

With the theme 'A Roadmap for Excellence' the 2018 APQO Conference also embraced:

- 3rd ACE (Award for Contributing to Excellence) Team Awards Competition
- 18th Global Performance Excellence Award
- 6th International Best Practice Competition
- Organisation-wide Innovation Award.

The conference was well attended – more than 1300 registrations, many from the UAE. Others attending from Australia-NZ region were Dr Robin Mann (Centre for Organisational Excellence Research [COER; and BPIR.com] at Massey University, and Kelly & Peter Nikolakopoulos of Sport Star Academy who were a finalist for the Global Performance Excellence Award. (Refer to Kelly's article in the last Quality Business). Russell Longmuir, the new CEO of the European Foundation for Quality Management, is also an Aussie but based in Belgium. Ravi Fernando, an AOQ Board Member, was unable to attend at the last minute.

Abu Dhabi was a natural venue for these meetings. The United Arab Emirates have a genuine commitment to organisational excellence that comes directly from the rulers themselves; excellence is built into the fabric of the country. Indeed, the UAE is the region with the greatest uptake of the EFQM. There were numerous accounts of improvement, benchmarking and excellence in sectors from across the UAE, especially public sector agencies. The goal is global best practice, commonly using the TRADE Benchmarking process, developed by Dr Robin Mann. (TRADE: **T**erms of reference; **R**esearch best practices; **A**cquire the selected best practices; **D**eploy them, and **E**valuate effectiveness and improve).

But it wasn't all Emirates! Other examples include:

- A number of Singaporean case studies, all supported Enterprise Singapore.
- The Tongan government is digitising all its services based on process mapping and associated KPIs, as the precursor for improvement via formal change management. This was reported by the relevant Tongan Minister at the Global Benchmarking Network meeting.

Such government commitment stands in stark contrast to the relative lack of government leadership in this area in Australia. Standing in for Ravi Fernando in a plenary session, Jeff Ryall observed that Quality is seen as yesterday's topic in Australia, and 26 years of continual economic growth has made us complacent.

Winning the awards is a strong driver for many regions, but not for Australia-NZ: we had only one contestant (despite the fact that all the awards except for ACE were ably coordinated by Dr Robin Mann from New Zealand!)

Dr Martin Andrew participated in a key role as a judge for the Best Practice Competition. There were some 37 presentations, limited to 8 mins + 4 mins questions from the judging panel. All the case studies were impressive examples of organisational improvement; they ranged from operation of the Dubai Courts, to separation of chemicals from crushed ore in Iran, to the operation of a hospital pharmacy in Abu Dhabi, to use of Quality Circles in a school in Pakistan. The best case studies were outstanding, such as the Dubai Police world's best practice system for vehicle fleet maintenance which was one of the five finalists (pictured). The winner was Jollibee Foods Corporation, a global fast food company based in Manila, for their incredible large-scale, global, real-time Voice of the Customer feedback and response system that generates a Net Promoter Score from patrons of >70%! Expect some disruption when Jollibee eventually launches in Australia.

We enjoyed some thought-provoking keynote presentations:

- Prof Hadi Eltengani (Chairman of this conference, and Coordinator General of the Sheikh Khalifa Excellence Award [Sheikh Khalifa is the ruler of Abu Dhabi and the President of the UAE] in “Building Excellence in the UAE and the Middle East: a review and update” outlined the history the various quality and excellence awards in the UAE. The secrets to success: leadership, leadership and more leadership!
- Dr James Harrington, a founder of APQO and a Quality guru, recounted how his father (an IBM executive) ran control charts on James’ school grades from the age of five – with corresponding rewards according to performance!
- Dr Zayad El Kahlout of the Dubai Excellence Program noted the increasing presence of women attending excellence events, such as this APQO meeting (also noted at Qualcon), and wondered if the next Quality guru will (at last) be a woman.
- Gianluca Mulè, Chief Operations Officer at EFQM, in “Excellence Builders and the Challenge of Megatrends” examined today’s megatrends and how the EFQM is adapting to accommodate them. One of the megatrends is ‘Over-regulation’; this is an issue raised at Qualcon 2018 which for AOQ is establishing a Special Interest Group to address.

APQO Conferences feature some impressive ‘pomp and ceremony’; government leaders contributed to the opening session and presented various Awards and recognitions. The Conference dinner opened with spectacular operatic soprano excerpts and concluded with an electric violinist playing popular tunes.

The catering was excellent including snacks and refreshments available early before the sessions started.

The social highlight was a bus tour to the Sheikh Zayed Heritage Festival, a permanent facility that is like an Australian capital city royal agricultural show without the agriculture – lots of food, business displays and displays featuring food, culture and products from various countries (including Australia).

The 2019 APQO Conference will be held close by in Bali, October 15-17. Why not plan to be there – perhaps join the AOQ delegation? And consider entering the competitions, as individuals, teams or organisations.