes of scientific research. Table 2 illustrate details on the ten selected 'assessment reports'.

Table 2. Assessment reports details

No	The institution	Issuing year	Number of pages
1	A	2013	72
2	B	2013	71
3	C	2013	69
4	D	2013	68
5	E	2013	73
6	F	2013	71
7	G	2013	70
8	H	2013	65
9	I	2013	69
10	J	2013	70
Total of pages			698
Average of pages			70

Source: the assessment reports (2013).

Analysis and discussion

As mentioned above, the content analysis method was used to analyse the data taken from the texts of the assessment reports. The authors divided the method into a number of stages. *Firstly*, in-depth reading of the assessment reports was undertaken. *Secondly*, the strong points and the opportunities for improvement were analysed, then linked to the sub-criteria and their various factors. *Thirdly*, similar answers were built into groups or themes. *Fourthly*, those themes that had similarity were entered into an Excel-based computer model to facilitate analysis that compared similar themes or groups. *Finally*, calculations were made of the frequencies and percentages of the challenges groups or themes. The following section provides the subsequent results and discussion.

The first sub-criterion: strategic planning

Factor 1: Vision, mission, core values and ethics

All the organisations included in the study had an explicitly identified vision, a mission, core values and code of ethics. However, the mechanism employed to construct or formulate them was not at all clear. The degree of involvement of stakeholders and employees in the formulation and development of the vision and mission was also unclear, with only three out of the ten government organisations studied being found to have actually involved them in their processes. With respect to this point, it is

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clear that understanding and commitment to the vision and mission of an origination by employees may be achieved through their involvement in the drafting of the explicit wording for them, rather than the words just being passed from 'on high'. There is also a weakness in adopting effective tools for the dissemination of the vision, mission and core values amongst employees, with the organisations unable to measure the impact of various modes of communication. Organisations were unable to measure the employees' awareness of vision, mission and core values, with no mechanisms facilitate informative feedback that could help in the further development of the mission and values in the future. According to Brown (2013) there are three challenges facing the strategy building such as strategy communication, participation the employees in the strategy formulation and problems in developing strategy process.

Even though the organisations researched had a code of ethics, there were no specific mechanisms to implement the code so that the behaviour of leaders and employees could drive in accordance with it, with abuses of power and the acceptance of cronyism as a natural state of play. It is clear that many public sector organisations have developed their vision, mission and core values statements in a way that is far removed from the context and culture in question, with a number of governmental organisations relying upon external consultants with little prior relevant knowledge. Jabr (2012) argued that an organisational vision ought to be reflection of the goals, values and dreams of employees, and employees need to find it inspiring, motivational, attractive and clear. He also recommends that the employee ought to be given the opportunity to contribute in the building and formulating of the vision and mission. Therefore, it is clear that leaders have to play a key role in the delivery of meaning of the organisational vision to employees and convincing them of its performance, so that employees believe in the vision and contribute positively in the achievement of strategic objectives.

Factor 2: The strategic plan

Based upon content analysis of the assessment reports, it is clear that a '*medium- term'* strategic plan exists in all the government organisations. However, only half the organisations linked their strategic plans to national goals for Jordan and the axes stated within the *Jordanian National Agenda*[1]. It

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[1]*The National Agenda* for Jordan is a forward looking attempt to establish a master plan for the development, future growth and reform of the country. The concept was introduced in 2005 by King Abdullah II to create a strategy that comprehensively considered economic, social and political transformation, in a way that could firmly place Jordan on the road towards a greater degree of social inclusion and more sustainable and rapid economic growth. On the 9th February 2005, a Royal Decree established a National Agenda Steering Committee which set about doing a holistic, qualitative study related to the public sector and its functions, structures, working procedures and management systems. The Committee was made up of 26 members who were representatives from parliament, the private sector, government, civil society, political parties and the media. Community stakeholders were also brought in from several different society sectors so that there would be contributions from a broad range of agents, and a more fair distribution of any political, economic and social benefits that accrued from the efforts at reform. Nowadays, the initiatives of the agenda represent the essential elements for consideration in the programmes and projects to be adopted in forthcoming years by successive Jordanian governments (Ministry of public sector development, National Agenda 2006-2015).

transpired that only three of the ten organisations had requested suppliers, partners, employees, stakeholders and service recipients to act as partners in the preparation of the strategic plan of the organisation. Indeed, only 30% of the organisations had involved strategic partners and employees when reviewing processes related to strategic planning. It was normal for a strategic plan to be prepared according to particular step-wise mechanism. However, only 20% of the organisations undertook periodic review and modifications of the strategic plan and an assessment of the effectiveness of the methods that had been used. In relation to measuring progress towards the goals within the strategic plans, only five of the organisations had methodologies that measure whether the strategic objectives, as set out in the plan, were being achieved.

Half the organisations followed their strategic plans and their associated action plans, the same proportion of organisations in the study that assessed the extent to which milestone as set out in operational plans were being achieved. At the completion of the cycle of strategy, one strategic planning step in the KAA approach is to review the strategic plan and to develop the required procedures for the its systematic review and updating. It was observed that only half of the organisations had applied this inclusive process in their operations, and even then it was done in an unsystematic manner. In order to highlight the challenges faced by public sector organisations in Jordan in relation to the area of excellence, the following words are quoted from a KACE Board of Trustees member:

> *"Perhaps the most important problem facing the award is the repeated succession of those in charge of the organisation within very short periods of time; the new administrator changes and cancels everything that was achieved. He develops a new strategic plan rather than developing and making use of the existing strategic plan because both the implementation and the activation of the strategic plan depend on the administrator not the organisation"* (KACE, E-Journal, 2013, p. 16).

In view of the points presented above, it can be seen that strategic planning problems in public sector organisations stem from the nature of the institutionalisation that exists, with it being rare for an administrative officer to pursue his predecessor's efforts. In focusing on Jordan, it can be noted that longevity of the average cabinet member is no more than a year and, as such, circumstances are not conductive to long-term strategic planning. Often, given their short term on office, administrative or political leaders try to make a quick impact, through usually in a way that is counterproductive and not sustainable in the longer term. So, rather than a consistent institutionalised system, regardless of changes to the leadership, in reality strategic planning is an inconsistent activity that changes with each new leader. According to Deming (2013, edited by Orsini) the continual changing of leadership positions is one of the killer diseases that affects the quality journey. In addition, Brown (2013) argued that the external political factors' driving the organisational strategy was a potential challenge.

Factor 3: Collaboration with partners

It was noted that the current government organisations were deficient in measuring the effectiveness of the relationships they had with partners, even though strategic partners were widely seen as critically important to the processes for strategic planning in the public sector organisations observed. Furthermore, some organisations had tried to involve strategic partners and stakeholders in their strategic planning processes; they had failed to properly incorporate partners' feedback in the improvement of performance and processes and the achievement of strategic plans. Moreover, it was found that the organisations under study had failed to employ methodologies for assessment of management relationships with their partners.

50% of organisations studied had developed a means for determining the nature of the relationships they had with their partners, and so failed to define partnership priorities which could contribute to the achievement of national and organisational goals. Whilst some organisations did obtain partner feedback, they did not use focused mechanisms to take full advantage of this feedback. Indeed, action plans to address challenges were not developed, nor were opportunities for improvement identified, nor corrective or preventive action taken. So many opportunities were missed and lessons not learned to avoid deviation from objectives in the future.

A final point to note is that, according to the Partnership Resource Centre (2006), many organisations across the world fail to efficiently and effectively manage their partner relationships. Causes for this are a lack of trust between partners and the role they could play in achieving enhanced performance and the realisation of goals; and a lack of general support for the principles and concepts of partnership amongst public sector leaders. Bezanson et al. (2004 cited in Horton et al. 2009:9) stated that:

> *"The very term partnership is vague and can span objectives that range from- at the lower end- information sharing and getting to know each other better, to learning about how parties might work together, to specific actions of an interdependent nature that assign responsibilities and accountabilities to two or more parties, to- at the higher end- an almost seamless bending of actors"* (p.9).

Factor 4: Risk management

Whilst the term '*risk management*' is commonly used in the public sector, current governmental organisations have significant weaknesses in relation to their management of risk. In the first instance, addressing risk factors can be considered a rational for the establishment of governmental services (Halachim, 2005). Public protection is a mandate for all levels of government to be observed. However, only three of the ten organisations under study were found to be identifying threats to their organisations.   On the other hand, 30% of the organisations allowed strategic partners and

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stakeholders to identify risks and study the effect that they could have on achieving the goals of the organisation.

An excellent organisation would usually attempt to establish a particular strategy for risk management that, as well as noting potential risks, would include identification of the objectives, targets and resources required to deal with them. However, this study observed that none of the organisations had a suitable strategy related to risk management and so did not receive any feedback, with the aim of enhancing learning and development. They were consequently unable to provide appropriate, ongoing revisions. It was noted that a methodology related to risk management was present in 20% of the organisations, with some working towards a measure of the effectiveness and efficiency of the methodology (though only two organisations were found to be working towards regular updating of the methodology).

Benchmark comparisons to similar organisations were undertaken in relation to risk management in a fifth of organisations, so that best practice could help enhance knowledge. It was also noted that work towards the application of specific measures related to hazard was present in 30% of the organisations, with 30% also having plans in place to deal with disasters. The results of Tizard (2012) correspondingly agree with some of these results. The problems of poor risk management within public sector organisations are attributed to a culture which underplays the importance of risk. Also, compared to the private sector, public organisations have relatively long periods of stability and, consequently, decision makers often pay little or no attention to risk management, even though the concept has been advanced as best practice in recent years (Halachim, 2005).

The second sub-criterion: Supportive culture

Factor 1: the leadership role in the creation and dissemination of a culture excellence

Analysis of the KAA amassment reports revealed that senior managers had been deficient in creating a culture supportive of the principle of excellence. For example, leaders played a critical role in improving administrative systems, and involved employees in the development of those systems, in only one of the organisations studied. Even though 20% of the organisations researched had committees or teams supposedly dedicated to excellence, there was no clear leadership role within these teams, with many of the supposed leaders failing to even attend committee meetings.

There was little or no support from leaders in embedding as culture of excellence in the organisations studied, and so employees were not set a good example by the leaders. With little to motivate employee enthusiasm for the adoption of the principles and culture of excellence, a degree of negativity had emerged that had a bearing on the perceptions of employees. This caused a block to the sharing of creative ideas and, hence, could often lead to a negative effect upon organisational performance. There seemed to be very little measurement and evaluation of the leadership role in

building excellenc,; a finding that is well supported in the literature (e.g. Alawadi, 2011; Vakakoupoulou et al., 2013). As a final word, Van der Wiele and Brown (2002) found that top management has a very important role in building the quality culture, and they found the stability of leaders or CEO has vital role in continuity of quality. Where this is not present, there is a negative impact on any culture of excellence.

Factor 2: Empowerment of employees

An overall analysis of the assessment reports showed that half of the organisations studied relied upon training as a critical factor in the provision of the required skills, behaviours, capabilities and knowledge for employees. More particularly, skills and knowledge were seen as the most significant factors facilitating empowerment (Melhem, 2004). Half the current organisations had in place a methodology that enabled managers to plan for the empowerment of employees, and half of these organisations had specific mechanisms in place to measure the degree to which employees were benefitting from the training they had received. The measurement methods for training effectiveness were, however, still rather anachronistic in the sense that they, for instance, only involved the collection of employee opinion once a training programme had finished, rather than reporting at stages during the programmes.

There, was no measure to check whether training programmes had a return on investment, even though many excellent organisations around the world calculate their training ROI[2]. The ROI measurement helps the HR department ascertain the extent to which training is beneficial to an organisation, and warrants the expense. Another issue highlighted in the study was the absence of plans to facilitate the implementation of the techniques, knowledge, skills and behaviour that any employee had learned whilst undertaking a training course. Only half the organisations under study had a methodology in place for succession planning[3]. Moreover, this succession methodology was not often applied, with many cases experiencing cronyism or promotion on seniority, and the promotion of employees being partial and/or unsystematic. It was seen as insufficient to have in place a process for the delegation of powers. Therefore, poor succession planning was evidently leading to the loss tacit knowledge, accumulated and stored in the minds of managers over the years.

The study found that only two organisations had a systematic and clear process that cascaded from the top level of management to the middle and lower operational levels. There are many different causes

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[2] The *measurement of Return on investment* (ROI) seeks to establish the monetary benefits that an organisation may have obtained over a specific period of time, as a return on a given investment made in a programme of training. Viewed another way, the ROI is the extent to which the costs (inputs) of training are exceeded by its benefits (outputs).

[3] The term *succession planning* is in reference to the identifying and developing of potential successors to take on key organisational positions by training and a systematic process of evaluation. Succession planning is by and large a predictive approach in that an individual is judged to be suitable for a role that she or he may not have been in before, unlike replacement planning which involves the grading of someone based solely upon her or his performance in the past (Clutterbuck, 2012).

for poor delegation or empowerment. For instance, there can be little support for the policy of delegation amongst top managers, and there can be a lack of confidence amongst subordinates to make decisions. Government regulations may be rigid and not allow authorities and power to be delegated. There may be centralisation in decision making, and the structure of public organisations can be complex. These factors inhibit the scope for empowerment or delegation. Further factors include weaknesses in self-development and training, and poor systems for incentives. Employees also avoid acceptance of authority if there is a fear that delegation may lead to criticism for mistakes or poor results (Aladwan and Al-Khawaldah, 2008). In addition, Brown (2013) found that the empowerment is big challenge facing excellence in an organisation. More specifically, he found this challenge ranged from communication to participation in decision making.

Factor 3: Social responsibility[4]

The content analysis of the assessment reports revealed that half of the organisations researched had in place a methodology for the management of issues related to *corporate social responsibility* (CSR).These include definitions of the roles for management, as well as the organisation as a whole, in relation to providing a social service to the local community. A third of the organisations studied had a systematic tool for the management and preservation of the institutional resources of the organisation. The effectiveness of CSR methodology was measured in 20% of the organisations with the same proportion managing to update their methodologies for CSR. Benchmarking was conducted by 30%, in order to check for best practices used to develop mechanisms and tools for CSR and, thereby, seek to provide greater satisfaction in the wider community of stakeholders.

Smart KPIs were used by 30% of the organisations studied in order to provide a measure of how effective the objectives and mechanisms of CSR had been. Jamali and Mirshak (2007) argued that, in developing economies, public sector organisations faced many challenges in relation to the management of their CSRs. Factors noted included a lack of HR capabilities and skills to efficiently and effectively manage CSR, and a general lack of systematic approach for CSR. They also mentioned that, within the public sector, the CSR concept is relatively new. This was reinforced from the sample organisations analysed in this research in Jordan.

The third sub-criterion: Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

Factor 1: The outcomes of strategic planning and action plans

From the analysis of the KAA assessment reports, there were shortcomings in the monitoring and evaluation of the strategic plans and action plans with the organisations researched. For instance, only 30% of organisations were measuring the effectiveness of the M&E methodology they had used. Only

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[4] Initiatives related to social responsibility can vary in terms of their aims and objectives though generally they have the purpose of encouraging government, business and citizens to be more socially responsible in their approaches to their operations so that they can cope better with social and environmental change (Terch et al., 2014. p. 4).

half the organisations had developed KPIs incorporated within their action plans and strategic plan documents. An absence of KPIs clearly leads to reduced precision in the assessment of progress towards strategic objectives. It is often the case that a lack of cooperation between departments in the provision of timely data will act as a barrier to effective evaluation, an observation confirmed by Brown (2013).

A number of indicators and targets may be unrealistic and present difficulty for accurate measurement. Most of the sample organisations did not have appropriate scientific and quantitative methods for the accurate measurement of progress toward strategic objectives. 30% of the organisations circulated their strategic planning outcomes amongst strategic partners. However, valuable feedback was not sought or received to facilitate the improvement of future strategic plans. Comprehensive annual reviews of strategic plans were undertaken by only 30% of organisations sampled, a finding consistent with previous literature, including the work of Judges (2006) and Tizard (2012).

Conclusion

Failures in the effective implementation of excellence models are a matter of serious concern for researchers and practitioners in public sector organisations (Asif et al., 2009). Despite their proven usefulness, criticisms of leadership - as the deterministic criterion and the main component of excellence models in public organisations - are not widespread. The extent literature reports that organisational excellence is becoming an organisational liability. This paper started with description of the Jordanian experience in the excellence, then introduced the challenges that face excellence in the public sector. In view of the findings from the current study and its associated discussion, a number of conclusions can be drawn with respect to aspects of leadership, such financial matters, leadership problems, and human resources management. The main conclusions drawn are highlighted below.

All organisations studied had relevant methodologies, such as a 'risk management', a 'communication methodology', a 'CSR methodology', and other strategic plan preparations. However, there was little or no effective implementation of these. The researchers had the feeling they formed part of a 'tick-box' exercise rather than a genuine programme of excellence. This was evidenced by the fact that senior managers were seen as offering only minimal commitment and support for these methodologies.

In general, the process for strategic planning is weak in the public sector in Jordan. Factors affecting this are a lack of continuity in the process, a lack of clarity in the definition of a vision for the organisation, and lack of consolidation of the relevant core values within an organisation. The process for strategic planning is often just a seasonal exercise, rather than being institutionalised, ongoing and

systematic. These problems were exasperated by continual change in administrative and political leaders in the public sector and instability in government institutions. Whilst training empowered employees in all the organisations under study, this was largely insufficient and did not go far enough. Delegation of authority is weak and limited in scope, especially in relation to those in direct contact with customers at the frontline of operations. No actual measurement was in place to ascertain the degree to which training impacts employee performance, so that opportunities for improvement could be identified. Furthermore, for the public sector, a lack of employee empowerment and restricted delegation were seen as the main causes for a lack conviction in the criterion for leadership in the KAA submissions analysed. In general, the organisations under study were faced with numerous challenges in terms of weaknesses in their systems for measuring, monitoring and evaluation processes, and in integrating organisational objectives and strategic plans. Benchmarking was, overall, seen as a significant challenge for the organisations studied. Financial constraints were a main cause of the weakness in benchmarking, as well as a lack of knowledge and access to best practices, both internally within other public sector organisations, and externally with other practices in existence across the globe.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, a number of recommendations are made by the authors as follows.

1. The public sector role for administrative leaders in Jordan needs to be re-evaluated so that the challenges that face them, and their causes, can be identified, especially in relation to participation of all in the improvement processes within the organisation. The role of leader can be activated by the creation of a new generation of leaders who are provided with new capabilities to lead the journey to excellence in the future.

2. Reform the deviations and distortions within the governmental structure and adopt a decentralised approach to decision making, with encouragement for all governmental bodies to engage in processes such as those for organisational excellence, continual improvement and strategic planning.

3. Conduct a comprehensive review of assessment reports established by the King Abdullah Centre for Excellence and the setting of action plans in order to correct deviations found therein. Benefits can be derived from such a review enabling organisational performance to be enhanced and organisational objectives to be achieved more effectively.

4. Establish a monitoring and evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of strategic planning and its associated goals, and to identify specific accountability procedures. Empower administrative leaders throughout all departmental branches and enhance their participation in, and contribution to, processes related to monitoring, improvement and evaluation. There is an urgent need to spread a measurement and evaluation culture throughout all bodies of government, to train key personnel, and permit them to study practice in the field.

5. Finally, establish a centre within government or an institute for *Best Practices* and benchmarking so that a knowledge base can built up comprising narratives related to success in the area of excellence, across the various functions of the public sector (such as education, transport and health), as well as studies related to more general public administration.

Figure3: Conceptual framework for leadership criterion challenges
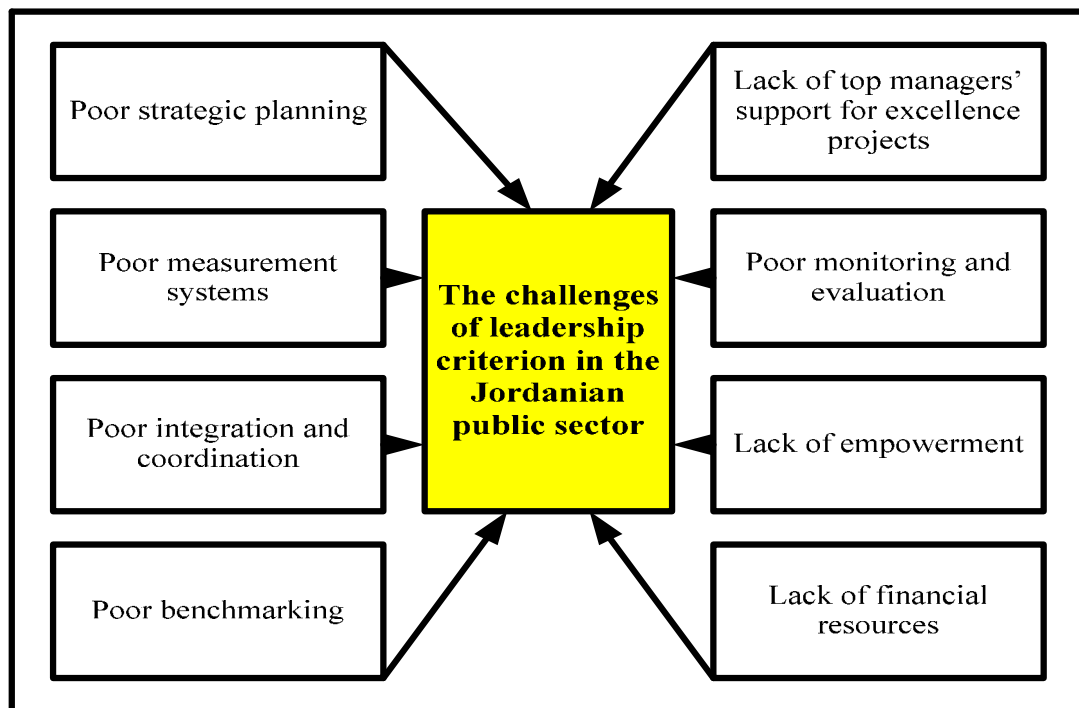
Source: the authors

Theoretical and managerial Implications

The findings from this paper have various important lessons for practitioners or policy makers in the public sector, and Jordanian government organisations in particular. Researchers and managers, as well as government organisations, are encouraged to see the whole canvas of challenges that face managers when applying excellence models in their organisations. Moreover, this paper provides the academics and practitioners with an enhanced understanding of managerial actions and factors that affect the leadership criterion, and how such problems could be tackled. Theoretically, this paper fills gaps in the excellence literature in general and, contextually, in organisational excellence in the public sector in particular. Finally, the findings will help decision makers in public organisations to design, plan and apply excellence models effectively and efficiently.

Limitations and future research

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The current study has been restricted to one of the criterion within the excellence model for Jordan, and the sample size was limited to only ten public sector organisations that had participated within the KAA for Excellence. Future research could expand the study scope and sample, and provide a focus on the challenges facing other criteria such as operational management issues, human resourcing matters, knowledge management and financial issues. So that the study can be generalised, further study of more categories of organisations is required. Future research might seek to explore different stages in the process of pursuing organisational excellence, including development, implementation, maturity and sustainability. As final remark, it needs to be emphasised that new and innovative analytical methods are needed to confirm or retract the findings of this study and enrich our understanding of management by providing a deeper appreciation of organisational working relationships and linkages between influential factors.

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