

## The Baldrige Journey - Definitions

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My organization, St Joseph Health System, began its “Baldrige Journey” in 2004. And in 2007, we were awarded the Texas Award for Performance Excellence (TAPE) by the Quality Texas Foundation. Baldrige based state organizations such as the Quality Texas Foundation serve as the proving ground for many businesses and health care organizations before they enter the national Baldrige competition. The Quality Texas Foundation serves as a very effective proving ground as Texas has more Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award winners than any other state.

Since SSM in St Louis, Mo. became the first healthcare organization to win a Baldrige award in 2003, the Baldrige management framework for performance excellence has become a popular tool for healthcare organizations trying to improve their results. In 2007, over half of the 84 national Baldrige award applications came from the healthcare sector. Like ours, many healthcare organizations have realized that Baldrige offers a roadmap to excellent healthcare and service that can effectively serve as a marketplace differentiator.

But it is a journey and you don’t arrive overnight. Baldrige fundamentally changes the way an organization and its staff work. It changes the culture. It focuses everyone in the organization on performance, on results, on excellent results. If an organization successfully changes the way it does its work, the Baldrige framework produces best in class performance.

Although the Baldrige management framework provides a road map to excellence, it does not tell you which route to take. Which road to take is for each individual business to determine based on its own unique environment. It really doesn’t matter which road you take, or even how fast you drive. It only matters that the destination is clearly defined, and you keep moving toward it.

It does help a lot, however, if you know how to read the map. The sooner you can read the map, the sooner you start making significant progress down the road, without making too many detours. Key to reading the map is knowing Baldrige definitions. And the folks that wrote the Baldrige book used a different dictionary than you’re familiar with.

The Baldrige criteria book contains a glossary of 56 key terms/words. All are important to a thorough understanding of the criteria, but there are 4 that are most important:

- Approach
- Deployment
- Learning
- Integration

Once you have a clear understanding of the Baldrige definition of these four words, you will be miles ahead of all the average businesses driving around in circles.

**Approach** - Approach can be a noun or a verb. My online dictionary contains 15 definitions of approach. The definition that seems closest to the Baldrige definition is “method used or steps taken in setting about a task or problem.” But Baldrige expects not just an approach to doing things, but a “systematic approach.”

When I put “systematic approach” in my online dictionary, here is what shows up:

There are no dictionary entries for *systematic approach*, but [systematic](#), [approach](#) are spelled correctly.

The Baldrige definition of a systematic approach is one that is repeatable and uses data and information to enable learning. A Baldrige approach must be used the same way from work unit to work unit; or individual to individual, or facility to facility, and it must use data and information to enable learning.

**Deployment** - My online dictionary contains 4 definitions of deployment. They mostly relate to military use—“troops, forces, weapons put into a position of readiness to battle.” The definition that seems closest to the Baldrige definition – “to put into use or action”.

Based on my online dictionary and the definitions of approach and deployment, I might think all I need to meet Baldrige management criteria expectations is to have methods or steps taken in setting about a task or problem and then to put those into use.

But the Baldrige definition of deployment is different - “implementation of systematic approaches in different parts of your organization.”

According to the Baldrige definitions of approach and deployment, I need to have repeatable approaches, using data and information to learn how to do it better, and I have to do that throughout all different parts of the organization—different work units, different facilities, different people.

The Baldrige dictionary raises the bar.

**Learning** - my online dictionary contains 8 definitions of learning such as “to memorize; to become informed or acquainted with.” The definition that seems closest to the Baldrige definition is “to acquire knowledge or skills in by study, instruction, or experience.” So based on my online dictionary definition of approach, deployment and learning, I need to have methods or steps taken in setting about a task or problem and then I have to put those into use and then study my experience with those methods/steps to acquire knowledge or skills.

The Baldrige definition of learning includes the basic definition PLUS, processes should include evaluation and improvement cycles as well as potential for breakthrough change. Process improvements should be shared with other units of the organization to enable organizational learning.

Here they go again, adding to the definition. And what about “breakthrough change?” What does that mean? When I put breakthrough change in to my online dictionary, here’s what I get:

There are no dictionary entries for *breakthrough change*, but [breakthrough](#), [change](#) are spelled correctly.

And another new term “organizational learning.”

The online dictionary? You guessed it:

There are no dictionary entries for *organizational learning*, but [organizational](#), [learning](#) are spelled correctly.

How do things, like organizations, learn?

**Integration** - The dictionary has 7 definitions. There are definitions for integration as used in math, electronics, and genetics. Perhaps the most common definition relates to putting together ethnic, racial, or religious groups.

The definition that seems closest to the Baldrige definition is the psychological definition-“integration is the organization of psychological or social traits and tendencies of personality into a harmonious whole.”

The Baldrige definition of integration is-“shows alignment and harmonization among processes, plans, measures and actions that generate organizational effectiveness and efficiencies.”

The connection here between Baldrige and the psychological definition of integration is “harmonious whole” and “harmonization that generates effectiveness and efficiency.”

I’m still not sure I know what integration means or looks like, whether from a Baldrige or psychological standpoint. Maybe it means on any given day, if you’re appropriately integrated, your psche/organization is pretty functional for whatever the situation is at any given moment, your psche/organization is not causing disruption around you and others. Maybe it means you/your organization is feeling pretty good about things, rumbling down the road like a well oiled machine, clicking on all 6 cylinders, in perfect harmony, a harmonious whole.

I am pretty sure these Baldrige people use a different dictionary than the rest of us!

But I’m also sure that if you are starting your Baldrige journey, the sooner you learn the Baldrige definition of these 4 words, the sooner you will become amazed at the improvement your organization will make.

It is a journey. It does take time. It requires patience and persistence. But learning the correct definitions helps ensure the straightest and quickest route to the destination is taken. And the destination is an organization that anyone should want to work for. An organization with well-defined, standardized work processes completely and effectively implemented to appropriate staff throughout the entire organization, with built in measurement that produces data and information used by the staff doing the work to continuously improve the process and its outcome. An organization where individual learning is shared with the entire organization in a way that enables others to improve their processes more rapidly. And all of that work is integrated harmoniously with the strategic goals and objectives set by the organizational leadership in a way that ensures the organization’s Vision and Mission are attained while upholding and living organizational values day in and day out. An organization that produces excellent, best in class results.

Sounds like a desirable destination to me.