Analyzing performance in the UAE manufacturing industry using the high performance organization framework

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Abstract

In the past 15 years there has been a strong drive for excellence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, in their strive for excellence UAE organizations depend heavily on excellence frameworks developed in the Western world. But when applying these management techniques one has to take into account the context in which they are used as literature has shown that Western management techniques cannot indiscriminately be transferred into non-Western contexts. This article describes exploratory research in which an HPO framework, as developed by de Waal (2006, 2012) is tested in the UAE context at a manufacturing company, in order to gauge whether this framework can be used successfully at an UAE organization to evaluate this organization's performance and to point out improvements. The research results showed that the HPO Framework is able to accurately evaluate the situation of this manufacturing company and to yield targeted recommendations to improve the performance of the company.

Key words: high performance organizations, HPO Framework, United Arab Emirates, organizational performance, manufacturing industry

Introduction

In the past years there has been a strong drive for excellence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (McLaurin and Mitias, 2008; Rashid Al Maktoum, 2012). The rulers of the Emirates have introduced several excellence awards, both for the public and private sectors. As a result, terms such as efficiency, effectiveness, customer service and total quality management are much used in the local business world (Al Gergawi, 2009; Mansour and Jakka, 2013). In their strive for excellence UAE organizations depend heavily on excellence frameworks developed in the Western world, such as the Malcolm Baldrige Excellence model and the EFQM (European Foundation of Quality Model). However, when applying these management techniques one has to take into account the context in which they are used (Holtbrügge, 2013; Rees-Caldwell and Pinnington, 2013). Literature has shown that Western management techniques cannot indiscriminately be transferred into non-Western contexts as these techniques might not work or work in a different way in these non-Western contexts, because of the impact of local culture (Elbanna and Gherib, 2012; Matic 2008; Palrecha, 2009; Wang, 2010). At the same time research on globalization increasingly finds that the transfer of especially Western management techniques - which started to get traction with the increase of multinational and global companies - is leading to similar patterns of behavior in Western and non-Western organizations. This opens an avenue for high performance techniques - developed in the West - to be applied in the UAE (Bowman et al., 2000; Costigan et al., 2005; Zagersek et al., 2004).

This article describes exploratory research in which an HPO framework, as developed by de Waal (2006, 2012) is tested in the UAE context, in order to gauge whether this framework

can be used successfully at a UAE organization to evaluate this organization's performance and to point out improvements. The research question is therefore formulated as follows: Can de Waal's HPO Framework be used to evaluate the performance of a UAE organization and to come up with tangible recommendations? This HPO Framework has been previously applied twice at UAE organizations, but only to identify best practices and best ideas. In this article the HPO Framework is used to the full extent (which entails conducting a questionnaire, interviews, and a feedback workshop with management) for the first time at an organization in the UAE, to evaluate its performance and to identify areas for improvement. The theoretical contribution of this research can be found in the extension of knowledge about how to implement HPO frameworks in the Middle Eastern context and about the cultural aspects which play a role in such implementations. The practical contribution will be that other UAE organizations can start using the HPO Framework as the basis for their improvement efforts, and that managers applying such frameworks can prepare themselves for the cultural aspects which might influence such improvement efforts.

High Performance Research in the UAE

Because of the strong drive for excellence in the UAE it does not come as a surprise that there is quite a lot of academic literature on excellence and (high) performance in the UAE. For instance, Siddique (2004) examined the impact of job analysis on organizational performance among 148 UAE companies and found that a practice of proactive job analysis - supported by: good HR information systems, an HR department heavily involved in strategic planning, and a strong emphasis on competency-based characteristics of employees - was strongly related to performance. Behery (2011) looked at the impact of high involvement work practices on trust and commitment in a service organization in the UAE and found a positive relation. Elbanna (2012) examined in 174 public and private UAE organizations whether slack and planning (comprehensiveness of strategic decision making and extensiveness of strategic planning) contributed towards organizational performance, and found that both slack and comprehensiveness were predictors of performance and that this performance varied with the age of an organization. This same result was basically found by Fadol et al. (2015) who looked at the mediating role of extensiveness of strategic planning on the relationship between slack resources and organizational performance in UAE hospitals. These authors found that the positive relationship between slack resources and organizational performance was indeed mediated by the effort that was put into the strategic planning process.

Whiteoak and Manning (2012) investigated the relationship between employees' perceptions of supervisors' emotional intelligence and organizational outcomes in a government-run UAE organization. They uncovered that supervisors' emotional intelligence was related to higher job satisfaction and group task satisfaction, which in turn were related to higher workgroup attachment, which was related to better organizational performance. Suliman and Al Harethi (2013) examined the relationship between perceived work climate and work performance in a UAE security organization, and found that

organizational climate and its components significantly predicted work performance. Abdalla Alfaki and Ahmed (2013) assessed the impact of information and communication technology (ICT) and education on improving the technological readiness of UAE organizations and on strengthening the global competitiveness of the UAE. They concluded that ICT and education increased productivity and competitiveness of a UAE organization, but also that the UAE was still lagging behind most transformation economies with regards to technological readiness which impeded the country's ability to absorb, adapt and create new technology and knowledge. Al-Ansaari et al. (2015) examined the role of a particular strategic orientation (technology, alliance, market orientation) of 200 small and medium-sized enterprises in the UAE, and found that market orientation had a more positive effect on business performance compared to technology and alliance orientations. Suliman and Kathairi (2013) examined the links between organizational justice, organizational commitment (i.e. employees' loyalty) and job performance in three UAE government organizations, and found a positive relation between these factors. Shah and Dubey (2013) studied the relationship between market orientation (involving gathering intelligence about customers, competitors, channels, and intermediaries and disseminating that intelligence through various functions of an organization for implementation) and organizational performance in the financial sector of the UAE, and uncovered a strong positive correlation. Pettaway et al. (2015) identified six dimensions shaping employees' perceptions of organizational effectiveness in a UAE institution of higher education, being a holistic impression of the organizational effectiveness of the institution; opinion of employee convenience services; views concerning employee involvement; perception of the security and appearance of the campus; opinion regarding the helpfulness of employee support services; and the organization's focus on continuous improvement. Zacca et al. (2015) measured the impact of network capability (NC) on the performance of small enterprises in the UAE through knowledge creation and two dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation (competitive aggressiveness and innovativeness). They found that NC was positively related to knowledge creation and competitive aggressiveness and innovativeness were key mediators between knowledge creation and firm performance. Al-Dhaafri et al. (2016) looked at the joint effect of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) and total quality management (TQM) on the performance of the Dubai Police, and confirmed the positive effect of EO and TQM on organizational performance.

When looking at the literature discussed, it is conspicuous that the majority of studies are not holistic of nature, i.e. they do not look at the complete picture of the potential relationships of the processes, resources and culture in the organization and organizational outcomes, but only at possible links between a specific organizational item and performance. This type of specialist research is valuable but it does not provide a complete overview of the factors that mutually influence the performance of UAE organizations. There is therefore a risk that a UAE organization starts to focus on one factor in isolation without knowing its effects (either positive or detrimental) on other factors in the organization and in the end on organizational performance. Only three research studies found seemed to be of a holistic nature. Abdulla Badri et al. (2006) empirically

tested the causal relationships between the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) Education Performance Excellence Criteria and organizational outcomes for 15 UAE universities and colleges. They confirmed that all their hypothesized causal relationships in the Baldrige model were statistically significant, with leadership being the key driver for all components in the Baldrige System. De Waal et al. (2014) analyzed the effectiveness of the internal and external processes of a UAE training company against a framework of high-performance organization characteristics, and thus uncovered best practices based on the company's underlying strengths and also identified opportunities for improvement. In a similar vein, de Waal and Frijns (2014) looked at the workings of a subsidiary of a multinational enterprise operating in the UAE using the same HPO Framework, and found that the applied framework could successfully be used to evaluate the performance and the underlying processes which created this performance of the case company. Thus de Waal's HPO Framework, which is of a generic and holistic nature, has been applied successfully twice in the UAE context. However, the framework was only used to identify best practices and best ideas without applying a full diagnosis, which entails conducting a questionnaire, interviews, and a feedback workshop. In this study we apply de Waal's HPO Framework for the first time fully to evaluate the mechanisms and performance of a manufacturing company in the UAE. In the next section, the HPO Framework is introduced.

Theoretical Framework: the HPO Framework

The High Performance Organization (HPO) framework was developed based on a descriptive literature review (Phase 1) and an empirical study in the form of a worldwide questionnaire (Phase 2) (de Waal, 2006 rev. 2010, 2012a+b). The first phase of the study consisted of collecting the studies on high performance and excellence that were to be included in the empirical study. Criteria for including studies in the research were that the study: (1) was aimed specifically at identifying HPO factors or best practices; (2) consisted of either a survey with a sufficient large number of respondents, so that its results could be assumed to be (fairly) generic, or of in-depth case studies of several companies so the results were at least valid for more than one organization; (3) employed triangulation by using more than one research method; and (4) included written documentation containing an account and justification of the research method, research approach and selection of the research population, a well-described analysis, and retraceable results and conclusions allowing assessment of the quality of the research method. The literature search yielded 290 studies which satisfied all or some of the four criteria. The identification process of the HPO characteristics consisted of a succession of steps. First, elements were extracted from each of the publications that the authors themselves regarded as essential for high performance. These elements were then entered in a matrix which listed all the factors included in the framework. Because different authors used different terminologies in their publications, similar elements were placed in groups under a factor and each group - later to be named 'characteristic'- was given an appropriate description. Subsequently, a matrix was constructed for each factor listing a number of characteristics. A total of 189 characteristics were identified. After that, the

'weighted importance', i.e. the number of times a characteristic occurred in the individual study categories, was calculated for each of the characteristics. Finally, the characteristics with a weighted importance of at least six percent were chosen as the HPO characteristics that potentially make up a HPO, these were 54 characteristics.

In Phase 2 the 54 potential HPO characteristics were included in a questionnaire which was administered during lectures and workshops given to managers by the author and his colleagues all over the world. The respondents of the questionnaire were asked to indicate how well their organization performed on the various HPO characteristics on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent) and also how its organizational results compared with its peer group. Two types of competitive performance were established (Matear et al., 2004): (1) Relative Performance (RP) versus competitors: RP = 1 - ([RPT - RPW] / [RPT]), in which RPT = total number of competitors and RPW = number of competitors with worse performance; (2) Historic Performance (HP) of the past five years (possible answers: worse, the same, or better). These subjective measures of organizational performance are accepted indicators of real performance (Dawes, 1999; Heap and Bolton, 2004; Jing and Avery, 2008). The questionnaire yielded 2,015 responses of 1,470 organizations. With a correlation analysis and a factor analysis 35 characteristics with both a significant and a strong correlation with organizational performance were extracted and identified, and categorized in five factors. The factor scales showed acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 1998) with Cronbach alpha values close to or above 0.70. These five factors and their accompanying 35 characteristics show a direct and positive relationship with the competitive performance of the organization. The factors have since 2007 been validated for many countries, based on data collected worldwide from approximately 3,000 organizations, both profit and non-profit. Therefore it is important to mention that they basically remain unchanged regardless of the type of organization being diagnosed, the type of industry involved, or the country in which the organization is based.

The research yielded the following definition of an HPO: "an organization that achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of time of five years or more, by focusing in a disciplined way on that which really matters to the organization" (de Waal, 2012, p.5). The five HPO factors are:

1. Management Quality. Belief and trust in others and fair treatment are encouraged in an HPO. Managers are trustworthy, live with integrity, show commitment, enthusiasm, and respect, and have a decisive, action-focused decision-making style. Management holds people accountable for their results by maintaining clear accountability for performance. Values and strategy are communicated throughout the organization, so everyone knows and embraces these.

2. Openness and Action-Orientation. An HPO has an open culture, which means that management values the opinions of employees and involves them in important organizational processes. Making mistakes is allowed and is regarded as an opportunity to learn. Employees spend a lot of time on

dialogue, knowledge exchange, and learning, to develop new ideas aimed at increasing their performance and make the organization performance-driven. Managers are personally involved in experimenting thereby fostering an environment of change in the organization.

3. Long-Term Orientation. An HPO grows through partnerships with suppliers and customers, so long-term commitment is extended to all stakeholders. Vacancies are filled by high-potential internal candidates first, and people are encouraged to become leaders. An HPO creates a safe and secure workplace (both physical and mental), and dismisses employees only as a last resort.

4. Continuous Improvement and Renewal. An HPO compensates for dying strategies by renewing these and making them unique. The organization continuously improves, simplifies and aligns its processes and innovates its products and services, creating new sources of competitive advantage to respond to market developments. Furthermore, the HPO manages its core competences efficiently, and sources out non-core competences.

5. Employee Quality. An HPO assembles and recruits a diverse and complementary management team and workforce with maximum work flexibility. The workforce is trained to be resilient and flexible. They are encouraged to develop their skills to accomplish extraordinary results and are held responsible for their performance, as a result of which creativity is increased, leading to better results.

Appendix 1 lists the characteristics of the HPO Framework. The HPO research shows that there is a direct and positive relationship between the five HPO factors and competitive performance: the higher the scores on the HPO factors (HPO scores), the better the results of the organization, and the lower the HPO scores the lower the competitive performance. The research also shows that all HPO factors need to have equal scores. An organization can evaluate its HPO status by having its management and employees fill in the HPO Questionnaire, consisting of questions based on the 35 HPO characteristics with possible answers on an absolute scale of 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent), and then calculating the average scores on the HPO factors. These average scores indicate where the organization has to take action to improve in order to become an HPO.

The Case Company

The case company, which prefers to stay anonymous, is a manufacturing company based in Dubai since the 1960s. The ISO 9001 certified company manufacturers a diverse range of products and offers a range of services from its facilities in Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The company is one of the largest manufacturers of building materials for the construction industry. The company prides itself on manufacturing products to international quality standards, ensuring timely delivery, and providing exceptional service. The company has a robust Quality Management System that ensures that its products and services surpass customers' expectations and that continuous improvement is part of every operational process. In addition, the company stays focused on finding new ways to design, produce, sell and deliver quality products at economic prices. The company has approximately 1,000 employees.

Until 2009 the company had been growing both in revenue and profit but since that year the company was on a downward trajectory. From 2012 the downward slope halted and the company's performance stabilized and even increased slightly. In this, the company had more or less precisely followed industry developments in the UAE, in which until 2008 there had been robust growth (+8 percent per year), from 2009 to 2010 a decline (-19 percent per year) and in 2011 to 2013 an increase again (between +3 and +6 percent per year). It was projected there would be a continued growth from 2014 onwards, however international competition was also expected to increase. This was because of the increased popularity of the free trade zones in the UAE, joint ventures, and open trade policies which made it easier for foreign companies to establish themselves in the region. In addition, there was increased interest of local companies to move into the field in which the company was operating. Therefore, the company decided it needed to understand better whether the company had the factors in place to allow it to be competitive, or if those factors had to be improved and strengthened.

Research Approach and Results

The authors were approached by the company and after a first visit in which the authors and the company got acquainted, the company decided to undertake the HPO Diagnosis. The HPO Questionnaire was tailored by the authors to reflect the organizational structure, organigram and set-up of the company and then put in an electronic format. A link was sent to the company's contact person who forwarded this link to all managers and employees who had access to a computer. For people with no electronic access a special room with computers was set-up where these people were invited to partake in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, managers and employees were asked to rate the company on the 35 HPO characteristics, on a scale of 1 (the company does not satisfy the characteristic at all) to 10 (the company satisfies the characteristic completely). It was decided by the company's management to only survey 'white collars' (from Supervisory level and up) for the reason that the education level of the 'blue collars' was deemed too low to understand the HPO Questionnaire properly. Most of these workers were expatriates with limited knowledge of English, on average a primary educational level, and also had limited knowledge of the company as they only worked in the factory. In total, 183 valid questionnaires were received, out of a possible total of 220 respondents, resulting in a response rate of 83.2 percent. The scores of all respondents were averaged for the five HPO factors and the 35 underlying characteristics and put in a graph (see Exhibit 1), indicating the company's HPO status relative to an HPO and to the average of the HPO scores for UAE organizations as collected in the database of the HPO Center. To be considered high-performing, an organization needs to have an average score of at least 8.5 on each HPO factor (de Waal, 2012). As can be seen from Exhibit 1 the company was an average performing one, in line with other UAE organizations. In fact, as the graphs for both are the same shape, it can be stated that the company was a typical UAE organization at the time of the diagnosis.

Subsequently, twenty one-hour interviews were conducted by two of the authors with managers and employees, at the Dubai and Sharjah locations. Notes were taken during the interviews while confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees. The authors analyzed the data from the questionnaires and the interviews, to identify areas where the case company performed well and areas where the company could improve. After this, based on the analysis, a feedback presentation was given to the management of the company. During the presentation the analysis and recommendations were presented and discussed, and questions of the management team were answered. Finally, a draft of this article was sent to the company for review and approval.
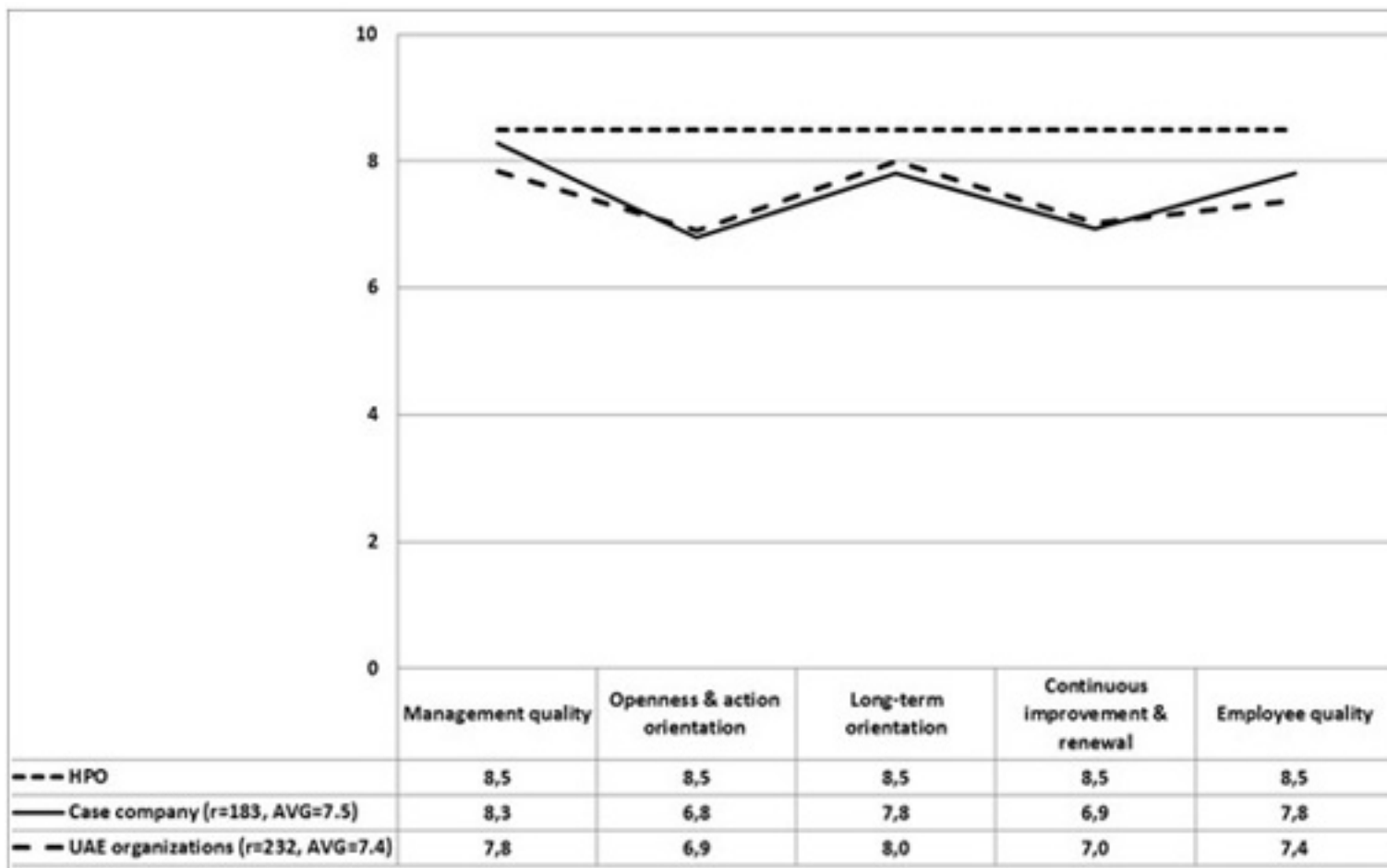
Analysis

The analysis first concentrated on the strong points of the company as it needed to keep and use these while working on becoming an HPO. The case company enjoyed an excellent reputation in the market, mainly because of its good technical workforce. In addition, managers and employees were loyal to the company, while at the same time the company was loyal to them and also organized lots of social activities to increase a 'family feeling'. As one of the interviewees put it: "This is a beautiful and unique company." The analysis yielded three main recommendations which were aimed to advance the company from an average to a high performing company.

HPO recommendation

1: Prepare managers for the future

Despite the high score for HPO Factor management Quality (8.3) it became clear from the interviews that many of the managers had mainly relied during their career advancement at the company on their intrinsic motivation and on self-development, illustrated by this remark from one of the interviewed managers: "I rely on my own knowledge and I take notes from colleagues ... but that is not enough." The company did employ a human resource manager but this person mainly had an administrative task, i.e. handling personnel information mutations and salaries, and was not concerned with the development aspects of the human resource function as management did not deem this necessary. Thus, many of the managers were seen by the employees as people with high integrity who could be trusted and who did their best, but who sometimes lacked the management skills to be resolute, especially with holding employees and fellow managers accountable, as they had never formally learned how to do this. The recommendation therefore was to prepare management for the HPO future by giving the human resource manager more maneuvering room to introduce management development programs focused on management skills and to make these programs mandatory. The main part of the programs had to be the introduction of the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, as this would be an excellent technique to make sure processes would be fully executed and the people responsible for these processes would be held accountable for their results

Appendix 1: HPO scores of the company versus the average scores of UAE organizations

	Management quality	Openness & action orientation	Long-term orientation	Continuous improvement & renewal	Employee quality
- - - HPO	8,5	8,5	8,5	8,5	8,5
—— Case company (r=183, AVG=7.5)	8,3	6,8	7,8	6,9	7,8
- — UAE organizations (r=232, AVG=7.4)	7,8	6,9	8,0	7,0	7,4

(Carter, 1994). A related recommendation therefore was that there should be consequences when people did not stick to the cycle and/or did not perform as agreed (Ferguson et al., 2010; Furnham and Taylor, 2011). Also, a promotion to management should always be accompanied with an introductory management training for the newly promoted manager (Sahni, 2011; Hendricks and Louw-Potgieter, 2012; McNeill, 2012). The programs could also be the basis for a coherent management team, i.e. a management team which speaks from one mouth and does things in a uniform way, for example by agreeing on standard operating procedures, taking time to understand each other, sticking to decisions, and communicating the same message to employees (Higgs, 2006; Hansen, 2009; Carmeli et al., 2012). This was sorely needed because one of the consequences of the organically grown management team was that there had not been enough guidance for managers in how to behave to each other and the rest of the organization, how to make sure a consistent message was communicated, and how to create a uniform way which should be used when dealing with (non-performing) employees. As the transition to HPO requires different behavior and performance on a higher level, the management team should give the right example to the people in the company and become a role model of HPO behavior (Kouzes and Posner, 2010). Working on this recommendation would mainly benefit the HPO factor Continuous Improvement & Renewal because management would get a more professional and tighter grip on the quality of process execution.

HPO recommendation

2: Increase morale of employees

As mentioned before people in the company were very loyal to it, illustrated by this comment of an interviewee: "People are not asking for an arm and a leg, just give them a finger and they will retire here." However, this did not necessarily mean they were satisfied with everything that happened in the company. The recommendation was to increase morale of employees by creating more transparency about the on-goings in the company. By providing employees regular updates on the company´s situation and explaining the basis for management´s decisions (which is not the same as asking permission of employees for these decisions), employees would feel better informed which increases commitment to the company (Gobillot, 2007; Detert et al., 2010). Management should also deliberately, when contemplating a change or update of rules, evaluate the consequences of this change for employees, then set the proper timing and make sure the employees are informed immediately. Another recommendation originated from a remark made by an employee who was interviewed, "We should not only grow economically but also with our heart", meaning that management should create more balance between their managerial interest in employees (i.e. about work-related issues) and social interest in employees (i.e. about personal issues) (Déniz-Déniz and Saá-Pérez, 2003; Mittal and Elias, 2016). This could be done by managers taking more time to understand and interact with employees, for instance through regular team meetings, and by having an open door policy which really invites people in but where managers themselves also go out to do regular work floor walking (Bufe and Murphy, 2004; de Waal, 2012). Working on this recommendation would mainly benefit the HPO factor Openness & Action-Orientation because management would create more openness in the organization.

HPO recommendation

3: Strengthen internal cooperation

Just as many other organizations, the case company also suffered from the silo-effect. This effect refers to the occurrence in which people view their membership and loyalty belonging to a certain unit of the organization and consequently they behave in a manner that benefits their unit but could be detrimental to the organization as a whole (Sy and D'Annunzio, 2005). This makes silos inward-focused, self-protecting organizational units whose 'walls' hinder collaboration and slow execution of processes (Stone, 2004). Therefore, the company had to cultivate cooperation between departments, by adapting the evaluation and reward structures so that these balanced rewards between unit and company results. Also, management had to look for synergy opportunities between units and divisions, discuss these with the parties concerned, and then make collaboration happen through creating sharing mechanisms within the company. An important part of fostering collaboration is to strengthen the feeling among the management team members that they together have to make the company a success and bring it to the HPO status, as illustrated by an interviewed manager: "Management is not a tennis game but a team sport" (Hansen, 2009). Working on this recommendation would mainly benefit HPO factors Continuous Improvement & Renewal and Openness & Action-Orientation because management, by fostering more cooperation and alignment in the organization, would create a higher quality of process execution and more dialogue throughout the company.

Follow-Up of the Diagnosis

The case company went energetically to work with the recommendation. Regarding recommendation 1 "Prepare managers for the future" it was noticed that people at the higher managerial levels tended to stay long with the company, in general 15 to 20 years and sometimes even until retirement. This however resulted in a motivation issue for people at the middle management level as they were not seeing many career advancement opportunities. As a result they tended to just stay and work with a certain inertia, without bringing much innovation and added value, or they would resign after some time. The HR manager therefore proposed several actions to keep these managers at the company and at the same time prepare it, in regard to its management quality, better for the future: start investing in the young generation by investing in campus recruitment campaigns locally and abroad so that ambitious people would enter the company; offer fresh graduates a graduate program whereby they would be trained and mentored by the most senior managers at the company; provide training for middle-management on-the-job; implement a new performance appraisal system that would help to identify managerial talent; and free-up senior managers from certain responsibilities to be taken over by middle managers who in this way got an opportunity to grow.

Certain circumstances influenced the approach to deal with recommendation 2 "Increase morale of employees." Just

before the HPO Diagnosis was conducted, a precious benefit was taken away from the company's employees. In the past, they were granted a Festival Leave whereby they got two days of paid leave for religious purposes. This benefit was taken away by management without any notice, announcement and explanation which was seen as very unfair as employees were working long hours and a long week as the company was one of the few organizations in the UAE to work a six-day week. In addition, the Festival Leave was considered by employees as a way to respect diversity and everyone's religious belief so management's decision did not go down well. This decision came on top of another benefit deleted by management a year earlier, to comply with local law. This concerned employees newly married who were before granted some days of unpaid marriage leave (sometimes up to thirty days) and a cheque of AED 2,000. These two decisions caused employees to start losing trust in management, and in fact enticed them to forget those times when management promptly took care of the neediest at the company. For instance, the company silently takes care of families of (ex-) employees who passed away, and pays for surgery and for medical cures for seriously ill employees thereby going beyond what is its responsibility as stated by the law. After the HPO diagnosis, the case company granted all employees a comprehensive medical coverage package which was put in place before this became compulsory by law, so this gesture was taken very positively by employees. In addition, management organized a year end party for all employees with traditional dances and food; and in 2016 the company switched to new working times so employees had alternate Saturdays off. Finally, in regard to recommendation 3 "Strengthen internal cooperation" the company started with organizing team-building activities so that people got to know each other better and were more willing to mutually cooperate.

Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research

The research question dealt with in this article was: Can de Waal's HPO Framework be used to evaluate the performance of a UAE organization and to come up with tangible recommendations? The results of applying this framework at the case company show that this is indeed the case: the HPO Diagnosis yielded an accurate picture of the current state of this UAE company and also originated several practical recommendations for improvement. The company's management team commented the HPO diagnosis to be insightful and objective, and found it to be a great starting point for their reflection on how things could be improved, starting from the main recommendations that quickly became the main focus areas to work on. The results of the diagnosis were also presented to the Chairman of the case company who appreciated these and urged the management team to indeed start improving things based on the recommendations. Finally, the HR Manager was the most satisfied person with the HPO Framework as it allowed her finally to implement several sorely needed changes. Therefore, we can conclude that the HPO Framework offers a holistic improvement framework which looks at the complete picture of the relationships of the processes, resources and culture in the organization and organizational outcomes, and therefore can yield tangible recommendations with which an organization can indeed improve its performance.

Despite the fact that the research question can be answered positively, there are several limitations to this research. As the HPO Framework was applied fully at only one company in one industry in the UAE, the research results cannot simply be transferred to other UAE companies in other industries. More research is needed in different contexts to be able to state that de Waal's HPO Framework is generally applicable in the UAE context. Another limitation is that the voice of blue collar workers at the company was not explicitly heard as they did not partake in the study. This could have created a positive bias, as from previous HPO research it is known that managers in general score higher on the HPO characteristics than employees (de Waal, 2012). Therefore in a next case study blue collar workers should explicitly be included. Finally, longitudinal research is needed at the case company (and other UAE companies) to evaluate if the recommendations which originate from the HPO Diagnosis in practice do indeed increase organizational performance.

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