# The Excellence Model for Reaching Sustained Peak Performance

Excellence is the quality of sustained peak performance – the ability to reach a level of performance that becomes the benchmark for others and then sustain that performance for an extended period of time. Many organizations find this difficult to achieve because they are trapped in repeating cycles of high-visibility initiatives that initially yield good results followed by a drift back to pre-initiative levels. What began as new and exciting gradually becomes less glamorous and yields to the constant pull of 'acceptable'. To help organizations break out of these repeating cycles, Life Cycle Engineering (LCE) developed a model for sustainable peak performance – an excellence model.

The excellence model is based on:
1. Defining the philosophies by which your business will succeed;
2. Creating a culture that reflects these philosophies;
3. Implementing philosophical concepts through well-defined business processes, while optimizing performance within each process; and
4. Building systems and structures centered on continuous improvement to sustain optimum levels of performance.

THE EXCELLENCE MODEL
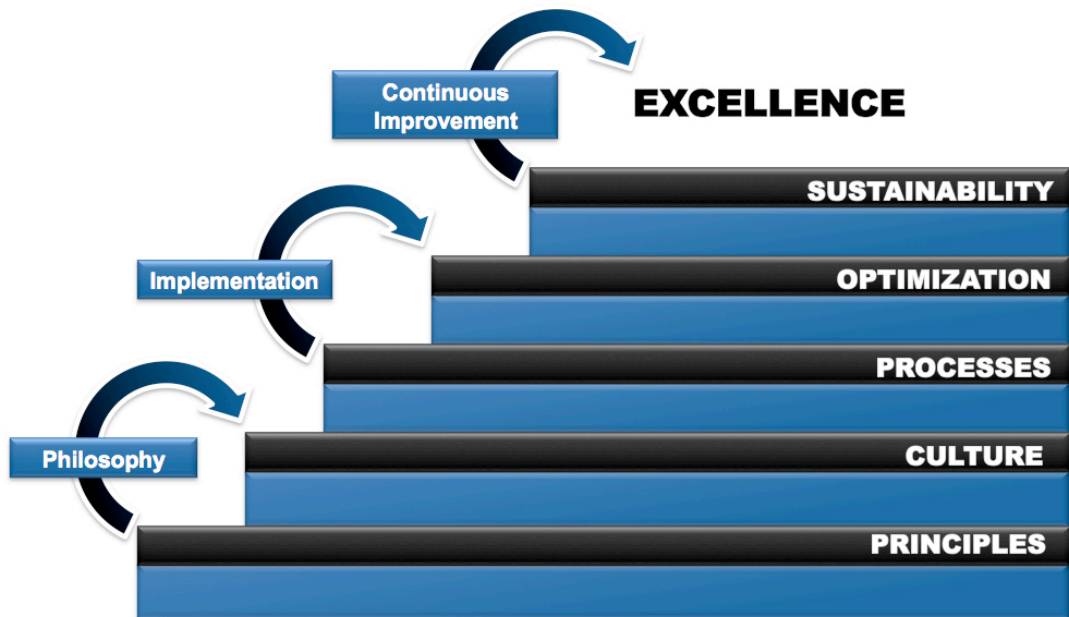
Note - The excellence model is founded upon one overarching principal – excellence in the little things yields excellence in the big things. The hidden message is that an organization can't 'cherry pick' its way to excellence. Most businesses have already removed any processes or positions that are not value-added, so concentrating efforts on selected areas can yield improvements, but will not result in sustained, peak performance.

Principles

The Principles foundation consists of both a vision and a values component. This vision and values approach has received widespread emphasis lately and has often been inappropriately implemented through corporate fiat. To be of any sustaining value, however, it is critical that this be a *shared* vision and values. It's important that each employee understands and believes in their place in the organization and can come to work each day with a clear understanding of their role and contribution to the organization.

In peak performing organizations, in addition to a shared vision, the day to day pursuit of that vision will provide two values, one to the employee individually, and one to the group collectively. If you think of team sports, the most satisfaction is achieved when two goals are achieved – the player plays well (personal satisfaction), and the team wins (contribution to the group). Creating an environment of performance that has a clear and consistent vision and allows the employees to maximize job satisfaction provides the foundation for building excellence.

Culture

The second level, Culture, is where the working environment is established. Where the Principles defined the vision and mission, the culture defines the system in which the work shall be done.

Excellence does not occur at random. It must be defined, planned and pursued. Short term thinking excludes planning and prevents reaching excellence since, in most cases, today's problems are the results of yesterday's solutions. This makes long-term thinking – focusing on tomorrow's problems – a critical component of excellence.

The second cultural issue is proactive versus reactive actions. It is impossible to achieve excellence in a reactive environment. Management behaviors must reinforce a proactive mindset. "How quickly can it be repaired?" must become "Why did this failure occur?"

Generally, organizations do not intend to be reactive or decide to be short-term thinkers or intentionally fail to cooperate. Rather, their environment tends to reinforce this mentality and they focus on the urgent to the exclusion of the important. Directly modifying the behavior is the leverage point in reversing this approach. Rather than approaching the problem as a cultural issue, simply focus on the behavioral aspects. The immediate approach is usually to try to stop being reactive. The problem with this is that being reactive is what is currently working, so rather than stopping what is working, start being proactive. As you become better at being proactive, forward thinking and cooperative, you can replace the old behavior with the new behavior.

Processes

All organizations have work processes. At their best, work processes make the mechanics of running the organization defined, disciplined, and effective with the proper balance between structure and flexibility. The work processes will inherently reflect the culture. If avoiding mistakes is valued more than innovation, work processes will be more bureaucratic and less flexible (e.g., nuclear power

plant operations.) If innovation is more valuable, then work processes will be less rigid (e.g., custom bike shop.)

Optimization

The fourth level, Optimization, builds on the work processes themselves, addressing efficiency and effectiveness issues to ultimately drive higher performance levels. Supervision, training, facilities/tools/equipment and technology all fall into this level. Technology is interesting because it oftentimes gets incorrectly placed in the third level (Processes). Using technology to attempt to force structure into poorly or undefined processes is a frighteningly common (and universally unsuccessful) approach.

The Fifth Level -- Excellence

The top level is the Excellence level, which paradoxically requires both sustainability and continuous improvement. Sustainability implies standardization and repeatability while continuous improvement implies change. This possible paradox is avoided with the realization that excellence is not a static standard. The bar is always being raised, so sustained peak performance *requires* continuous improvement. Sustainability is primarily accomplished through two processes:

1. *Monitoring micro-processes* – Micro-processes are the individual actions that are performed all along the way, e.g., how an invoice is processed, how repair parts are stored, or how a work order is closed. Since the founding assumption of the excellence model is that excellent micro-processes will result in excellent performance, it is critical to ensure the micro-processes are not eroding. Establishing benchmarks for the micro-processes (i.e. all labor hours will be accounted for in a work order) and effectively monitoring the micro processes (i.e., monthly reports, periodic inspections) will ensure continued excellence.

2. *Evaluating performance lapses at the micro-process level* – Excellence is not perfection, so there will be times performance falls below acceptable levels. When performance lapses do occur, there should be a systematic way to perform root cause analysis to find where the failure(s) occurred.

While monitoring and evaluating the micro-processes to ensure sustainability, attention must also be placed on ensuring that the process today is better than yesterday and will be better tomorrow. This is a cultural quality that must be embraced from the top and reinforced throughout the organization. Fundamentally, continuous improvement is addressing tomorrow's problems today. Envisioning the future (i.e., "What will we be doing better this time next year?") is a common exercise in driving continuous improvement. If your organization inherently supports long-term thinking, then continuous improvement is easily implemented.

Excellence does not occur by chance, nor does it depend upon superhuman efforts by selected individuals. It is the collective result of getting the details right, quantifying those actions, and doing them better each and every time. The excellence model, while presented as layers, is not meant to imply that these actions can only occur in a series. It is important, however, that any transformation start at the foundation level.

To find out more about implementing Reliability Excellence in your organization, please visit Life Cycle Engineering's website (www.LCE.com), email us at info@LCE.com or call 843-744-7110.