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The Evaluation of Technical and Vocational Centers in Ahwaz Based on the Excellence Model of EFQM.

Forough Talanak^{1*}, and Faranak Omidian²

¹Educational Sciences Department, MA student of Educational Sciences, Educational Planning, Islamic Azad University, Dezful, Iran.

²Department of Educational Sciences, Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Dezful, Iran.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study assessing the purpose quality of Vocational Centers Ahwaz city based on European Fundamental Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model. The method of research is descriptive and in term of aim is applicable. The tools of data collection this study is standard questionnaire of organizational pattern. Reliability coefficient of directors, employee, trainers and trainees questionnaire is estimated 70% to 97%, which it was calculated by Cronbach's alpha. This questionnaire was distributed between 65 directors, employee and trainers of Vocational Centers. Also, 309 trainees were selected as stratified random and based on two variables of Vocational Centers and Sex. The result are showed that the vocational centers are gained the highest score 79/60 in employee criterion and the least score 56/60 in participation and resources. 714/80 from 1000 score is showed that the operation of vocational center is in desirable level.

Keywords: assessment, quality, vocational centers, organizational excellence model.

**Corresponding author*

INTRODUCTION

Today Iranian enterprises and organization face a large number of challenges in the process of globalization and joining world trade system. Participation in the global markets and even staying in the domestic ones requires competing with the powerful competitors. Given the development and complexity of the objectives, processes and organizational structure in the competition arena, the organizations survive which are responsible for their customers and beneficiaries' demands and expectations (Hadavand, 2006). Educational organizations are no exception. These organizations also deal with a lot of challenges due to their several-year existence and work force asking for higher and technical education. Educational activities of each country can be regarded as the investment of a generation for another generation (Bazargan, 2004).

Sachar Paulus (1997), in a research, argues that technical and vocational centers provides a way to reach some objectives such as economic growth and unemployment reduction. The results of a research done by Bacar and Hanafi (2007) showed that teaching and learning system and strategies in a technical and vocational institute in Malaysia had had positive effects on the development of basic skills, the quality of people and the reinforcement of scientific power among men and women in this country. Hardy (2000), from the University Of Quebec, Canada, carried out a research in regard with the trainees who had technical and vocational education and transferred to the work environment. The research results indicated that technical and vocational education had not led to occupational success of the people to enter the labor market. Of necessities of economic growth and development is an educational system which provides necessary skills of human resources. Meanwhile, technical and vocational educations is a mixture of science, technology and art, playing a key role in providing efficient manpower and having a developmental theme. Technical and vocational education is the sum of scientific and practical educations aiming to provide necessary conditions for acquiring knowledge and creating an attitude and training skills of the trainees to get a job and improve skills, leading to acquire a certificate (Iran Technical & Vocational Training Organization, 2004).

Formal technical trainings in Iran dates back to the establishment of Dar ul-Funun in 1889. However, the first formal activities as technical and vocational organization emerged with the formation of the Supreme Council of Guiding Graduates, Supreme Council of Occupations and Workforce within the organizational structure of the Ministry of Labor in 1960. In later years, the Supreme Council of Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship Fund were established as well (Ahang, 2011). Iran Technical and Vocational Training Organization affiliated with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Iran was established in 1978 through integration of three educational units including General Department of Vocational Educations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Apprenticeship Fund and Apprenticeship Center (Parand, 2013).

In Khuzestan Province, the formation of technical and vocational trainings dates back to 1973. Apprenticeship fund started up the same year in mobile in Khuzestan's villages. Apprenticeship Center was formed in 1973 with the name of work camp and then with the name of Apprenticeship Center. According to the act of the Council of the Islamic Revolution in 1978, out of Vocational Education Center, Apprenticeship Fund and Apprenticeship Center, Technical Training and Human Resources Organization was established (Mehr Alizadeh and et al, 2012). Following the formation of Iran Technical and Vocational Training Organization, Technical and Vocational Training General Office of Khuzestan Province was also founded in this year with the establishment of two centers of technical and vocational training for men in Ahwaz and Dezful (Ahang, 2011). Currently, 44 centers in 25 cities and counties operate.

However, the research in regard with the effectiveness and efficiency of technical and vocational organizations performance shows that there are still problems and deficiencies in Iran's technical and vocational system. Rabiee (2004), in a research under the title "the evaluation of informal technical and vocational training courses' performance in trainees and employers' point of view in Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari Province, concluded that the lack of appropriate equipment and the breakdown of machines are the most important weaknesses of technical and vocational trainings in trainee's viewpoint and Masoudifar (2004) evaluated the effectiveness level of the General Office as weak generally in a study titled as the assessment of technical and vocational training courses in technical and vocational training centers of Great Khorasan Province. The quality of equipment, facilities, educational tools of the centers have been at a high level and at a good level based on the mean scores of the scale. The quality of training trainers have been 74.80; at a good level, in the trainees' point of view. Nikkhoo (2007) conducted a research under the title "the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of informal technical and vocational training courses in managers, trainers, educational

experts and trainees' viewpoint in Technical and Vocational General Office of Eastern Azerbaijan Province in 2006-07. The findings reveals the ability of the organization in doing educational commitments properly, the high capability of non-educational groups in responding to the clients, the trainees enjoying the optimum educational content, the optimum presentation of the subjects by the trainers although not carrying out a prerequisite test to determine the level of the trainees, not evaluating the trainers' performance and its reflection to them, not studying the educational needs are the vital weaknesses of technical and vocational trainings. Bayani (2007) studied the internal efficiency rate of technical and vocational trainings in Kordestan Province by taking an internal efficiency approach and found that the efficiency rate of educational centers, trainees, directors, trainers, workshops and educational equipment of technical and vocational centers in Kordestan Province have been favorable. Nahal Tahmasbi (2008) assessed the informal courses of technical and vocational training in Hormozgan Province in 2007-08 and found that the governmental technical and vocational centers in this province were not at optimum level in terms of quality and quantity especially in the educational empowerment at first and secondly educational equipment levels, 93% of all centers under the study having a significant difference with the standard in educational empowerment and 50% of them in terms of educational equipment. 72% of the learners were dissatisfied with the all educational empowerment factors. Ahag's (2011) research findings indicated that in Khuzestan Province technical and vocational system, the threats have been more than the opportunities in evaluating the external environment and in regard with the internal environment, the strengths have been more than the weaknesses. Moreover, the results of a comparative research test showed that the threats of the General Office have been more than the opportunities but the strengths are more than the weaknesses. Therefore, there is not significant relationship between opportunities and strengths but there is a meaningful relationship between other factors. The results of the analytical test with recurrent measurements revealed a significant difference between the four factors (opportunity, threat, strength, weakness). Hasanzadeh and et al (2012), studying the challenges of educational standards of Khuzestan Province Technical and Vocational Training General Office (Ahwaz), found that among viewpoints of trainers, formulators and trainees there were differences, the viewpoint of the directors having a significant difference with the trainers and trainees. In other words, in the managers' view, the mean evaluation of educational standards had a lower standard in comparison with that of the trainers and trainees. Amini also examined the status of technical and vocational training skills evaluation in the industry of Ahwaz city the results of which show that in general, the trainees have no more positive attitude toward the status of technical and vocational evaluation and test. Particularly, they have a negative attitude toward the test resources, equipment and how written and practical tests are given. The trainers have a negative attitude toward the test resources, equipment and how written and practical tests are given. Finally, the employees and experts of testing office have generally had a positive attitude toward the status of technical and vocational tests and evaluation.

Hence, as it is clear in Iran different aspects of technical and vocational organization have been investigated independently which suggest some deficiencies. So quality promotion in this system is of high importance which should be taken into account by the educational planners and policy makers. Quality in technical and vocational trainings is one of the latest subjects and an important one in the future in education in the national and international arenas. Quality assurance in technical and vocational trainings is a common task among all those involved in educational activities due to the special complexities of these trainings, which requires its own tools (Thabetzadeh, 2011). One of these quality assurance tools of technical and vocational trainings is the evaluation of its performance. The reasons behind the evaluation of the performance has been explained as below since performance evaluation helps organization to identify their processes well and find that what they know and what they do not know. To ensure that these decisions are made upon the realities not hypotheses and speculations (Parker, 2002: 7).

Thus, performance evaluation as one of the important dimensions in the comprehensive system of evaluation, if carried out systematically, leads to a more accurate and constant control and improvement of the activities (Jaafari and et al, 2009). One of the models - drawn upon in the performance evaluation of the organizations - which has recently found a wide usage in the performance evaluation of higher educational and training organizations is the organizational excellence model (EFQM).

The organizational excellence model, in its primary stage of development, was regarded as a medium to evaluate the performance of industrial organizations and service providers and after 2007 some research was done in regard with the organizational excellence model in educational organizations.

Nine evaluative criteria form the core of EFQM. They fall into two categories of enablers and results. The enablers are the factors which help the organization to reach great results including leadership, strategies, human resources, companies and resources and processes and results are also the findings like customer results, human resources' results, society results, key performance results, suggesting the achievements are resulted from appropriate exercise of the enablers (Najmi, Hosseini: 2008).

As was mentioned, although it is several decades since the establishment of Khuzestan Province's Technical and Vocational Organization, there are, based on research results in regard with its different scopes of inputs, processes and outputs which have been studied from a variety of aspects, problems and deficiencies. Thus, this research, taking a comprehensive approach, tries to evaluate technical and vocational centers in Ahwaz based on the organizational excellence model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of objective, this is an applied research. Because research findings help the leaders and directors of technical and vocational centers in improving the conditions of the centers. This is a descriptive survey research.

This research has two statistical populations; the first includes the directors, employees and trainers of technical and vocational centers of Ahwaz city the number of which is 65 and the second consists of all trainees of technical and vocational centers in Ahwaz the number of which is 605. It is important to note that the sampling method has been carried out in stratified random way based on two variables of technical and vocational centers and sex. The directors and trainers the number of which 65 were participated in the research as the census. So the total sample size is 374 in this study.

The main research instruments in regard with the data collection included a questionnaire which is approved by the European Foundation for Quality Management and it is called Organizational Excellence Model (EFQM). This foundation authorizes the mentioned questionnaire be proportionated according to the requirements of each organization and maintaining the 9 main factors in the model. This has been made possible with the help of the supervisor and technical and vocational planning and research unit.

Research Findings

Q 1- Leadership: in general, how is the performance of the center director in regard with leadership criterion?

The results show that this organization has gained 76.60 points out of 100 points given to the process of leadership in EFQM the value of which is equal to 76.60 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have only been successful in leadership factor by 76/60; attempting to promote the trainees in scientific terms, the close and mutual relationship between employees and trainers, continuous relationship between technical and vocational general office management and deputy of education, holding sessions to guide the trainees, presenting strategies to interact with the target population and other executive organizations, encouraging the trainees to participate in symposiums. But in obviating the trainees' need for experienced trainers through inviting other centers' trainers, they have failed.

Q 2- Strategy: in general, to what extent has the performance of the technical and vocational centers been able to give a favorable strategy to reach the aims of the centers?

The results show that this organization has gained 76.60 points out of 100 points given to the factor of strategy in EFQM the value of which is equal to 76.60 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have acted favorably in strategy factor by 76.00; the specified time of holding centers' sessions, the existence of determined mechanism to evaluate the quality of the trainers' performance, the existence of determined mechanism to evaluate the quality of the trainees' performance, the transparency of the centers' strategy based on the city skill-learning or organizational development document.

Q 3- Employees: in general, how is the performance of the technical and vocational directors in regard with the criterion of employees?

The results show that these centers have obtained only 79.60 points out of 100 points given to the factor of employees in EFQM the value of which is equal to 79.60 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have acted favorably in employee's factor by 79.60; paying attention to the specialty of the trainers in defining and running the courses, determining examiners at the end of the courses based on their specialties, empowering the required competency and skill to promote the trainers scientifically, informing the time of holding conferences and seminars and in-service courses but they have failed in regard with the lack of alignment between rewards and benefits and the employees' capabilities.

Q 4- Partnerships and resources: in general, how is the performance of the technical and vocational directors in regard with the criterion of partnerships and resources?

The results show that these centers have obtained only 56.60 points out of 100 points given to the factor of partnerships and resources in EFQM the value of which is equal to 56.60 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in partnerships and resources factor by 56.60; attracting financial and material resources from external organizations and the superior executive organization but in providing material facilities at the required level of the trainers and providing ICT through the internet, they have not been successful.

Q 5- Processes: in general, how is the performance of the technical and vocational centers in managing the processes?

The results show that these centers have obtained only 67.40 points out of 100 points given to the factor of the processes in EFQM the value of which is equal to 67.40 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in the processes factor by 67.40; reviewing the standard of the curriculum (headings and the content of courses) in accordance with the needs of the trainees, society and scientific developments), the compatibility between available facilities and equipment and trainees' admission however in regard with the appropriateness of educational and research facilities for the centers' trainers, timely informing the trainers of educational and research activities through the website and email, they have been unsuccessful.

Q 6- Employees' results: in general, how is the performance of the technical and vocational centers in regard with the employees' results (directors, trainers and employees' satisfaction)?

The results show that these centers have obtained only 72.20 points out of 100 points given to the factor of the employees in EFQM the value of which is equal to 72.20 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in the employees' results factor by 72.20; fair distribution in order to participate in training workshops, the participation of the centers' members in planning and decision-making, presenting educational suggestions by the members, the selection of the employees according to their qualifications.

Q 7- Society results: generally, how is the evaluation of the technical and vocational centers' satisfaction with the educational and external activities and its effect on the society?

The results indicate that these centers have obtained 72.20 points out of 100 points given to the factor of the society results in EFQM the value of which is equal to 72.20 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in the society' results factor by 72.20, the relationship and cooperation between the technical and vocational centers, the relationship with other educational institutes, the desirability of these centers' performance in comparison with other ones. But the relationship and interaction with the industry has been reason for the failure.

Q 8- Key performance results: generally, how is the technical and vocational centers' performance in regard with the key results (educational activities)?

The results indicate that these centers have obtained 106.50 points out of 150 points given to the factor of the key performance results in EFQM the value of which is equal to 71.00 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in the key

performance results factor by only 71.00; the ability of the centers in creating new courses, the appropriateness of the teaching methods, satisfaction with educational services but they have not had an acceptable performance in that the directors, trainers and trainees have been informed of the scientific articles by the trainers and that they have been aware of organizational health.

Q 9- Customer results: in general, how is the evaluation of the trainees' satisfaction with the performance of directors, employees and trainers in the technical and vocational centers?

The results reveal that these centers have obtained 107.70 points out of 150 points given to the factor of the customer results in EFQM the value of which is equal to 71.80 predicted in the model. That is, out of all statistical population, technical and central centers have done satisfactorily in the customer results factor by only 71.80; the manner of accessibility to the trainers and directors of the centers, responsibility toward educational problems, presenting educational services, trainers' flexibility, satisfaction with the quality of the courses, encouraging others to participate in the courses, providing educational standards by trainers, giving importance to project-orientedness in learning. However, in the manner of giving information and career consultations, they have acted unfavorably.

Table 1 – The results of technical and vocational centers' performance in Ahwaz city based on organizational excellence model (EFQM)

Criterion	Gained Points	Gained Percentage	Total Points	Distance to Previous Point
Leadership	77.60	77.60	100	22.40
Strategy	76.00	76.00	100	24.00
Employees	79.60	79.60	100	20.40
Partnerships and Resources	56.60	56.60	100	43.40
Processes	67.40	67.40	100	32.60
Enablers	356.20	71.24	500	143.80
Customer Results	107.70	71.80	150	42.30
Employees' Results	72.20	72.20	100	27.80
Society Results	72.20	72.20	100	27.80
Key Performance Results	106.50	71.00	150	43.50
Results	358.60	71.72	500	141.40
Total	714.80	71.48	1000	285.20
Total Score of Technical and Vocational Centers				714.80

Technical and vocational centers gained 356.20 points out of total 500 of enabler factor in regard with educational quality. This score shows that the educational quality of the above-mentioned centers is above average. Technical and vocational centers gained 358.60 out of total 500 of results' factor in regard with educational quality. This score indicates that the educational quality of the above-mentioned centers is at an acceptable level. The total score of the technical and vocational centers' performance in evaluating with EFQM, as has been shown in the table above, is 714.80 out of 1000, showing that the performance of technical and vocational centers is above average and at an acceptable level. Among the groups, out of the nine factors, the highest score goes to the factors of employees; 79.60 of 1000 and the lowest belongs to the criterion of partnerships and resources, gaining 56.60 of 1000.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the interviews done with the officials of the centers, the results show that the most important reasons of the findings in leadership factor can be said to be the increased academic level of the trainees with the participation in symposiums and skills Olympiad, close and mutual relationship among directors, employees and trainers in administrative affairs, the desirability of relationships between directors and deputies, which has led to successful performance in this criterion. However, it is vital to note that these centers have weaknesses such as each workshops having only one trainer, financial resources current expenditures limitations (the problems related to the costs like mission, reception, vehicles etc.), general offices and the executive centers of educational services project not being supported by the organization (the

use of professors etc.) which results in lack of motivation in doing the job. The results obtained from this factor correspond with the research results done by Navehebrahim and Hamsi (2010) and Eghbal et al. (2009) while it they are consistent with that of Khajeh and Salami (2013).

In explaining the findings of strategy factor, one can say that announcing the time of holding session asked by the general office (staff department), sending evaluation form of all staff and trainers once in three months, doing evaluation of the trainees by trainers and office of assessment and evaluation at the end of in the middle of the courses, annual needs assessment of the five-year plan lead to the favorability of the centers in regard with this factor. This research findings correspond to that of Amini (2013), Bani Davoodi (2011) and Navehebrahim and Hamsi (2010) but not being in line with that of Ghorbani et al. (2008) and Akhshik and Faraj Pahloo (2008).

In explaining the findings of employees' factor, one can say that the existence of organizational guidelines and instructions in regard with the lack of permission to use a trainer unrelated to the profession training, deploying trainer training LMS in Karaj and timely dispatch of most trainers to retraining courses result in performance success of the centers in this factor. This factor has also some weaknesses the reasons of which are concentration in payment and equal determination by the headquarters, the limitation of the centers' directors in applying the rate of efficiency and productivity of the staff in respect to rewards and benefits, which have led to inefficiency in this factor. The research results correspond with the study done by Akhshik and Faraj Pahloo (2010) and Zaker Shahrak and Abazari (2012). But they are inconsistent with the studies of Hassanzadeh et al. (2010) and Navehebrahim and Hamsi (2010).

Among the main reasons behind the findings concerning partnerships and resources factor are the ability of the centers in attracting financial and material resources based on the high-level documents, which has led to the desirability of these centers in terms of this factor. However, there are deficiencies in this regard as well. No delegation of power, the limitations of the centers in providing equipment needed for information technology, infrastructural and structural problems in creating the conditions for optical fiber, internet etc. and in some cases the improper use of the staff, all of which lead to disability in carrying out the assigned tasks. The research results are consistent with the studies of Hassanzadeh et al. (2010) but inconsistent with that of Roza and Amaral (2007) Bani Davoodi (2011)

In explaining the findings of processes factor, one can argue that the admission of trainees under supervision of the trainer and after being equipped, 90% of educational equipment become desirable. These centers have some weak points in organizational guidelines and bureaucracy, the concentration of the general office budgets in the organization, the lack of cyberspace for the trainers in regard with educational and research activities, not being informed of office automation's strengths and the problems arising from it (like the limitations made by the portal), which have sometime led to the deficiency of the centers in this factor. The results correspond with that of Bani Davoodi (2011) but not with Ghourchian et al. (2010) and Khajeh and Salami (2013).

In explaining the findings of employees' results factor, one can argue that publishing codified calendar of retraining courses for staff and trainers to the centers of holding continuous sessions in the centers to justify organizational guidelines and instructions, call for all employees in all centers in order to give new suggestions and ideas, all of these cases having led to the utility of this factor in the centers. The results are consistent with that of Akhshik and Faraj Pahloo (2010) but no with Nahal Tahmasbi (2008) and Zakeri et al (2010).

Of the most important reasons of these findings in the factor of customer results, one can refer to the relative favorable quality of skills training in the centers, informing the trainees of educational standards in all centers through books publication and/or by hanging a banner in which the headings of courses are brought, all of which have led to successful performance of the centers in this criterion. This factor has also weak points including the lack of appropriate hardware and software conditions in training workshops to access the general office website, substitution of consultants, ambiguities in the guidelines, using people with unrelated specialties, inappropriate guidance of the trainers in regard with career consultation, which have caused the disability of the centers regarding this factor. This research findings correspond with that of Salahshoori (2012), Jalilian (2013), Huang Tang (1992), Hardy (2000) and Khajeh and Salami (2013) but not with that of Hassanzadeh et al. (2010).

In explaining the findings of society results, one can say that the interaction of the centers' directors with the other centers' in order to exchange information and cover mutual needs, relationship with other educational institutes through the general office issuing guidelines, agreements and educational contracts to the centers have resulted in desired performance of the centers. The reasons behind the failure of the centers are also some managing directors of companies and enterprises not welcoming this factor, inappropriate advertisement of technical and vocational centers and in some cases poor quality of required technical and vocational equipment. These findings are in agreement with those of Nikkhoo (2007), Bayani (2007), Zaker Shahrak and Abazari (2012) and Bani Davoodi (2011) but not with those of Nahal Tahmasbi (2008), Hossein Zadeh et al. (2012).

In explaining the findings of key performance results, it can be said that the ability of creating new courses in the centers based on the strategic document, polling trainers and staff on organizational health indices have led to the favorable performance of the centers in this factor. This factor also suffers from some weaknesses including weakness in giving information to the centers, the trainees being unaware of the importance of this matter, not all staff and trainees having access to scientific information and articles and the general office being weak in the manner of notification, all of which lead to demotivating staff, trainers and trainees.

As the results in the tables above show, the total average of enablers is 356.20. So if looked at in managerial aspect, an optimum use of the centers' facilities and equipment becomes clear and given the great deal of efforts devoted in order to heighten quality, these centers have been able to carry out education at an acceptable level. One can also conclude that given the gained final score of 714.80 out of 1000 in EFQM in these centers, he/she can hope quality in technical and vocational organization be promoted since directors, employees and trainers showed that in spite of all shortages and difficulties in some cases, they would continue their attempts to reach the long-term organizational objectives and quality promotion. In regard with optimum use of the resources results, this research is not in line with those of Khajeh and Salami (2011), performance evaluation of Islamic Azad University of Qom by Zaker Shahrak and Abazari (2012), performance evaluation of Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. The criterion of enablers with half of the total points of organizational performance is regarded as the prerequisite of gaining results, which is worthy of more attention.

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