Good Management Practices in Assessments

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Good Management Practices are essentially a technique or methodology that, through experience or research, has become an innovative or better practice, which is recognized as 'best' or 'pioneering' by other peers. It implies accumulating and applying knowledge about what works and does not work in different contexts.

Total Quality Management review as used in Industry (Corporate sector) is referred to as Assessment, while the same in the Education sector is termed Accreditation, at a broad level. The intent behind both of these is to assure quality from the product/services of the applicant (undergoing review), by taking inputs from relevant stakeholders – Students, Parents, Faculty, Management, Government, Alumni and Industry in the Education sector, or Customers, Employees, Suppliers, Partners, Management, Regulatory bodies, Society and Shareholders (if appropriate).

A Good Operating Practice during assessments in a corporate sector can be exchanged and replicated just like any instructional capital. This paper attempts to capture some such practices that are based on the assessment experiences of the author and his interactions with co-assessors across the globe.

Six aspects of a typical assessment are presented:

1. Self Assessment Report (SAR)

(a) *Separate sections:* For Process areas and Outcome areas (with trends) are seen in Industry assessments. Hence some groups (e.g. Tata) restrict the number of pages, by indicating a specified (not to exceed) number of pages, in areas where process description (e.g. Part B of Accreditation) is expected from the applicant. Pictures (flow charts) are used to describe processes, saving detailed description.

The Baldrige criterion is broadly classified as Process related and Outcomes related, in the Baldrige model, with 55% for Processes and 45% for Outcomes on a 1000 point scale. Outcomes correspond to each Process criteria and consist of graphs and tables. In the Baldrige assessments, all Process related descriptions are segregated together and Outcomes for the corresponding criteria bundled together, with a limit on the total number of pages.

(b) *Action Taken Report (ATR):* On previous assessment findings (if applicable). Typically, the assessment findings have comments categorized as Strengths and Opportunity for Improvements (OFI), across each criterion. The ATR will indicate timelines, status and change

implemented and brings in more seriousness about previous assessment findings, to ensure Strengths are sustained and OFIs are acted upon.

2. Assessment Process

(a) *Individual assessment in stages:* Enables team Chairperson to get better individual assessments from the team. There are typically three stages of individual assessment, spread over 2-3 months in the Tata or CII-Q assessments. The Secretariat (equivalent of NBA, which organizes accreditation) facilitates this process, by providing an audio/video bridge to the Chairperson and the team. The Chairperson defines the time lines for different stages of individual assessment and spends time, with the team on completion of every individual stage. Stage-wise individual assessment yields better quality of individual assessment.

(b) *Digitization of assessment process:* In entirety enables better administration of the whole process. The digitization of assessment processes in the industry covers areas such as maintenance of assessor pool, mapping/replacement assessors to applicant, and different steps of assessment process, site visit questions, the assessor feedback, and integrating the whole process. Mobile applications have further improved the situation. Given that the formats of SAR (e.g. Institution Information) in the NBA accreditation are structured and the numbers of Accreditation is increasing, digitization will reduce administrative load.

3. Human Resource Factor

(a) *Assessor recognition:* Through a 360 degree. Assessors undergo a 360 degree feedback and top assessors are recognized, which motivates assessors and makes others aspire for the same.

(b) *Roles of mentor and process consultant*: Are available in industry assessments. While there is a Chairperson for every team, at times there are moderations required beyond the Chairperson and Principal, when a Mentor is used. Likewise, one of the team members wears the hat of a process consultant to ensure that the process is followed. Infact, both Confederation of Indian Industry (Quality) and Tata group have an explicit role – process consultant to facilitate process guidelines being followed.

(c) *Assessor certification:* Makes the process aspirational for future assessors. Factors such as validity, curve normalization during training, ensure some pre-defined percentage of fresh assessors every year come into the Accreditation process.

(d) *Zonal forum* of Quality representatives (heads) in most companies of the Tata group connect with each other through a digital platform (called Edge in the Tata group). The intent of this digital forum is to understand good practices, experience sharing and internal assessment. A similar forum for Institutional Quality representatives can also be thought through with similar intent.

4. Criteria

(a) *Competitive scenario* being part of the criteria will help better responses and assessment feedback. This is the case especially, when there are several qualitative descriptors of the vision statement such as World class, Global and National. Such statements can only be validated; if the

outcomes are benchmarked against comparable institutes which the applicant identifies and compares key outcomes with them.

(b) *Revising criteria* in fixed periodicity to keep it relevant. Many assessment organizations including NBA keep revising criteria to keep it pertinent for the current day. The Organization Profile (equivalent to the Institution Information) in an industry also brings out strategic challenges and strategic advantages for the applicant, amongst other things. The criteria to which the applicant responds implies processes being put in place, in an attempt to address these challenges, while leveraging the advantages.

(c) *Focus on a systematic process* and alignment and integration of process, ensuring desired results is seen in industry assessments. This will confirm sustenance of the business process. Analogy to academic processes being aligned and integrated in every institute could also be thought through, likewise.

5. Recognition of Applicant Company

Any recognition is known to motivate applicants and draw them towards assessment, especially when the assessment process is voluntary. Examples are Highest delta jump or Good Management Practice (or Pioneering practice, yielding desired results) in a particular area recommended by the assessment team, but decided by a separate executive committee.

6. Assessment Types

Many institutes may find it intimidating when applying for the first time. Defining an informal level of maturity amongst companies right from novice to experienced, can help better preparation of SARs. Three types of assessment in the industry are distinctly visible:

(a) *Dipstick* for those entering assessment for the first time and process quality needs to stabilize. Focus only on outcomes and check for processes in site visit. These are short duration site visits and a crisp feedback report.

(b) *Regular assessments* are the normal assessments, once a company has processes and corresponding outcomes and finds it comfortable in being subjected to assessments.

(c) *Deep dive* for Companies scoring highly may not feel the need or value of reassessment. Deep dive for such high scoring companies focusses on one aspect of assessment is done, as desired by the applicant.

To conclude, the above is an attempt to briefly capture prevailing industry practices into six groups above, during a typical total quality assessment and draws analogies to this in the Education sector. The academic processes are comparable to business processes in the industry. These equivalences are presented, since the intent of both industry and academic assessment goes beyond compliance i.e., continuous process improvement.

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