

Use the Baldrige Criteria to Measure Operational Excellence

By Kevin McManus, Great Systems LLC

How Do You Measure Operational Excellence? 1

The Baldrige Award Criteria Design Helps Drive Operational Excellence 2

Five Ways to Use the Baldrige Award Criteria and Measure Operational Excellence 2

Would You Like Help as You Use the Baldrige Award Criteria to Measure Operational Excellence? 4

About the author 5

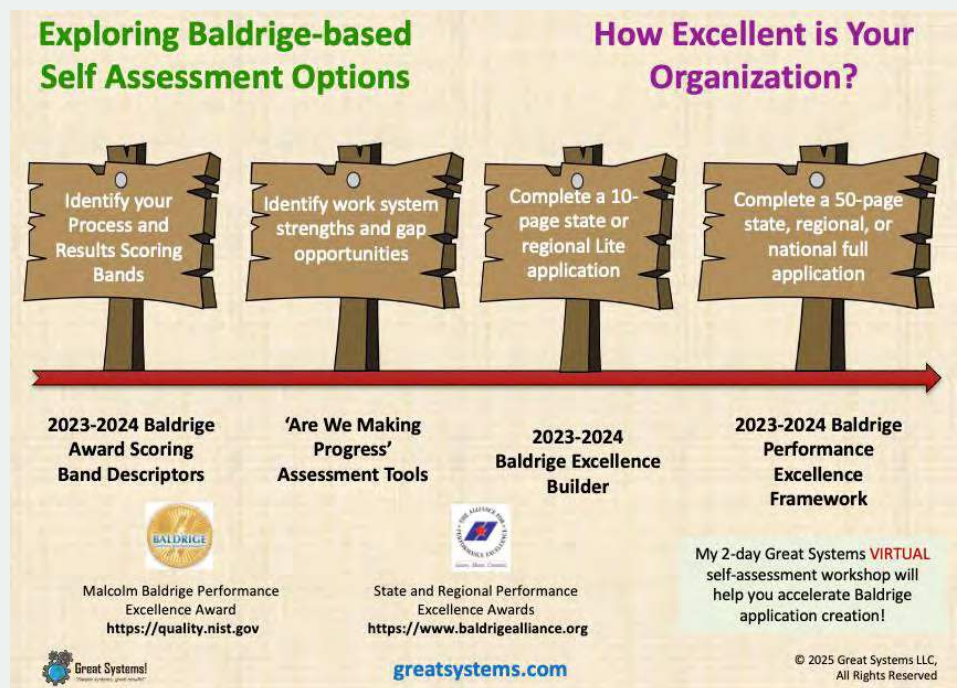
How Do You Measure Operational Excellence?

At the most basic level, it should be relatively easy to measure operational excellence. All you must do is measure and look at the results!

Many would argue that all one needs to do is review a set of key performance indicators for all the organization's key performance areas. Is this not enough information for such an evaluation?

When one uses the Baldrige award criteria to help measure operational excellence, they find that they need more than just excellent results.

Unfortunately, there are limitations if we only use 'the numbers' to assess performance excellence. This is especially true if one considers the future sustainability and competitiveness of the organization.



How effectively will current work system designs support the organization's strategic intent over the next five to ten years? Are systematic processes in place to drive further work system design changes? How will we meet shifts in internal and external customer expectations?

Finally, for true process effectiveness, positive trends aren't enough. Key trends should exhibit movement towards external levels of excellence. These levels should be consistent with the long-term goals of the organization.

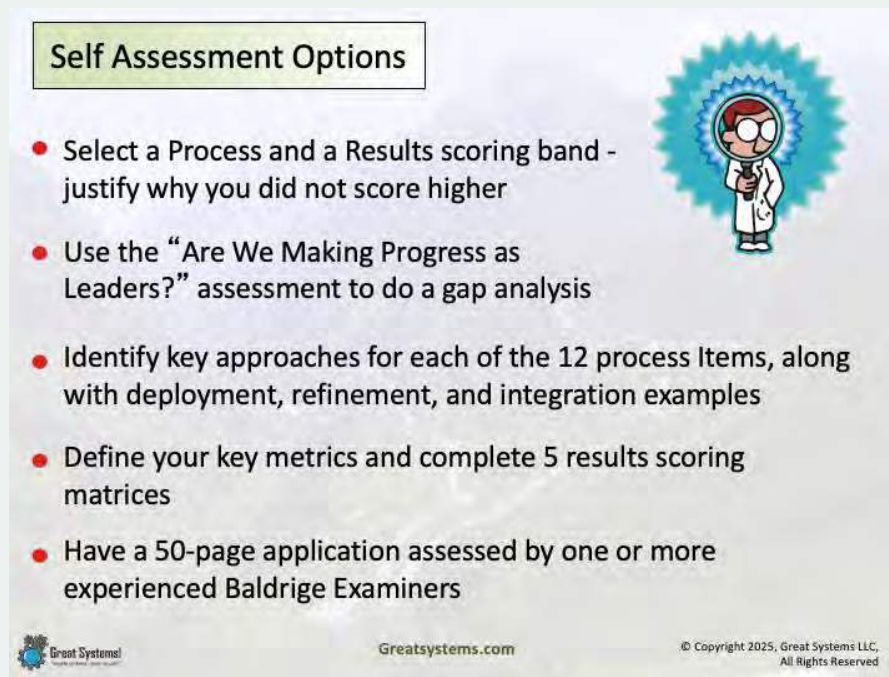
The Baldrige Award Criteria Design Helps Drive Operational Excellence

From a Baldrige perspective, effectiveness and sustainability go hand and hand. The Baldrige perspective on effectiveness also takes into consideration the potential effects that different work systems can have on others.

Have you ever seen one process perform at an exceptional level, but at the same time, cause the performance of other processes to falter? Have you ever seen one work area's process efficiency improve at the expense of patient satisfaction or safety in another?


The [design of the Baldrige award criteria, scoring guidelines, and assessment process](#) take sustainability, integration, and other factors into consideration. These factors alone support its use as a tool to evaluate process effectiveness. Results are important, as they constitute 45% of the total Award points.

The Baldrige belief is simple. *Organizations struggle to sustain excellent results over time, in all areas of importance, when they fail to effectively deploy, refine, and integrate their key work systems.*



Self Assessment Options

- Select a Process and a Results scoring band - justify why you did not score higher
- Use the "Are We Making Progress as Leaders?" assessment to do a gap analysis
- Identify key approaches for each of the 12 process Items, along with deployment, refinement, and integration examples
- Define your key metrics and complete 5 results scoring matrices
- Have a 50-page application assessed by one or more experienced Baldrige Examiners



Great Systems! | Greatsystems.com | © Copyright 2025, Great Systems LLC, All Rights Reserved

Five Ways to Use the Baldrige Award Criteria and Measure Operational Excellence

There are five different approaches that leaders can use to gauge their current level of organizational design and performance against the Baldrige award criteria. These five approaches are shown in the graphic for this post. The length of time that one needs to use a given approach ranges between minutes and days, and months, if not years.

#1: Select a Process and Results Score from the [Scoring Band Descriptors](#)

This is the fastest way to get a quick read on where your organization may stack up against the Baldrige award criteria. Examiner teams use the [Scoring Band descriptors](#) at the end of the assessment process to help ensure a 'best fit' score assignment. There should be alignment between the scorebook mix of strengths and opportunities for improvement and the overall Process and Results sub-scores.

Here's how to use the descriptors as a quick assessment tool. First, simply select the 'best fit' descriptor for your organization. Do this for both the Process and the Results columns.

Then, read the descriptor above and below the two you select (one for Process and one for Results). This helps ensure you make a 'best fit' selection. You won't receive recognition for where you rank. However, you have at least two performance excellence benchmarks.

#2: Complete the '[Are We Making Progress as Leaders?](#)' self-assessment

This tool provides the second fastest way to benchmark your organization's work practices against those of the best companies in the United States. Composite results from Examiners who have taken the survey are also provided.

Two versions of the 40-statement assessment tool are available. This tool helps leaders look at their work systems and practices from both their own and their staff's perspective. Also, this a great tool to help leaders identify current areas of strength and areas where design / execution gaps exist.

#3: Use the [Baldrige Excellence Builder](#) to put together a 10-page 'Lite' application

Multiple states and regional award processes offer a Baldrige Lite award. This level of award allows an organization to receive recognition for its progress towards best-in-class levels of performance and work system design.

To complete this version of the application, leaders first answer the questions that make up the Organizational Profile. Then, they respond to the overall Baldrige Award criteria requirements for the Process and Results Items.

The [Alliance for Performance Excellence](#) exists in the United States to coordinate the efforts of the different state and regional groups. You can visit their website to find the group in your area that can provide further information on the Lite application process. An organization must receive state-level recognition to be eligible for the national award.

#4: Complete a full 50-page application and apply for a state or regional recognition

Leaders can use the [Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework](#) to create a meaningful plan for organizational change. [Application summaries from past recipients](#) are available on the national Baldrige award website.

These summaries provide you with many examples for reference. Full application requirements are consistent between the state, regional, and national programs.

#5: Refine your state or regional full application and apply for national recognition

Also, a completed application is not something that leaders refer to only occasionally. Instead, its contents provide a roadmap of current work system design and deployment that all staff can reference. Plus, the application contents serve as a map of future work system refinement needs.

Many more organizations use the criteria internally as an improvement template than apply for local or national recognition. The performance benefits leaders and staff gain from use of the criteria and process far outweigh the recognition itself.

I have used the criteria myself in two different organizations for this purpose. Baldrige-based organizations are great places to work. Check out the presentation evidence from the annual [Quest for Excellence conference](#) each year.

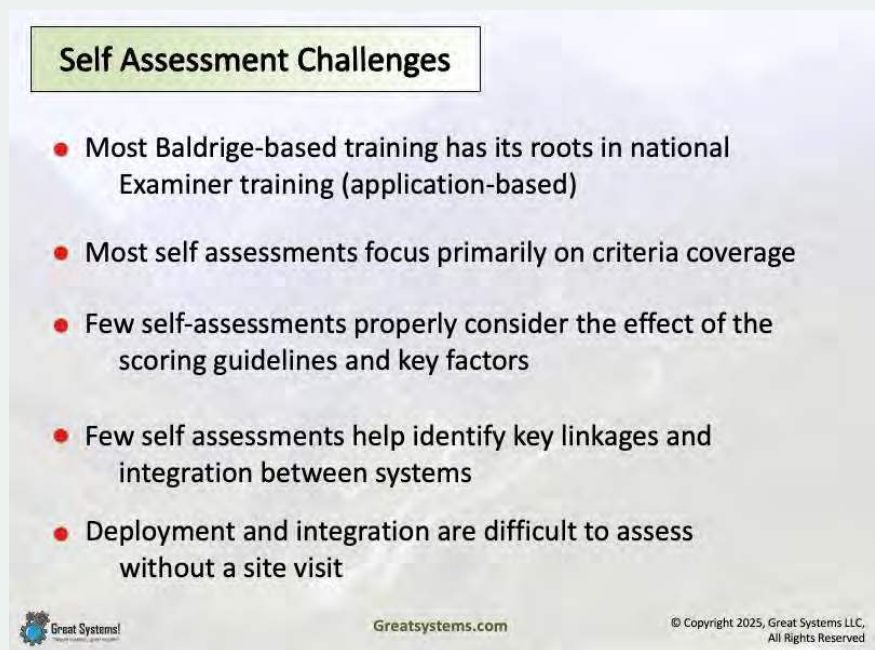
Would You Like Help as You Use the Baldrige Award Criteria to Measure Operational Excellence?

Do you have questions about how to use the Baldrige Award Criteria to measure operational excellence? If so, message or email me at kevin@greatsystems.com.

We can set up a time to explore the five different self-assessment options. Also, I can help you determine which assessment best meets your current improvement needs.

In just a few hours of time, I can help you gain a much better perspective as to where your workplace might score relative to the Baldrige Performance Excellence criteria. Until then, you may want to check out some additional OPEX links of mine.

- [Five Essentials of Operational Excellence](#)
- [Operational Excellence Barriers](#)
- [Ten Ways to Change Your Work Culture](#)



Self Assessment Challenges

- Most Baldrige-based training has its roots in national Examiner training (application-based)
- Most self assessments focus primarily on criteria coverage
- Few self-assessments properly consider the effect of the scoring guidelines and key factors
- Few self assessments help identify key linkages and integration between systems
- Deployment and integration are difficult to assess without a site visit

Great Systems! Greatsystems.com © Copyright 2025, Great Systems LLC, All Rights Reserved

About the author

As Chief Excellence Officer of Great Systems LLC, Kevin McManus provides virtual coaching and content to help people use proven best practices to enhance and optimize their daily work systems.

Over forty years of work experience in roles such as Industrial Engineer, Training Manager, Production Manager, Plant Manager, and Director of Quality give Kevin a 'real life work' perspective relative to daily work process optimization, work team engagement and empowerment, and sustainable operational excellence.



As a contract trainer for the TapRoot® root cause analysis process, Kevin has taught over 450 courses and further enhanced his ability to help leaders proactively minimize risk, reduce errors, and improve reliability. Kevin holds an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering and an MBA. He served as a national Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence Award Examiner for twenty years, including a three-year term on the national Judge's Panel.

Kevin has authored the monthly performance improvement column for Industrial and Systems Engineer magazine for over 20 years, is an Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineering Fellow and has been a member of IISE for over forty years. His newest book, "Different Company – How the Best Build Great Organizations", will be published in late 2025.

If you would like more information about the improvement tools and systems I have to offer, please send me an e-mail at kevin@greatsystems.com.

[LIKE Great Systems on Facebook](#)

[CONNECT with me on LinkedIn](#)

[CHECK OUT my Amazon.com Author Page](#)

[FOLLOW me on Twitter: @greatsystems](#)

[LISTEN to my 'Real Life Work' podcast](#)

[WATCH over 70 continuous improvement videos on my Great Systems YouTube channel](#)

[LEARN MORE from my 'Best Practice Work System Downloads](#)

"The first step on the road to high performance begins with a choice."

Kevin McManus, Great Systems!



Great Continuous Improvement Books by Kevin McManus!



Pursuing Process Excellence

- 150 pages of ideas and examples that will help you accelerate and sustain your process improvement efforts
- Over 25 examples of 'best practice' assessment tools that leaders can use to encourage and support high performance work
- 12 team exercises that you can use to begin applying each concept as it is learned



Mistake Proofing and Corrective Action Writing

- 156 pages of exercises, tools, and examples to help you learn about and practice the fundamentals of mistake proofing and corrective action writing
- 14 exercises you can use to practice the five key mistake proofing tactics and identify tasks and processes to target for improvement
- Over 100 proven techniques to help minimize the risk and error potential associated with daily job completion



Error Proof

- 162 pages of examples, strategies and dialogue questions to help you stop daily goofs for good
- Over 100 proven best practices that you can use to help error proof your key work processes
- Can be paired with the 100-page workshop workbook that contains 13 team exercises to help you begin applying key ideas



Facilitating and Leading Teams

- 182 pages of ideas, tools, and examples to help you improve work team, project team, and focus team effectiveness
- 10 assessments that will help you identify areas of strength and weakness relative to work and project team support
- Over 20 team exercises that will help you optimize your use of teams and improve meeting effectiveness, while also practicing your facilitation skills



Lean Tool Use Basics

- 150 pages of exercises, tools, and examples to help you learn about and practice the fundamentals of lean thinking
- 13 exercises you can practice to learn more about using the five key lean tools, creating a lean culture, and planning for lean success
- Two assessments to help you gauge the degree of support your lean efforts require and how much progress you make

kevin@greatsystems.com
206.226.8913

greatsystems.com

