



## An empirical assessment of the EFQM Excellence Model: Evaluation as a TQM framework relative to the MBNQA Model

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### ABSTRACT

Total quality management (TQM) is an approach to management embracing both social and technical dimensions aimed at achieving excellent results, which needs to be put into practice through a specific framework. Nowadays, quality award models, such as the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model, are used as a guide to TQM implementation by a large number of organizations. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of empirical research confirming whether these models clearly reflect the main premises of TQM. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the extent to which the EFQM Excellence Model captures the main assumptions involved in the TQM concept, that is, the distinction between technical and social TQM issues, the holistic interpretation of TQM in the firm, and the causal linkage between TQM procedures and organizational performance.

Based on responses collected from managers of 446 Spanish companies by means of a structured questionnaire, we find that: (a) social and technical dimensions are embedded in the model; (b) both dimensions are intercorrelated; (c) they jointly enhance results. These findings support the EFQM Excellence Model as an operational framework for TQM, and also reinforce the results obtained in previous studies for the MBNQA, suggesting that quality award models really are TQM frameworks.

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### 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, most firms have used the models underpinning quality awards, such as the Deming Prize (DP Model) in Japan, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) Model in the USA, and the European Quality Award (EFQM Excellence Model) in Europe, as a framework for implementing TQM initiatives. Many researchers have considered quality models as operational frameworks for TQM (e.g., Bohoris, 1995; Ghobadian and Woo, 1996; Curkovic et al., 2000; Van der Wiele et al., 2000; Yong and Wilkinson, 2001; Lee et al., 2003). These authors consider that quality award models reproduce TQM by capturing its main constitu-

ent parts and by replicating its core ideas in clear and accessible language. Nevertheless, the empirical validation of the extent to which these models reproduce TQM is scarce, partial, and limited to some empirical studies such as Curkovic et al. (2000), who conclude that MBNQA and its criteria do capture TQM core concepts. In the context of the EFQM Excellence Model, this question remains unanswered and, therefore, more research is needed.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the EFQM model as a framework for TQM, that is, to analyze whether the internal structure of the EFQM Excellence Model takes into account the basic TQM assumptions. As McAdam and Leonard (2005) point out, there is a paucity of studies on the effectiveness of quality award models for developing TQM in organizations. By improving the understanding of the internal structure of quality award models, there is an opportunity to assess the application of TQM.

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**Table 1**  
Different views of the core concepts which constitute TQM and their embedding in the TQM framework

TQM core concepts				TQM frameworks based on quality award models	
Anderson et al. (1994)	Powell (1995)	Tummala y Tang (1996)	Sila and Ebrahimpour (2002) <sup>a</sup>	EFQM Criteria (2003)	MBNQA Criteria (2007)
Customer satisfaction	Closer customer relationship	Customer focus	Customer focus and satisfaction	5. Processes	3. Customer and market focus
Visionary leadership	Committed leadership	Leadership	Leadership and top management commitment	1. Leadership	1. Leadership
	Adoption and communication of TQM	Strategic quality planning		2. Policy and strategy	2. Strategic planning
Continuous improvement		Continuous improvement	Continuous improvement and innovation		4. Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management
Process management	Process improvement	Design quality, speed and prevention	Process management	5. Processes	6. Process management
	Zero-defects mentality Flexible manufacturing				
Internal cooperation	Increased training	People participation and partnership	Employee training	3. People	5. Workforce focus
Learning Employee fulfillment	Employee Empowerment Open organization		Teamwork Employee involvement Everybody's participation		
External cooperation	Benchmarking	Fact-based management	Quality information and performance measurement	4. Partnership and resources	4. Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management 7. Results
	Closer supplier relationship Measurement				

<sup>a</sup> Summary of core concepts after analyzing 347 survey-based articles published between 1989 and 2000.

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