



Aspects of Baldrige

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Aspects of Baldrige

Valuable perspectives

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For nearly 20 years, the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence have proven themselves time and again to be a path to exceptional organizational performance. Used in more than 70 countries around the world, the seven categories of the criteria are often seen as essential for excellence.

What's so brilliant about the criteria is that they can have an immediate effect on an organization. Once you do a self-assessment and organizational profile, you know exactly what to change and improve, and that points you toward a range of methods and tools that may be applicable. It's different for everyone. Every organization will find and follow its own path. As a living, changing document that may adapt to each organization, the criteria will endure.

While the categories have evolved over the years, how they're viewed and the relationships among them have changed little.

The traditional Baldrige model (Figure 1) continues to serve its purpose well. Sometimes called the "Baldrige burger," it shows the link from the leadership triad (leadership, planning, and customer focus) to the results triad (staff, processes, and results) and how measurements affect both. This diagram gives those new to the criteria a basic view of how all the pieces fit together. It's a systems view of the criteria and how they penetrate the entire organization.

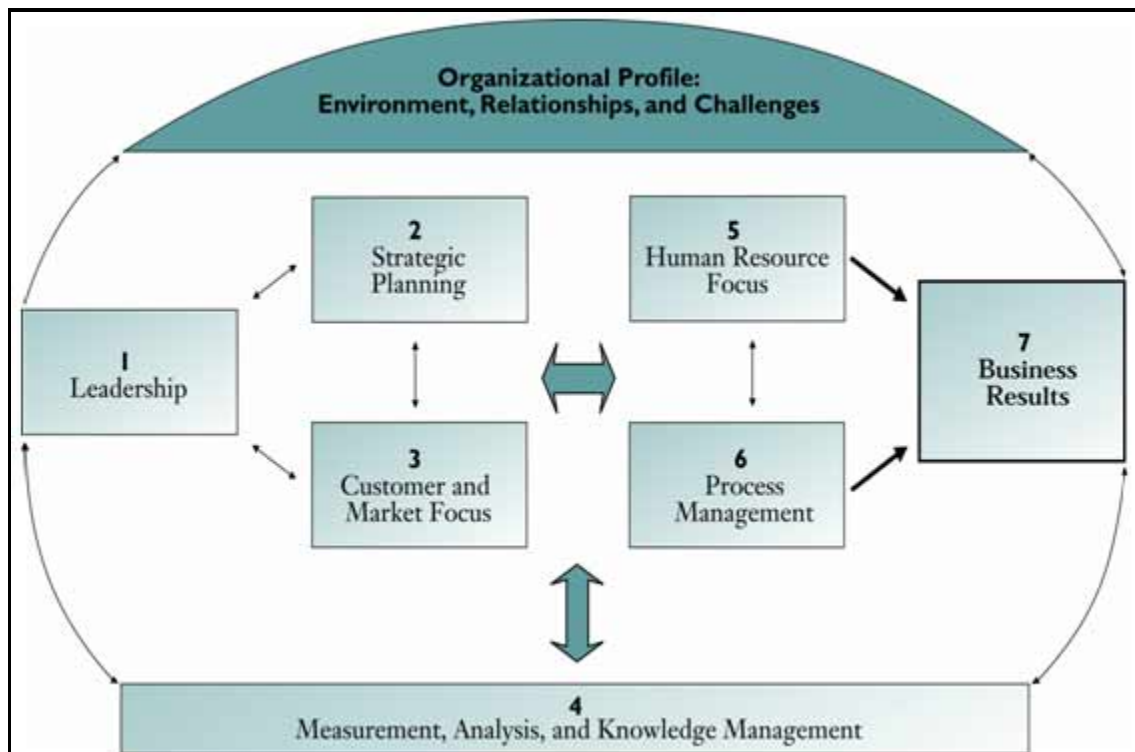


Figure 1. The Baldrige model

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The nonprescriptive approach of Baldrige assures its endurance and undermines its relevance. Any good organizational improvement model must be made relevant by showing how it relates to modern business methods and tools. Otherwise, it appears to be more a theory than an executable system that can produce business results. The Baldrige model doesn't cover all quality disciplines, which leads some people to believe that the criteria are intended to stand alone and that they're all one needs to do.

This isn't true and was never intended to be so. The criteria have always been intended to be a big picture, a systems view. The categories are larger areas to address, and it's understood that other tools may help in that quest.

It's important to look at relationships between the criteria, and other methods and tools, for example, ISO standards management systems and other approaches as indicated in Figure 2.

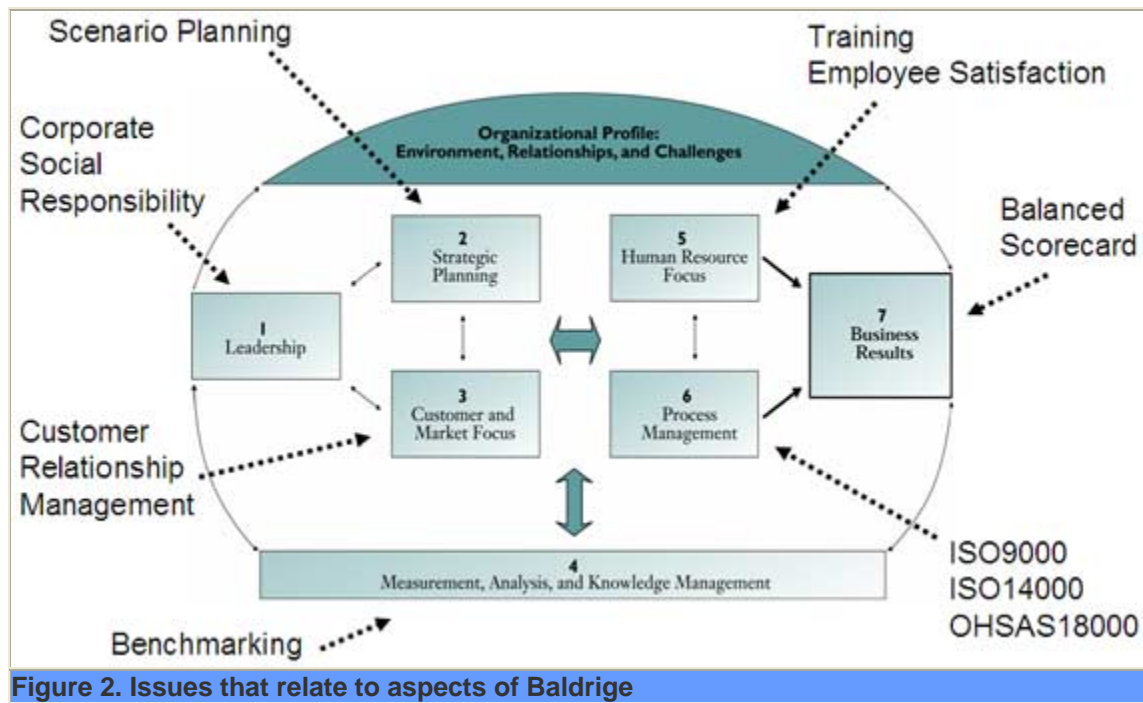


Figure 3 demonstrates the strategic flow of Baldrige. Note that it starts with leadership and ends with results. While some success can be enjoyed in pockets of improvement within large organizations, the organization as a whole will never make large improvement leaps unless senior leadership is actually engaged. That engagement has a ripple effect throughout the organization and gives it the feedback to continuously improve.

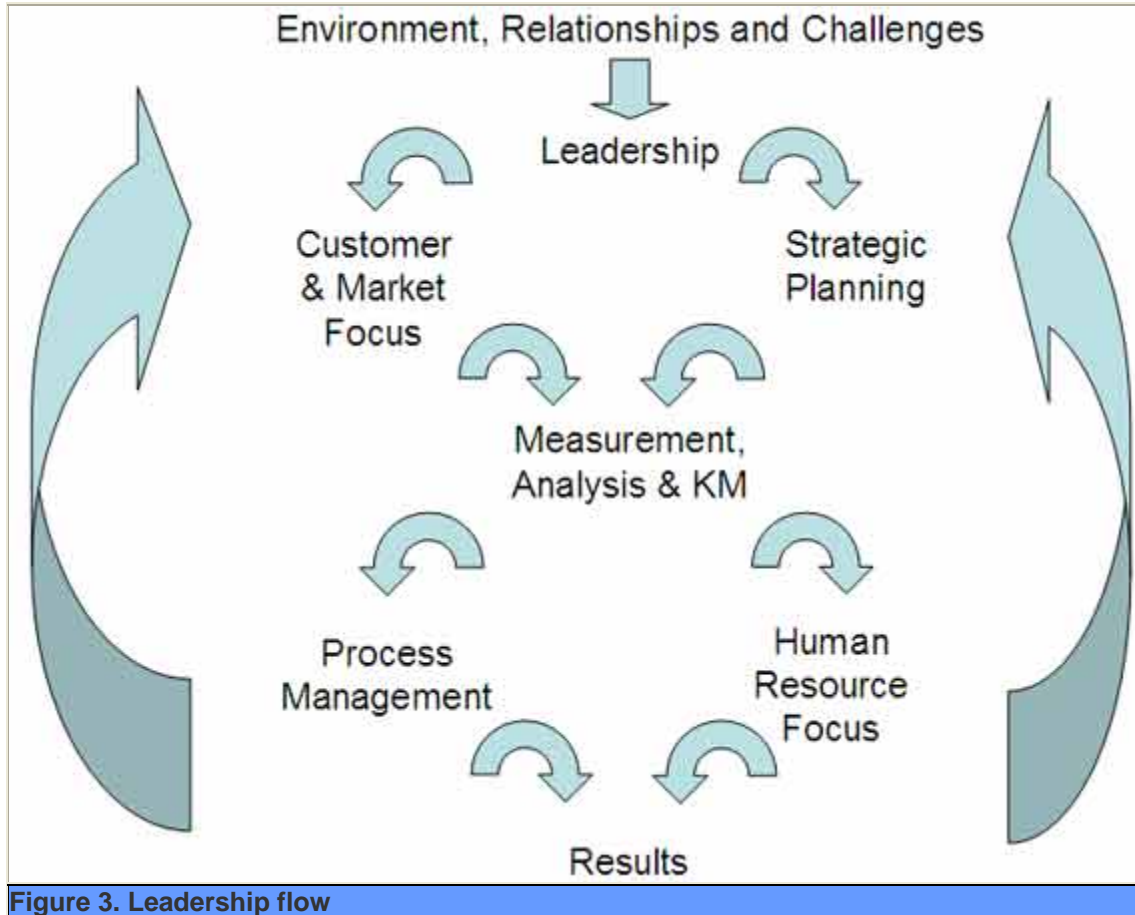
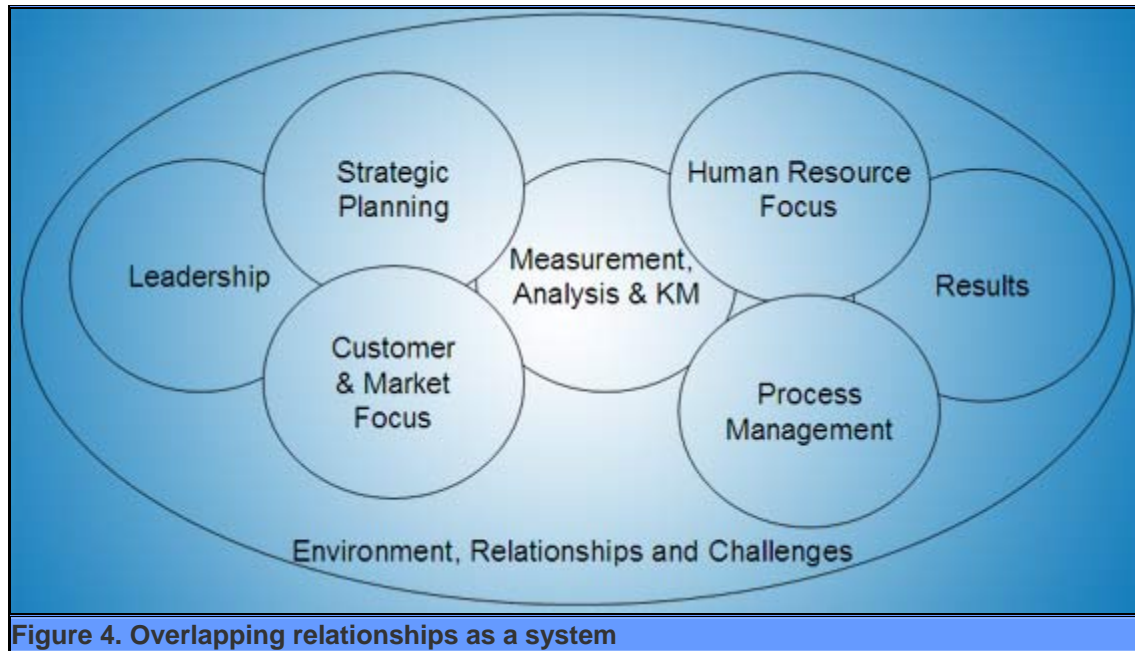


Figure 3. Leadership flow

Figure 4 is an attempt to show the pure systems theory behind Baldrige, how all of the categories are interrelated and dependent on each other.

Any organization that does an organizational profile and self-assessment learns quickly that organization gaps cut across the entire organization. You can't improve customer service without addressing staff training. You can't deploy strategic initiatives without touching leadership, employees, processes, measurements, and the rest. It all links together. That is what the criteria tell us loud and clear.

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As noted earlier, the criteria cannot be the only thing we do. They only form the foundation for everything else we must do. They point us in the right direction while forcing us to take a systemic approach to organizational management.

The beauty of the criteria is that they force us to think constantly about two questions: What should we do and how should we do it? How we answer these questions is different for all of us, because we must apply solutions to our unique circumstances.

By constantly forcing us to determine what our next steps should be and how we should deploy them, the criteria lead us to various methods and tools that fit our specific needs. What do our organizational profile and strategic plan say we must do? Will we work with international companies? Is standardization our biggest problem? Maybe we should begin with ISO standards. Do we have cost-ridden, inefficient processes? Do our processes drive value for our customers? Maybe we should use Six Sigma or lean. How will we know what processes to work on first? How will we know our processes run efficiently? How will we know if we are effective? Taking a look at the organization as a system, and doing a self-assessment and an organizational profile will tell us where to start and what processes to work on. Using appropriate measuring tools will tell us if we're doing things right. Driving the metrics back through the profile and criteria will tell us if we're doing the right things.

The criteria are what make learning and integration possible. Many organizations start at the wrong end of the pyramid, with tools or methods. This is a backwards approach to improvement—solutions looking for a problem. We could start with SPC or ISO standards as our approach, and we might be successful deploying them, but we won't be systematic about how we learn from what we do, and about how we integrate what we learn across the organization for broader improvement. It would be better if we started with an understanding of the problem and then chose the appropriate solution.

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In Figure 5, the improvement flows from the bottom up and demonstrates the strategic nature of the Baldrige criteria, and their abilities to integrate and coordinate. Above Baldrige at the tactical level are ISO quality management systems, lean and Six Sigma for example. Finally, at the top are the operational level tools and techniques such as SPC and fishbone. It takes all of these layers to create an integrated approach to quality.

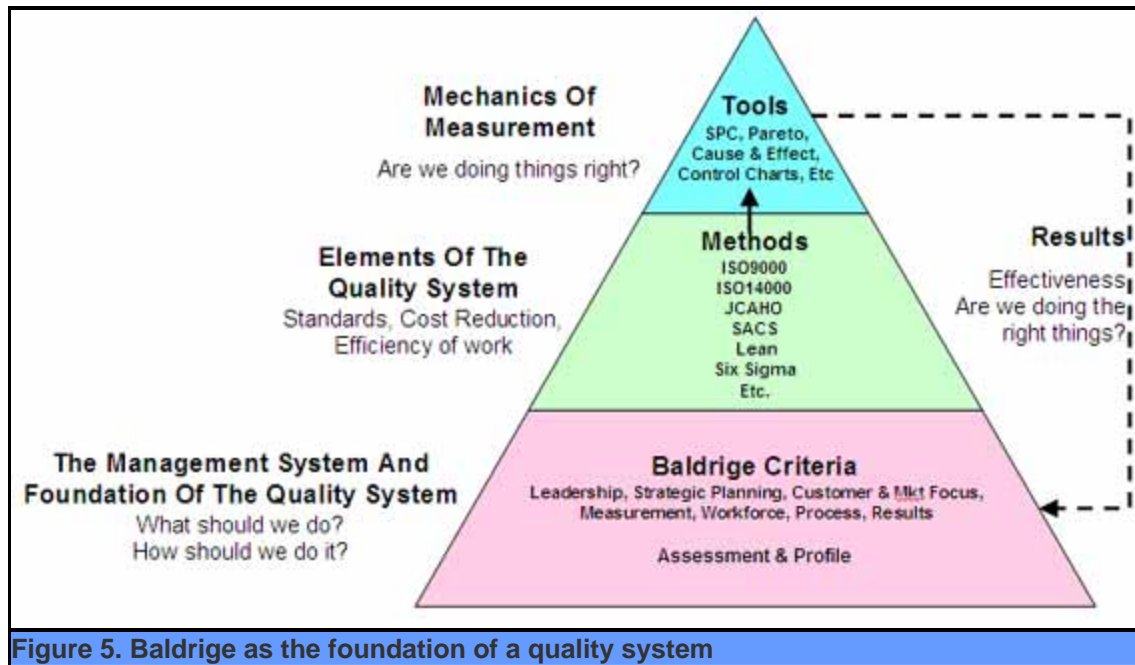


Figure 5. Baldrige as the foundation of a quality system

Why look at Baldrige with a different eye and from multiple perspectives? Because without a larger view of the organization as a system, small successes represent only short-term improvement. Seeing the criteria with a third eye from multiple holistic views helps us realize the systems knowledge that Baldrige addresses.

If you disagree with these models, it means they've worked; they have made you think and created a dialogue, which is their purpose. Look at the criteria from your own vantage point and think about how they can transform your own organization.

About the authors

Denis Leonard, Ph.D., is a senior member of the American Society for Quality, a certified manager of quality or organizational excellence, a certified quality auditor, and a Six Sigma Black Belt. He has been an examiner for the Wisconsin Forward Award and the Baldrige National Quality Award. He's also a member of the Quality Management Division Baldrige Committee and recently published An Executive Guide to Understanding & Implementing The Baldrige Criteria: For Organizational Excellence and Financial Impact through ASQ Quality Press. Leonard is a quality manager for Veridian Homes in Madison, Wisconsin.

Bill Denney, Ph.D., spent 30 years as an executive in large businesses. He's a senior member of ASQ, a certified manager of quality and organizational excellence, and a certified quality auditor. He has been a Baldrige Examiner, as well as an examiner, team lead, and judge for the Texas Award for Performance Excellence. Denney is currently the chief executive officer for the Quality Texas Foundation.