



# Business Excellence Questionnaire

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Contact Name

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Job Title

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Company Name

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Advisor

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Date

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## What is Excellence?

Put simply, it's about the relentless pursuit of continuous improvement in an organisation's results and the way in which those results are achieved

### Welcome to The Benchmark Index – Business Excellence Module.

This module has been developed to help you perform an initial assessment of how the management of your business overall compares against an internationally recognised, world class framework of excellence. This framework is used by all sizes of organisations in the UK, Europe and beyond – whether in the private, public or voluntary sectors - to help them work towards better performance.

The module is based on tried and tested techniques and represents a robust process for establishing relevant improvement activities for organisations. At the module's heart is an easy to follow questionnaire containing 34 questions, which combined with the Managed Assessment module and feedback via your advisor, can bring the following benefits:

- *help your organisation identify its current position and suggest appropriate future direction and priorities*
- *allow comparisons with the achievements of other organisations and 'world class' performers*
- *encourage your organisation to monitor its progress on a regular basis*
- *provide a sound foundation for future improvements*

## Introduction to the Questionnaire

### Background

The questionnaire uses the EFQM Excellence Model\* as the basis for questions about how well you are managing your business and what levels of performance you are achieving in satisfying the stakeholders in your business (e.g. customers, the people working for you, suppliers/partners, shareholders, the community).

The Excellence Model is based on the concept that long term excellent performance comes from satisfying the needs of stakeholders, and that this is achieved by good leaders managing the organisation's policies and plans, people and other resources, through effective processes.

This means that good results should be achieved over a number of years (not just a one-off) and that they should compare favourably with both what you planned to achieve and with other like organisations. It also says that to achieve these, the organisation should be managed in a sound and consistent way across all of its activities at a level of detail appropriate to the size and type of business.

### The Questions

The 34 questions in this module are divided into 2 main parts. The first part (the 'enablers') has 5 sections dealing with the ways you are managing your business. The second part (the 'results') has 4 sections about the excellence of your results.

Each question within those sections provides a choice of four responses, a to d. All try to 'paint a picture' of how a business might deal with a specific issue. They are not intended to be precise, but give a general sense of different levels of 'excellence'.

Even organisations currently regarded as world class might find it very hard to select the top level on every question, so it could be tough! But if you really want to improve your business this is a great way to understand the priorities.

Your advisor will be pleased to provide any additional help should it be required.

One final thought - honesty is the best policy as organisations that are more realistic about their current position benefit most when it comes to planning and implementing improvements. They are not starting from the wrong place!

\*The EFQM Excellence Model or Business Excellence Model is a trademark of the European Foundation for Quality Management

## Hints on completing the questionnaire – Steps 1 & 2

### Step 1. Preparation

- Briefly read through the module to get a feel for what the questions are asking
- Decide on your method of completion e.g. one person only, a small team of individual responses, or maybe a joint team response people often find it useful to involve several company representatives of different levels to complete the questionnaire separately before coming to an agreed view. However, only one view can be accepted for assessment purposes (but there can be valuable lessons in discussions about any differences).
- Set aside some time to complete it and agree a timescale.
- You will find it helpful to complete the Definitions section that follows before answering the questions. This will make sure that there is clarity and consistency of understanding about various key issues for the business as you work through the questions

### Step 2. Completing the questionnaire

- Read the introductory statements for each section, as these will provide additional help before making your choice
- Please circle the single response, a, b, c, or d, in each question that most closely reflects your business. Your business may have some characteristics from different levels. You should 'take a view' and mark where the balance feels right. Your advisor may be able to help if you require additional clarification
- Remember that you should be prepared to refer to appropriate evidence to support your answer to each question

## Definitions

This section will help you to answer the questions, as it allows you to define certain terms used. It can also help others in the business who are answering the questions to have a clear and consistent understanding. (They may also seek clarification if there are differences of opinion.)

**What are your main products and services?**

**Outline your main customers (direct and end-users if necessary):**

**Outline your main suppliers/partners (these might include distributors, joint ventures and alliances):**

**What market are you in? (e.g. automotive supply, haulage, retail fashion, etc)**

**Who do you regard as your leaders? (e.g. just the MD? The top managers?  
From first level supervisors upwards? Certain 'specialists' such as trainers?  
A combination of these?)**

## Enabler Questions – General

'Enablers' are how your business undertakes its work. The following 5 sections look at that. In summary, 'excellent' approaches should be appropriate for the business, should be well deployed to relevant people and should be reviewed for continuing effectiveness. Please read all statements in each question and then circle the single response, a, b, c, or d, in each question that most closely reflects your organisation.

### Section 1 - Leadership

Definition: How your leaders are personally involved in the achievement of your business' aims and live out the behaviours that your business will need to achieve its long-term success.

NB Ensure you have defined who you mean by 'leaders' on page 6

**1.1 How do your leaders decide on the aims of the business, what personal behaviours are appropriate and how do they set the right example to others?**

- a We manage on a day-to-day basis in ways we're used to, whatever our individual backgrounds.
- b The senior managers decide the aims for our business and what personal behaviours are appropriate so that we grow as an excellent organisation. Some leaders try to set the right example to others and support people's involvement in improvement work.
- c Most leaders set the right example, and improve their leadership from feedback on their style. Leaders are personally involved in improvement work.
- d As (c) and leaders have been actively involved in setting out the ways in which we work towards our goals, e.g. using teams. Leaders check progress against our plans regularly.

**1.2 How do your leaders have contact with your customers, suppliers, partners and representatives of the community?**

- a Our leaders have no direct contact with these groups, or if they do it is for dealing with the day-to-day running of the business.
- b Some leaders meet some of these groups during their normal work, and try to understand their needs. This information is used to improve the business.
- c Most leaders are involved in meeting these groups, but often in situations outside of their normal roles. Leaders are involved in relevant professional bodies and may be involved in promoting good practices to others.
- d As (c), and leaders are also active in recognising individuals or teams of stakeholders outside of the company for loyalty or contribution to the business.

**1.3 How do your leaders motivate, support and recognise your people?**

- a People receive their salaries and wages in recognition of their contribution.
- b Leaders tell their people about the aims of the business. Most leaders listen and respond to people constructively. They personally give recognition to people in formal and/or informal ways, e.g. 'employee of the month', a simple 'thanks' etc.
- c We have set out how leaders should behave, and most communicate well and give appropriate recognition. They also give support to their people to help them achieve their own plans and targets.
- d As (c) and leaders take training seriously and ensure that people can complete pre-booked training – it's only rarely cancelled "for operational reasons".

## Section 2 - Policy and Strategy (Planning)

Definition: How your business sets about achieving its ultimate aims, which are focused on your stakeholders and supported by your plans, targets, and processes. In other words 'what success looks like and how you are going to achieve it'.

### Helpful meanings:

**Stakeholders** – all those who have an interest in your business, its activities and its achievements. These may include customers, partners, employees, shareholders, owners, government, and regulators.

**Key processes** – these are the activities things that your business does to ensure its success, e.g. delivery of products and services, managing customer relationships, budgeting and planning, managing cash flow, etc.

#### 2.1 How are stakeholder and other information used to set your business' direction?

- a We mainly produce or buy in what we believe we will sell.
- b We collect some information to help us understand the market/business we are in. We have ways to understand what our stakeholders want, and we review our own internal results to help us make sure we can deliver that.
- c As (b) and we have ways to understand what is happening in the marketplace, e.g. with our competitors and government legislation and use that information to help us.
- d As well as (b & c) we regularly check that we have got all the right sources of information to allow us to plan for the future.

#### 2.2 How do you put your plans together and check that they are continually right for your business?

- a Our plans are quite informal and tend not be written down. We review things if there has been a problem.
- b We identify the important issues that will ensure our success and then agree the plans for the next year most likely to achieve it. We formally document our plans.
- c As (b) and we make sure that our plans are based on what our different stakeholders need. We do consider the next few years as well as just this year.
- d As well as (b & c) we regularly check that our plans are achieving what we have set out to achieve and make changes if necessary.

#### 2.3 How do you communicate your aims and plans, and how are those plans put into place?

- a We tell our people what the business is trying to achieve and what they are expected to do in their jobs.
- b We tell our people about our aims and check that they understand them. Targets are set so that people know how they are contributing to the success of our business.
- c We have clear ways to communicate our plans and put them into action throughout the business. We check that plans for different parts of our business do add up to what we want to achieve overall.
- d As (c) and we let stakeholders outside of the business know what we are doing. We check that the way we communicate and implement our plans is working for us.

#### 2.4 How are your plans achieved through the way you work?

- a We do not focus on how the way we work relates to our plans – we just get on with it as we always have.
- b We have a set of key processes to achieve what we want. We have allocated responsibility to people to ensure that these processes work smoothly.
- c Our key processes have been set up using our stakeholders' needs, and everyone knows their part in them. We make sure that the different parts of the business work together so that these processes work as well as possible.
- d As (c) and we check regularly that the key processes continue to remain the most important ones for the success of the business.

## Section 3 - People

Definition: How your business releases the full potential of its people.

Helpful meanings:

**People** - are defined as all employees including, full time, part time, contract, agency, etc

### 3.1 How do you plan, and improve the way you manage your people?

- a We do our best to follow legal requirements.
- b Our overall business plan includes staffing needs. We seek feedback from our people on their views of the business, and make efforts to meet their needs.
- c The results of feedback from people are regularly used to improve how we manage people. Unions/staff bodies are seen as valuable partners. We have succession plans so that we have some idea how key jobs will be filled in future.
- d As (c) and we use new ways of organising ourselves to improve the way we work together, e.g. self managed teams and regularly review how we manage our people resources.

### 3.2 How do you improve your people's knowledge and skills?

- a We take people on with the aim that they can do the job. They are made aware if their performance is not satisfactory.
- b New people receive induction training, and everyone has targets linked to the business's aims. People have regular appraisals/reviews, and training plans, which include technical skills and personal development.
- c We know exactly what work skills our people have and need to help us plan training and recruitment for future needs. The Investors In People framework is used to help us with our people management.
- d As (c), and some training for people may include things not obviously relevant to the business, but which helps them and encourages learning, e.g. languages, driving lessons etc

### 3.3 How do you involve your people and delegate authority to them?

- a People mainly do what they are employed to do. They do sometimes put forward new ideas on their own volition.
- b There are clear guidelines setting out what people can and can't do, but with scope for them to take the initiative when trying to resolve a problem. We encourage individual and team improvement activities.
- c We have a culture which allows people to do what they feel is necessary to get the job done. People's training helps their involvement and creativity. Jobs are covered for those working on improvements, so backlogs don't build up.
- d As (c), and people at all levels are encouraged to visit other businesses to get new ideas for us to adapt in our business.

### 3.4 How do you communicate with one another throughout your business?

- a We have different types of communication, which tend to be largely unplanned.
- b We communicate in a number of ways which we know works for us. People are able to give feedback to leaders freely. We ensure that people in different parts of the business know what's going on throughout.
- c We've asked our people about communication, and we ensure that the right message goes to the right people at the right time using their preferred method, whether up, down or across the business.
- d As (c), and we have set up ways in which good practices are shared between appropriate parts of the business.

### 3.5 How do you reward, recognise and care for your people?

- a We pay the wages and try to make people aware of health and safety regulations. On occasions we thank people if they have performed well.
- b We thank people in different ways for doing a good job, including recognition schemes and informal "thanks". Our 'benefits package' includes appropriate things such as pension plans, social activities, health care, etc.
- c We understand the needs of our people and offer things like flexible hours, transport, car parking etc, where possible. People feel valued because of our approach to recognition. Redundancy, if necessary, is managed with sensitivity.
- d As (c), and we promote a responsibility to the environment, which the business endorses through its own actions.

## Section 4 - Partnerships and Resources

Definition: How your business plans and manages its supplier partnerships and its internal resources, e.g. finances, buildings and equipment, technology and information, to support what it wants to achieve.

### Helpful meanings:

**People** - are defined as all employees including, full time, part time, contract, agency, etc

**Partnerships** - are defined as working relationships between two or more parties, which create value for the customer. Partners include suppliers, distributors, joint ventures, and alliances.

**Finances** refers to the funds needed to run the day to day operation as well as the capital funding from various sources which is needed for the longer term.

**Buildings, equipment and materials** includes assets such as, premises, cars, stock, machinery, etc

**Technology** includes items such as telecommunication systems, PC systems, etc.

**Information** could be customer records, databases, instructions, manuals, etc

#### 4.1 How do you manage your relationships with suppliers/partners?

- a The selection of our suppliers is driven mainly by price or tradition.
- b We have a purchasing policy, which helps us to select the most suitable suppliers and it covers quality as well as price.
- c We have identified key suppliers with whom we have formed a closer working relationship, which involves some joint working.
- d We have formal 'partners' with whom we share knowledge to improve the way each of us works and adds value to our customers.

#### 4.2 How do you manage your finances?

- a We try to ensure that our wages & bills are paid, and that we avoid things like County Court Judgements.
- b We have good control over our finances and manage the cash flow carefully. The costs of what we sell are understood.
- c As (b) and the need for additional funding is part of an overall plan and not normally dictated by emergencies. We evaluate any investments we intend to make.
- d As well as (b & c), financial risks to the business are known and managed.

#### 4.3 How do you manage your buildings, equipment and materials?

- a We do our best to meet Health and Safety regulations. Our premises and equipment are protected and we make repairs when necessary.
- b Premises & equipment are kept in good order. We have records of our equipment & materials. We try to contain our usage of water, electricity etc and the amount of waste.
- c Our equipment is regularly maintained to improve performance and extend its life. We aim to reduce our usage of electricity, water, etc and recycle as much waste as we can.

- d As well as (c), we use an environmental management system (possibly registered to ISO 14001) and manage any adverse effects of our business on the community.

#### 4.4 How do you manage your technology?

- a We use what we have got already and we rely on other people from outside of the business, e.g. sales reps, to let us know if we need anything else.
- b We try to get the most out of our existing technology and learn about new ideas from magazines/trade associations etc.
- c As well as (b), we actively use technology to support improvements within the business, and job(s) exist within the business to manage all the technology that we have.
- d As well as (b & c), we have a system to identify relevant new technologies, and we evaluate them to decide whether they should be used in the business.

#### 4.5 How do you manage the information within your business?

- a We try to keep records accurate. We do our best to comply with legislation about data and software, e.g. data protection and licensing.
- b We 'back up' and store data securely and virus checking prevents corruption of our records. All people within the business have access to the appropriate information for their job.
- c As well as (b), we ensure that all information is as up to date and as accurate as possible including systems to prevent incorrect data being keyed, for example.
- d As well as (b & c), we do what we can to protect all ideas and intellectual property generated in the business. We provide access to relevant information to people outside of the business.

## Section 5 - Processes (& Customer Focus)

**Definition:** How your business manages and improves its processes to achieve your goals. It includes designing, producing, delivering and servicing your products and services, as well as managing and improving customer relationships.

**Helpful meanings:**

**Process** – a sequence of activities that adds value at each step to produce something that is required, e.g. the different steps involved in designing, developing, producing and then selling your products.

### 5.1 How do you manage your processes?

- a We have not documented the way we run our business but we believe our methods work for us.
- b We have documented all relevant processes and everyone knows what they have to do to meet our standards/targets (the system may be registered to ISO 9000 or similar). The work still gets done even when key people are absent.
- c As (b), and we've made sure that departmental/work-group boundaries do not usually create workflow problems between sections in the business.
- d As well as (b & c) our processes specifically address the needs of our stakeholders.

### 5.2 How do you improve your processes?

- a Most improvements/changes occur when circumstances dictate. On a few occasions ideas maybe taken forward and changes made.
- b We have ways for staff to put forward improvement ideas, and we also review our processes when we get customer complaints/comments. Changes we make are communicated to staff with relevant guidance.
- c As (b) and we have set ways to improve processes, which use information from all relevant stakeholders. The changes are tested first to ensure that they work, and our people are trained to operate them.
- d As well as (b & c) we review changes after implementation to ensure that the improvements have worked.

### 5.3 How do you design and develop your products and services?

- a We design and develop what we think our customers will buy. We might use comments made by customers to help us from time to time.
- b We seek customer feedback through various ways (e.g. surveys, research, meetings) to learn what they think of our products and services, and to help us improve them.

- c Feedback is used to improve our existing products and services and to develop new ones to satisfy future customer needs. We use various ways to bring in innovation and creativity in product and service design.
- d As (c) and we also involve our partners/suppliers in developing new products and services.

### 5.4 How do you produce, sell and service your products and services?

- a We make/buy as many products and services as we think will sell. We follow legal requirements on servicing/replacing our products if problems arise.
- b We schedule production/purchasing in line with order forecasts, and have sales plans in place. We offer replacement/refund/repair/ support if problems develop during a warranty period.
- c Marketing plans address current and potential customers, and take account of existing and new ways to deliver our products and services. Regular servicing is included as part of the product package.
- d As (c) and we regularly review our approaches here to make sure they are effective and in line with our customers' preferences.

### 5.5 How do you manage & improve your relationships with customers?

- a Our relationships with customers extend to fulfilling orders.
- b We have some ways we use to improve our relationships with customers, e.g. Account Managers, informal/formal reviews, customer surveys, etc
- c Our customer surveys include specific questions about the relationship as well as our products or services.
- d We have well developed ways to improve our relationships with customers, which include proactive involvement e.g. working together to improve our products and services.

## Results Questions – General

The following 4 sections look at what your business is achieving in satisfying your stakeholders. They include, but also look beyond the data that you provided in Part A of this questionnaire, and test for the ‘excellence’ of the full range of measures you are using to monitor and improve your business’s performance. The results should ideally comprise an appropriate range of measures involving direct feedback from the relevant stakeholder (e.g. customers, people, society, suppliers/partners) and from internal performance indicators.

The first question in each of the Results sections allows you to show the breadth of measures that you use. The subsequent questions assess the degree of excellence of those results according to their trends and their performance against your own targets/budgets, and with other organisations.

### Section 6 – Customer Results

Definition: What level of performance the business is achieving in satisfying its customers

#### 6.1 What measures do you use to track your performance relating to your customers?

- a Nothing structured yet – we rely on our instinct and informal feedback.
- b We rely on some basic formal feedback, e.g. complaints/queries, products returned, letters of appreciation, comments about good performance, etc.
- c We formally collect and track some feedback from our customers on a regular basis, and also track some key internal measures that help us to predict and improve customer satisfaction, e.g. error rates, repeat business, average order value etc.
- d As (c) but we have also established what’s most important for our customers and measure those specifically. We use a broad set of internal and customer perception measures to manage for improvements in the business.

#### 6.3 How do the trends described in question 6.2 compare with your own targets/budgets and with other organisations?

- a We have met a few targets and we have never compared our performance with any other organisations.
- b Some results have compared well with our own targets over the last two years, and we think we are about as good as our competitors.
- c Many results over the last 3 years have compared well with our own targets, and we have got some firm evidence that we are at least as good as our main competitors.
- d We have hit most of our demanding targets over the last 3 – 5 years, and we have clear evidence that we are about the best anywhere.

#### 6.2 Trends; How good is your performance for the measures identified in question 6.1?

- a There is no or little improvement over last year
- b Some are better than two years ago
- c Many have improved over the last three years
- d Most show strong consistent improvements over four to five years

## Section 7 - People Results

Definition: What level of performance the business is achieving in relation to its people

### 7.1 What measures do you use to track your performance relating to your people?

- a Nothing structured yet – we rely on how the atmosphere feels here and some informal feedback from supervisors.
- b We rely on some basic information, e.g. staff turnover levels, sickness and absenteeism rates, notifiable accidents, occasional staff surveys, comments made at performance appraisals or meetings, etc.
- c We collect and track some feedback from our people on a regular basis, and also track some key internal measures that help us to predict and improve people satisfaction. We segment the results to show different levels/roles within our business.
- d As (c) but we have also established what's most important for our people and measure those specifically. We use a broad set of internal indicators and people perception measures to manage for improvement.

### 7.2 Trends; How good is your performance for the measures identified in question 7.1?

- a There is no or little improvement over last year
- b Some are better than two years ago
- c Many have improved over the last three years
- d Most show strong consistent improvements over four to five years

### 7.3 How do the trends described in question 7.2 compare with your own targets/budgets and with other organisations?

- a We have met a few targets and we have never compared our performance with any other organisations.
- b Some results have compared well with our own targets over the last two years, and we think we are about as good as our competitors.
- c Many results over the last 3 years have compared well with our own targets, and we have got some firm evidence that we are at least as good as our main competitors.
- d We have hit most of our demanding targets over the last 3 – 5 years, and we have clear evidence that we are about the best anywhere.

## Section 8 - Society Results

Definition: What level of performance the business is achieving in relation to local, national and international society/community as appropriate (This may include performance as a 'responsible citizen', impact on the firm's relevant community, the environment etc)

### 8.1 What measures do you use to track your performance relating to society?

- a Nothing structured yet – we try not to consciously do any harm.
- b We rely on some basic internal measures which indicate our effect on the community, e.g. reductions in waste and utilities' usage, increases in recycling, monies raised and/or time given to charities/community activities, number of jobs created for local people, etc.
- c We have agreed the ways in which we impact on the community, and formally collect and track internal measures about them to help us improve. We also track some informal feedback from the community about our activities.
- d As (c) but we use formal methods to gauge community's perceptions of us, including identifying the key issues for them. We use a broad set of indicators to manage for improvement.

### 8.2 Trends; How good is your performance for the measures identified in question 8.1?

- a There is no or little improvement over last year
- b Some are better than two years ago
- c Many have improved over the last three years
- d Most show strong consistent improvements over four to five years

### 8.3 How do the trends described in question 8.2 compare with your own targets/budgets and with other organisations?

- a We have met a few targets and we have never compared our performance with any other organisations.
- b Some results have compared well with our own targets over the last two years, and we think we are about as good as our competitors.
- c Many results over the last 3 years have compared well with our own targets, and we have got some firm evidence that we are at least as good as our main competitors.
- d We have hit most of our demanding targets over the last 3 – 5 years, and we have clear evidence that we are about the best anywhere.

## Section 9 – Key Performance Results

Definition: What level of performance the business is achieving in relation to its planned goals. Typically this includes your financial results and others not already covered in sections 6, 7 & 8.

### 9.1 What measures do you use to track your financial and other key results?

- a We try to ensure that we remain solvent - paying the wages and avoiding County Court Judgements takes most of our time.
  - b We use basic financial measures, e.g. sales, gross and net profit, meeting budgets, debtor/creditor days, stock turn etc. We also use some non-financial measures, e.g. machine breakdowns, product faults discovered in-house, process cycle time, market share etc.
  - c We have a comprehensive set of financial and non-financial measures that we track regularly across our direct operational activities. Results are used at all relevant levels/units within the business to understand performance and manage for improvement.
  - d As (c) and we measure across operational and other areas of our business, which can include time to market for new products, process improvements, asset use/performance, etc.
- 

### 9.2 Trends; How good is your performance for the measures identified in question 9.1?

- a There is no or little improvement over last year
  - b Some are better than two years ago
  - c Many have improved over the last three years
  - d Most show strong consistent improvements over four to five years
- 

### 9.3 How do the trends described in question 9.2 compare with your own targets/budgets and with other organisations?

- a We have met a few targets and we have never compared our performance with any other organisations.
  - b Some results have compared well with our own targets over the last two years, and we think we are about as good as our competitors.
  - c Many results over the last 3 years have compared well with our own targets, and we have got some firm evidence that we're at least as good as our main competitors.
  - d We have hit most of our demanding targets over the last 3 – 5 years, and we have clear evidence that we are about the best anywhere.
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