

Quality Conversations: Organizational Excellence Specialists

What are excellence models, and how can organizations use them to drive quality and boost performance? Dawn Ringrose, Principal of [Organizational Excellence Specialists](#), is an expert on excellence models—and a big believer in their benefits. Since 1984, Dawn has been helping organizations across the public, private, and non-profit sectors fine-tune their culture and operations to achieve outstanding results. In this piece, she explains how companies can use her Organizational Excellence Framework to be more efficient, effective, and downright excellent. Let's dig in.



First of all, thanks for taking the time for us. Let's start with some background on you: how did you get into this field, and what keeps you engaged?

It's great to be here. I initially started working at large international consulting firms before I went on to start my own business. I was really keen about work in the customer service area, and as I was doing ongoing professional development, I got involved in ISO 9001 and then literally bumped into excellence models. I was really impressed with the models because they were based on global research that defined the best management practices that were common to high-performing organizations, and I loved the way they captured all of that and put it in one place. Over time, I have found that working with an excellence model to help an organization improve their performance has really been exciting and rewarding work, and so that's what keeps me going.

That's wonderful. I understand you authored your own framework, called the Organizational Excellence Framework (OEF). Can you tell us more about the OEF? How did you develop it and why?

I wanted to build on the definitions of best management practices that were found in excellence models, and I saw a need to fill a gap in the literature as well, because the existing models were missing implementation guidelines. So I developed a publication by merging what we know in organizational excellence with how we implement it in management consulting. I wanted to share it with professionals and employees working with organizations to improve performance. I saw that there was a great need to increase familiarity with excellence models, because the global research tells us that only 10-20% of the working population is familiar with them. And I wanted to encourage application because if more organizations apply this, they perform better, and that helps them but it also helps their communities—boosting the local economy, trade, and overall resident quality of life.

What results are you seeing with the Organizational Excellence Framework—success stories, applications, etc.?

There are a number of [testimonials on our website](#) that demonstrate how people are using the Framework for their own professional development, applying it holistically across the organization, and also using it in a modular sense to tackle issues that need to be addressed within the organization. I look at all of the work that we do as **happy work** because people who learn about this and apply it are experiencing a formula for success, and it's so exciting to hear about the short term results that they experience. I often hear them say, "Our communication is better, we've got less duplication, our employees are more engaged and involved, and we've got everyone working towards a common aim," and then as time goes on, I hear about longer-term results. Things like good governance and trust in leadership, how delighted the customers and employees are, improved work processes, better supplier/partner relationships, a nice balanced system of measurement, and the list goes on and on. These good news stories really keep us going.

"Happy work"—what a great phrase! You touched on suppliers and partners, and I'd love to hear more about that because our software helps facilitate interactions between manufacturers and suppliers, and we know what an important part of the quality equation that is.

Sure. This is a key question because any organization and its suppliers and partners have to be working well together in order to serve the end customer. In the publication that I've authored (Organizational Excellence Framework), there are five best management practices in the suppliers and partners area. A few of them are: (1) Selecting suppliers and partners on the basis of criteria. For example, you want to make sure you have the same definition of—and ability to deliver—quality; (2) Developing win-win partnerships. This is all about capturing the terms of a

partnership in an agreement so that you've got mutual understanding about how you're going to work together. And then it's by working together, sharing information such as strategic and business plans, collaborating on new products and services, and even developing social and environmental standards that go beyond what is expected of you, that you start to pull ahead of the pack. A real trend that we see around the world with high performing organizations is that they work with a few select suppliers so that they can really develop these good strong relationships and work side by side seamlessly to deliver what they do best to the customer.

What are some projects and initiatives you're working on right now?

We're working on three initiatives. (1) We're transferring knowledge to professionals around the world so they can work with organizations in their region to improve performance, and we've been training professionals in over 20 countries now; (2) We're transferring knowledge to leaders and employees so they can work together to improve organizational performance; and (3) We're leading a really exciting global research study. It's called the [First Global Assessment on the Current State of Organizational Excellence](#) and this study is capturing the culture of excellence and the deployment of best management practices in organizations around the world. We're reporting the aggregate results by size, industry sector, and country, and the organizations that are participating in the study are learning more about an integrated excellence model and they're able to self-assess their current state and benchmark with others. So there are a lot of benefits for everybody who participates in this study.

Wow! What advice do you have for organizations that are hoping to adopt some of your principles?

It's pretty straightforward. What I always like to tell organizations is, number one, become familiar with excellence models. You can download a copy of the Organizational Excellence Framework at no charge on the home page of our website <http://organizationalexcellencespecialists.ca/>. Number two, organize a short presentation so you've got professionals like us providing you with a high-level overview for your leadership team so they understand what the Framework is and can ask questions. Number three, work with professionals like ourselves to engage everyone in the organization in an assessment so you can get a good idea of where your culture is right now, and to what extent you've deployed best practices. And when you receive an improvement plan to address gaps, engage and involve everyone in the organization in working to address those gaps. And finally, celebrate along the way—have fun with it!

That's a fantastic response. How do you create a culture that's committed to excellence?

There's a formula for that! It starts with leadership conveying the message to everyone in the organization that excellence is important, and then of course inviting the employees on the journey, and then following the formula for success. As I described in my previous response, as

your organization implements the best management practices, you will develop a culture that's committed to excellence, and then you will go on to achieve exceptional results. It's a formula, and it works, and it's been working, as we know from the global research, for 25 years with all sorts of organizations around the world. The real shame is that not a lot of the working population knows about it, and that is what drives me every day to increase familiarity because I want organizations to benefit from this knowledge and from the experience of others.

How does the OEF fit into the notion of Quality 4.0?

It fits beautifully. Quality professionals around the globe have expressed that OES is doing some of the most innovative work in this area and our secret really is to focus on what we do best, and to work with reputable suppliers to create a seamless system for organizations. Our part in it is to develop and provide that turnkey toolkit that's more simple, straightforward, time-efficient, and cost-effective, and that can be customized for the organization. We work with a partner called QLBS to automate the assessment and reporting process. Using this tool, organizations can engage all of their employees in the assessment and improvement planning process and then monitor assessment results over time. And of course we work with ARMATURE, who's got a [beautiful quality management platform](#) that captures the management system so that everybody in the organization knows how the work is done, and what is being done on the improvement initiatives. Your system helps by automating tasks, controlling documents, keeping track of non-conformances and corrective actions, and managing standards.

Exactly. That's a nice example of how technology can help drive a culture of quality.

Technology provides tremendous support for the culture of quality because it's critically important to communicate with employees about the management system and organizational performance. Technological platforms like ARMATURE Fabric™ help you do that.

True. Speaking of technology, I'd love to know what trends, changes, or improvements you're seeing that can be attributed to software tools like ours. Are organizations in general embracing digital transformation?

Well, if organizations use technology properly, they become more efficient and effective, there's no doubt about that. However, I've noticed some hiccups in the application of technology. For example, you'll find organizations not taking the time to explore new and emerging technologies that can make a difference, or you'll see them embracing technology that has not been tested to see if indeed it does result in improvement. Or you'll see them purchasing technology that is complex and expensive to maintain. My advice is take the time to identify what your organization needs and to seek out reputable suppliers like ARMATURE, who are very good at what they do and have a platform that is easy to use and maintain.

One of the things I love about our software is that we have what we call a “collaborative API.” It allows for easy integration with other systems so that organizations can see the full picture across the BI landscape.

Yes, and so often we see in technology that it isn’t open and you’re almost tied to a given vendor without that flexibility. That doesn’t work for the organization at the end of the day.

Agreed. How can software companies like ARMATURE best support organizations on their excellence journey?

Number one, it is all about the customer: you need to understand the strategic and business plans of the organizations you support. I would also encourage them to use an excellence model as a foundation for their management system, and to ensure that the relevant standards are integrated into that. A lot of organizations are dealing with ISO standards for quality, environment, health and safety, and so forth. And you want those to be integrated, and then you need to help organizations place their management system on the platform so they’ve got everything there at their fingertips. Of course training employees how to use and maintain it is critical, and then encouraging leaders to report regularly to employees about the performance of the organization—the data in the system is at your fingertips, so you want to share it with employees, and make that a habit.

Absolutely. The visibility is so important because if you can’t see all the way to the source of an issue, then there’s not a good way to remediate it and prevent it from happening again. That visibility up and down the chain is helpful for workers, too—to know what they’re accountable for, and to see the context of what they’re doing.

Exactly.

Is there anything else you’d like to share?

I’d like to invite the reader to participate in the global research study that we’re doing. They’ll get a chance to learn more about the current state of excellence in their organization, and be able to benchmark with others, so I think it will be particularly valuable. The more organizations we can encourage to participate, the more we can profile what’s going on by organization size, sector, and country. The entire exercise is entirely confidential for organizations that participate. We can only report on the data that we have to work with, so I would invite one, two, or three people from an organization to participate by completing the assessment and that will help us in terms of providing a really good final report. And of course we’re sharing the final report with everyone involved. Visit [this link](#) to learn more about get involved.

That's fantastic. I'm really excited about this. Thank you for all of the work you're doing to promote quality and organizational excellence in the world, Dawn.

It is my pleasure and my passion.

The ARMATURE team met Dawn Ringrose at ASQ WCQI 2018, where she gave a talk on her Global Research Study. We struck up a conversation with her at the conference, and discovered our shared passions for quality and excellence. We are proud to spread the word about the great work that Organizational Excellence Specialists is doing, and hope you'll get involved with Dawn's study and put some of her advice to good use in your organization.