

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

DIAGNOSING THE REALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL EXCELLENCE IN IRAQ BASED ON THE EXCELLENCE MODEL FOR INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY

Fadi Walid Augustine (Corresponding Author)

Department of Public Administration,
College of Administration and Economics,
University of Baghdad, Iraq
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3810-1840>
Email: Fadi.waleed2204d@coadec.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Hussam Ali Mhaibes

Department of Public Administration,
College of Administration and Economics,
University of Baghdad, Iraq
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9115-5061>
Email: hossam.ali@coadec.uobaghdad.edu.iq

—Abstract—

This study seeks to utilize a government excellence model in Iraq to assess institutional performance. The research sample comprised 32 leadership figures from the Iraqi Presidency. The Emirati quality management model was employed to evaluate the level of Institutional Excellence (IE). The findings indicate that government IE serves as a crucial foundation for public institutions to achieve sustainable success and gain a competitive edge in an increasingly competitive environment. The study recommends that Iraqi government institutions prioritize the adoption of IE standards, emphasizing that performance excellence is an imperative in the government's efforts to provide superior services to citizens, especially in comparison to neighbouring countries. Additionally, the study offers insights into the adoption of IE standards in developing countries.

Keywords: Institutional Excellence; UAE Excellence Model; Strategic Planning

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INTRODUCTION

The IE model is extensively utilized, particularly in developing countries, to enhance and advance institutional operations ([Alsuwaidi, 2023](#)). The IE model is well-established in nations neighbouring Iraq, particularly within the Gulf region ([Abuzanjal & Bashir, 2024](#)). The United Arab Emirates was the first among these countries to implement the model, successfully employing it as a benchmark for evaluating public sector institutions. This distinction in service quality between public and private sector institutions has positioned government institutions as a standard for assessing the performance and service quality of private sector organizations ([Ibrahim et al., 2021](#)). The nature of the public or private institution's activities determines the national need for IE and the methods for measuring it ([Hussin & Oudah, 2023](#)). IE is the advancement, distinction, and institutional commitment for sustainably and continuously improving a manner aligning with organizational aims, including high profitability and customer satisfaction ([Ghamari et al., 2017](#)). Adopting a philosophy of administrative excellence has become an essential element to institutions for ensuring their survival and success which secure their place among key organizations and enabling them for the competition in a dynamic environment known by the constant evolvement of strategies, as in Iraq. This excellence is seen the institution's capability of driving changes and fostering development under challenges and to overcome obstacles in different ways. In addition, such excellence is kept by adopting indicators of planning, policy implementation, and the developing organizational structures aligning with operational developments, investment in human capital, and the improvement of financial competences. This approach helps the institution achieve well-designed strategic plans supporting flexible organizational analyses ([Bayiz Ahmad et al., 2020](#)) and fostering an effective leadership style which concentrates on continuous improvement ([Karam & Kitana, 2021](#)).

IE is regarded as a fundamental requirement for administrative improvement, aimed at enhancing overall performance and achieving organizational goals by leveraging the skills and capabilities of employees. According to [Hussin and Oudah \(2023\)](#), integrated management is an approach that emphasizes balancing the interests of both internal and external stakeholders, including employees and clients, to deliver significant and tangible results for the organization in a rapidly changing environment. This approach represents a form of administrative distinction, characterized by a scientific and logical way of thinking grounded in a modern intellectual and administrative philosophy. Emerging from contemporary concepts of administrative theory, integrated management enables organizations to better meet the needs of all beneficiaries. This is accomplished by advancing institutional practices through the continuous improvement of processes, thereby elevating the organization's operational reality ([Mahmoud, 2020](#)).

Prominent examples of institutions that embody excellence include the European Quality Foundation, the Japanese Quality Foundation, and the American Malcolm Baldrige (Naser & Al Shobaki, 2017). IE equips organizations with unique capabilities that are difficult for competitors to replicate, allowing them to achieve superior performance in the marketplace. Thus, excellence offers organizations the opportunity to preserve resources, sustain high performance levels, engage in effective strategic planning, and achieve future goals and visions. Al Rashidi and Al Rashidi (2019) emphasize that maintaining exceptional performance and service quality requires the adoption of policies, strategies, and tactics that ensure continuous improvement across all organizational dimensions. This is achieved by aligning with the global environment and adapting to its ongoing changes and developments. A study by (Khasawneh et al., 2020) highlighted that IE is an integrated system for evaluating organizational performance by assessing both internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats). Excellence is an essential practice for managing institutions and achieving results through nine key indicators: results orientation, customer focus, leadership and goal stability, process and fact management, individual development and integration, continuous learning, social responsibility, improvement, and innovation (Shamrokh et al., 2022).

Achieving IE, whether in government services or the private sector, is driven by employees' perception that their work is conducted uniquely, though this process is often met with various technical and administrative challenges that require swift solutions and the removal of obstacles to success (Ibrahim et al., 2021). With the rapid changes in the economic and social landscape, the government sector faces growing challenges in achieving IE and numerous barriers to accurately identifying excellence levels (Buniya et al., 2021; Tkach, 2020). As the Presidential Office is the focal point of this research, it confronts several challenges related to IE. The research problem is particularly relevant given the institution's governmental and executive role, tasked with sensitive responsibilities such as implementing legislative decisions from the Iraqi Council of Representatives, approving representatives for Iraq in international contexts, and finalizing the appointments of governors and judges.

Given that IE has become a critical requirement for modern administrative practices, necessary to keep pace with the significant advancements in both administrative and technical domains, assessing and diagnosing the level of IE within the Presidential Office presents a distinct challenge. This difficulty constitutes the core problem of the study, especially considering that the responsibilities of the Presidential Office are primarily of a highly confidential nature. To diagnose this research problem more precisely, the following key question can be posed:

Q1: What is the level of IE of the Iraqi Presidency?

Q2: What is the level of task excellence carried out by the office?

Q3: Are there obstacles that limit the possibility of developing a model for Iraq for IE like global models of IE?

The significance of this research lies in its focus on a crucial sector of the Iraqi government, specifically the Presidential Office. As a government institution, the Presidential Office is vital in offering crucial moral services, such as implementing legislative laws the the Iraqi Council of Representatives passes, the final approval of Iraq's representatives in international contexts, and the ratifying governors and judges. The judiciary, particularly, works as a key t in upholding the law and ensuring justice. The Presidential Office, though does not provide a direct service for the Iraqi public immediately, have long-term implications. So, IE study and the evaluation of the Presidential Office's performance by global excellence models is crucial.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

[Aladwan and Forrester \(2016\)](#) explored leadership challenges in Arab contexts by the adoption of best practices as key components of whole Jordanian quality management and excellence models in. the use of the analytical approach, this work tested the excellence evaluation results from the King Abdullah II Centre for Excellence which focuses on a sample of ten public institutions in the King Abdullah Award for Excellence. In the same way, , [Ibrahim et al. \(2021\)](#) examined the role of IE in the mitigation of administrative and financial corruption in the Iraq's accounting oversight framework. They argue this for the necessity for the Financial Supervision Bureau focusing on the key accounting features and the achievement of a high excellence by the adoption set of some IE standards. The findings, yet, showed that the Financial Supervision Bureau and Iraq's unified accounting system did not affect the reduction of financial fraud and corruption.

[Karam and Kitana \(2021\)](#) examined the effect of leadership styles on IE and identified the variables for the achievement of IE in organizations with diverse leadership approaches. The study concentrated developing Emirati leadership, facing challenges because of the rapid changes in the environment. It showed the significance of leadership in institutions which operates in complex and dynamic contexts and emphasizes the conscious and effective leadership for driving institutional progress and development when there are t challenges like the technological developments and the rapid evolvement of operational conditions. In the study, organizations must adopt specialized administrative philosophies for the navigation of workplace complexities and the achievement of exceptional performance.

Similarly, [Alsaqi \(2021\)](#) identified the dimensions of IE within sports clubs by the examination of athletes who participated in the Iraqi Premier Basketball League. According to the findings, these clubs show a good level of IE. Based on the growing significance of sports institutions in Iraq, particularly as the country becomes a tourist destination following the lifting of the ban on Iraqi stadiums, the need to investigate excellence in this sector has become critical. With higher participation of international sports teams and the rise of Iraqi stadiums symbolising modernity and attraction, managing these institutions must show a high level of IE aligning with global standards which leverage current abilities and support by the government. [Shakhour et al. \(2021\)](#) studied the necessity for institutions in the healthcare sector in the UAE for embracing agility as a means of the achievement of IE. However, [Aldarmaki and Yaakub \(2022\)](#) studied the IE role in Dubai's free zones which emphasizes its position to position the UAE among the top five best places to live universally. They highlighted the additional Emirati organization developments and enhancements of by identifying key IE measures and implementing an internationally recognized IE framework. Their supported the launch of different initiatives for fostering creativity and ambition among the employees in public sector.

[Marks and Al-Ali \(2022\)](#) explored the imperative for educational institutions to excel by the digital transformation. They underscored the adopting digital transformation as essential to maintain competitiveness due to its significant contribution to developing human values and skills, enhancing technical competencies, and improving the educational practice and administrative process. So, digital transformation is critical to sustain IE which aligns with the demands and dynamics of the contemporary era. In addition, [Aljarrah et al. \(2023\)](#) explored the effect of the business intelligence model—which focuses on responsiveness, flexibility, and speed—on IE in Jordanian banks taking into account the mediating role of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB). According to the findings, there is a positive relationship between business intelligence dimensions and IE, with OCB as a mediating role to strengthen the effect of the business intelligence model on IE ([García, 2023](#); [Serrano, 2023](#)).

METHODOLOGY

Research Sample

It is important to note that the survey was primarily conducted through personal interviews with most respondents, given the sensitive nature of the study environment. The survey was completed within a ten-day period, from Sunday, June 2, 2024, to Wednesday, June 12, 2024. The research sample consisted of leadership employees from the Presidential Office, including the Director General, Assistant Director General, and department heads. The total sample size was 32 employees. [Table 1](#) provides details on the characteristics of the research sample. The frequency distribution analysis reveals

that most respondents were male, comprising 81.3% of the sample (n = 26). Age-wise, most participants were between 51 and 60 years old, accounting for 68.8% (n = 22), followed by those in the 41–50-year age range at 18.8%. Additionally, 9.4% of respondents were aged 61 years and above. Regarding educational qualifications, 62.5% of participants held a bachelor's degree (n = 20), 25% had a master's degree, and 12.6% possessed either a higher diploma or a doctorate. Notably, the sample did not include any senior management surveyors with an intermediate education level (technical diploma). Concerning job roles, the frequency distributions indicate that the study sample encompassed most of the job positions within the Presidential Office.

Table 1: Characteristics of Sample

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequencies	Percentage%
Gender	Male	26	81.3
	Female	6	18.8
Age	30 Years and Under	-	-
	31 to 40 Years	1	3.1
	41 to 50 Years	6	18.8
	51 to 60 Years	22	68.8
	61 Years and Over	3	9.4
Academic Qualification	Technical Diploma	-	-
	Bachelor's Degree	20	62.5
	Higher Diploma	2	6.3
	Master's Degree	8	25
	Doctorate	2	6.3
Job Position	Unit Manager	-	-
	Division Director	-	-
	Head of Department	23	71.9
	Assistant General Director	8	25
	General Director	1	3.1
Work Experience	1 to 5 Years	-	-
	6 to 10 Years	1	3.1
	11 to 15 Years	12	37.5
	16 to 20 Years	6	18.8
	21 Years and Above	13	40.6

The study sample was predominantly comprised of department managers, who constituted 71.9% of the respondents. The second largest group was assistant general managers, making up 25% of the sample, while general managers represented 3.1%. Notably, the sample did not include respondents from the ranks of department or unit/division managers. In terms of job experience, the sample was skewed towards individuals with substantial experience. Specifically, 37.5% of respondents had 6 to 10 years of experience, and an equal percentage had 11 to 15 years of experience. However, the proportion decreased to 18.8% for those with 16 to 20 years of experience.

Conversely, 40.6% of respondents were categorized as "experts" with 21 years or more of experience. The study did not include any respondents with less than five years of job experience. Overall, the demographic and screening data indicate that the analysis could benefit from further insights, if respondents offer valuable information.

Study Scale

This study utilized a primary data collection approach through a specifically designed questionnaire to capture respondents' perceptions, opinions, and attitudes regarding the core components of the research. The aim was to develop effective measures by translating theoretical concepts into operational terms. The development of the questionnaire scales was informed by previous research recommendations, and, where applicable, scales were adapted from existing instruments (Avalos et al., 2023; Muthuswamy, 2022; Sekaran, 1992). Consequently, the study's scales were derived from the UAE Government Excellence Model (GEM), which provides a framework for assessing and enhancing the performance of government entities in the UAE. The most recent version, GEM 2.0, was employed to guide government institutions in their pursuit of excellence. The response pattern followed a five-point Likert scale, for its reliability in measuring attitudes. Comparative research studies have evaluated 5-point scales in contrast to alternatives-3, 7, 9, and 11-point scales. The consensus is that the 5-point scale shows better balanced response options in comparison to the 3-point scale, while it also mitigating the challenges respondents face with the more granular distinctions by 7, 9, or 11-point scales. So, the 5-point scale decreases respondent frustration, thus raising not only the response rate and the collected data quality (Boone Jr & Boone, 2012; Li et al., 2023; Salami & Bhatti, 2022).

Questionnaire Structure

The research tool, which a questionnaire, was in official language of Arabic, the in Iraq. It included an introductory letter detailing the researcher's identity and the objectives of the study, which is crucial for establishing the study's validity and enhancing the response rate by assuring confidentiality. The questionnaire comprised two main sections. The first section gathered basic demographic information such as gender, age, educational qualifications, and job-related details including job title and years of experience. The second section consisted of 72 statements designed to evaluate respondents' perceptions of IE within the Iraqi Presidency. This section was structured around eight dimensions: Leadership (11 statements), Strategy (11 statements), Citizens (10 statements), Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management (MAKM) (12 statements), Human Resources (HR) (13 statements), Operations (9 statements), and Results (6 statements). Each dimension was divided into two sub-dimensions, with the Results dimension including only one sub-dimension focusing on operational results. The detailed structure of the questionnaire is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Questionnaire Structure

Study Dimensions	Number of Items	Range of Items	Symbol
1.Leadership			
1.1. Senior Leadership	5	1 to 5	A
1.2. Governance and Community Contributions	6	6 to 11	B
2. Strategy			
2.1. Strategic Development	5	12 to 16	C
2.2. Strategic Implementation	6	17 to 22	D
3. Citizens			
3.1. Citizens' Expectations	4	23 to 26	E
3.2. Citizen Engagement	6	27 to 32	F
4. MAKM			
4.1. Measuring, Analysing, and Improving Organizational Performance	6	33 to 38	G
4.2. Information and Knowledge Management	6	39 to 44	H
5. HR			
5.1. HR Environment	6	45 to 50	I
5.2. HR Engagement	7	51 to 57	J
6. Operations			
6.1. Functional Processes	5	58 to 62	K
6.2. Operational Activities	4	63 to 66	L
7. Results			
7.1. Results of Operations	6	67 to 72	M

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics serve to outline the primary characteristics of research data, providing a clear and concise summary of observations. [Table 3](#) presents the relevant descriptive statistics employed in this study to encapsulate the features of both primary and sub-latent constructs. According to [Table 3](#), responses to the overall IE scale (GEM 2.0) varied from a minimum of 2.35 to a maximum of 4.06, with an average score of 3.5293. The standard deviation was relatively low at 0.383, and the coefficient of variation was also low at 0.147. This indicates that the level of IE in the Iraqi Presidency, as assessed by GEM 2.0, is perceived as "above average," with a relative importance score of 70.6% based on respondents' evaluations. This suggests a general awareness among senior management regarding the achievement of IE in the Iraqi Presidency.

Table 3: Summary of the Statistical Description of the Study Dimensions

Variables	Mean	Std. deviation	Variance	Minimum	Maximum	Coefficient Relative Importance	Level of Relative Importance
1. Leadership	3.5594	0.454	0.206	2.4	4.4	0.7119	Above Average
1.1. Senior Leadership	3.5500	0.485	0.235	2.4	4.4	0.7100	Above Average
1.2. Governance and Community Contributions	3.5688	0.552	0.305	2	4.4	0.7138	Above Average
2. Strategy	3.6042	0.430	0.185	2.11	4.33	0.7208	Above Average
2.1. Strategic Development	3.6016	0.470	0.221	1.75	4.25	0.7203	Above Average
2.2. Strategic Implementation	3.6063	0.499	0.249	2.4	4.6	0.7213	Above Average
3. Citizens	3.2719	0.587	0.345	1.5	4	0.6544	Above Average
3.1. Citizens' Expectations	3.1641	0.745	0.555	1	4.25	0.6328	Above Average
3.2. Citizen Engagement	3.3438	0.550	0.303	1.83	4.33	0.6688	Above Average
4. MAKM	3.6432	0.483	0.234	2.25	4.5	0.7286	Above Average
4.1. Measuring, Analysing, and Improving Organizational Performance	3.7396	0.537	0.288	2.33	4.67	0.7479	Above Average
4.2. Information and Knowledge Management	3.5469	0.560	0.314	1.33	4.33	0.7094	Above Average
5. HR	3.6000	0.501	0.251	2.3	4.4	0.7200	Above Average
5.1. HR Environment	3.6016	0.546	0.298	2.5	4.5	0.7203	Above Average
5.2. HR Engagement	3.5990	0.530	0.281	2	4.333	0.7198	Above Average
6. Operations	3.5521	0.404	0.163	2.56	4.56	0.7104	Above Average
6.1. Functional Processes	3.4750	0.492	0.242	1.8	4.4	0.6950	Above Average
6.2. Operational Activities	3.6484	0.495	0.245	2.5	4.75	0.7297	Above Average
7. Results	3.3938	0.509	0.259	2.2	4.2	0.6788	Above Average
7.1. Results of Operations	3.3938	0.509	0.259	2.2	4.2	0.6788	Above Average
IE Measure (GEM 2.0)	3.5293	0.383	0.147	2.35	4.06	0.7059	Above Average

The dimensions of IE deemed most critical by the respondents were as follows: the MAKM dimension, with an importance rating of 72.9%; the Strategy dimension, at 72.1%; the HR dimension, at 72%; the Leadership dimension, at 71.2%; Operations, at 71.04%; Results, at 67.9%; and Citizens, at 65.4%. While all these dimensions hold above-average relative importance, there is a noticeable differentiation among them, which suggests varying strengths and weaknesses in the IE practices within the Iraqi Presidency. Among the sub-dimensions of IE, the most significant was the Measurement, Analysis, and Improvement of Organizational Performance, with an importance rating of 74.8%. This was followed by Operational Activities, at 73%; Strategic Implementation, at 72.1%; the HR Environment, at 72.03%; Citizen Engagement, at 66.9%; and finally, Citizen Expectations, with an importance rating of 63.3%.

Although these sub-dimensions exhibit above-average relative importance, there is a clear distinction among them, indicating potential strengths and areas for improvement in IE within the Iraqi Presidency. The sub-dimensions related to measuring, analysing, and improving organizational performance, as well as operational effectiveness, emerged as significant strengths in the Presidency's IE practices. Conversely, the dimensions concerning citizen engagement, citizen expectations, and operational results were identified as areas of relative weakness or less emphasis within the institution.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, IE is crucial for public institutions trying for the achievement of sustainable success and competition in a highly competitive setting. They relatively lack competition among Iraqi government institutions diminishes competitive drive, no matter they offer similar or different services. IE includes a series of ongoing efforts which aims for the enhancement of the internal standards and processes within institutions, and it is a key for superior performance. The Malcolm-Baldrige model functions as a comprehensive framework to assess institutional management performance by its standards-instrumental in institutional self-evaluation. The findings help us to make some recommendations for the Iraqi government institutions such as the adoption of IE standards, as performance excellence has become critical amid government aims to deliver superior services in comparison with to neighbouring countries. The institution under study is required to cultivate distinctive and effective capabilities across all departments for ensuring optimal resource utilization. Furthermore, it is essential for the institution to implement learning and improvement strategies by the electronic automation and modern systems aligned with e-government needs, thus improving performances and adding values. The institution is also advised d to exhibit flexibility in the adaption of routine processes to important changes by the

development of new business models. In addition, it is important for the establishment of objective measures and indicators with standardized timings anticipating prospective future developments which contributes to achieving of strategic aims amid the challenges the Iraqi government institutions face.

IMPLICATIONS

This research contributes to the understanding of the implications of IE in public sector institutions in Iraq. Initially, the study underscores the significance of the IE model, particularly as it has been effectively applied in the Middle East, notably in the UAE. The findings suggest that IE should be regarded as a crucial factor for enhancing public sector institutions in Iraq. The study recommends that policymakers recognize the value of the IE model and advocate for its integration to optimize government resource utilization, thereby advancing overall performance across the country. Additionally, the research highlights the need for continuous adaptation within Iraqi government institutions, achievable through strategic administrative practices. Improved policy implementation is essential to foster advancements within the public sector, facilitated by the adoption of e-government services, which would contribute to more equitable service delivery.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This research advances the understanding of IE within public sector institutions in Iraq. Future studies are recommended to perform a comparative analysis of IE's implications in the public sectors of Iraq and the UAE. Such analyses would offer a comprehensive perspective, enabling practitioners to identify areas for improvement and further extend the implementation of IE in both contexts. Additionally, future research should consider longitudinal studies to investigate IE implementation in Iraq's public sector on an annual basis. This approach would provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners, facilitating more effective improvements in IE practices and the expansion of public sector operations. Consequently, these scholarly efforts would make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

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