

LEADING WITH  
LOVE AND  
EXCELLENCE:  
HOW “WORKING  
TOGETHER” ©  
IMPLEMENTS  
THE BALDRIGE  
EXCELLENCE  
FRAMEWORK

*Debbie Collard, Susan Ireland, Sarah McArthur*

**T**he dynamic and rapidly changing business environment of today is challenging for everyone and especially so for leaders. We are often asked in our work with leaders at all levels how they can lead their organization while managing competing priorities and focusing on the most important things.

Our answer is based on our experience: Debbie's three decades of involvement with Baldrige, including guiding Boeing organizations on using Baldrige and a term as chair of the Baldrige Foundation Board of Directors; Susan's experience as a "Working Together" practitioner during her career, including on the Boeing 777 program; and Sarah through her role as Editor-In-Chief of *Leader to Leader* and "Working Together" partner with Alan Mulally. Leaders need a system. We recommend that system be Alan Mulally's Our "Working Together"© Leadership and Management System, which implements the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

The Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System is a proven system with a specific set of steps that are designed to be accomplished in a specific order, and which results in an effective, efficient, and successful organization. The Baldrige Excellence Framework is perfectly named as a framework, because it doesn't provide answers but instead asks a leader to consider how their organization implements all the elements of excellent organizations.

Think of the Baldrige Excellence Framework as a set of questions and the Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System as the answers that will help you and your organization perform at the top of your game.

We have had decades of experience with each of these approaches. Both address leadership and management

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*Our answer is based on  
our experience.*

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*Each of these approaches  
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of an organization, both cover everything done in an organization, and both are proven approaches. Each of these approaches was developed separately, the Baldrige Excellence Framework under the U.S. Department of Commerce National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System by Alan Mulally throughout his integrated life and career.

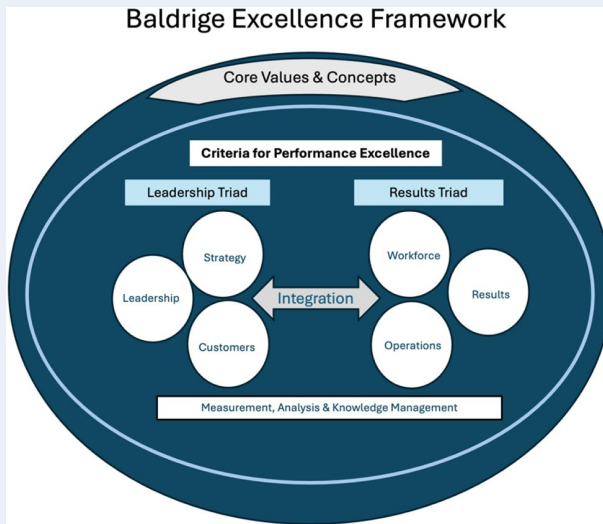
Though these two leadership approaches were developed separately, they meld seamlessly together to create a way of being, doing, and leading that is greater than the sum of the parts.

We start with our first approach, a framework that is available to everyone.

## **The Baldrige Program and The Baldrige Excellence Framework**

The Baldrige Program, as part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, oversees the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Named for President Ronald Reagan's Commerce Secretary, Malcolm Baldrige, the award was created by Public Law 100-107, in 1987, to recognize excellence, stimulate business, encourage sharing, and create an award program. In short, to help the United States become and stay more competitive in business.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework (depicted in Figure 1) helps an organization achieve excellence through understanding how to organize and address everything done in the organization in an integrated, proven whole-system approach.



**FIGURE 1. BALDRIGE EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK**  
[ADAPTED FROM [WWW.NIST.GOV/BALDRIGE](http://WWW.NIST.GOV/BALDRIGE)]

The Baldrige Excellence Framework includes Core Values and Concepts and The Criteria for Performance Excellence, which are organized into seven separate categories that address different aspects that contribute to achieving excellence. These categories are:

- Category 1 – Leadership
- Category 2 – Strategy
- Category 3 – Customers
- Category 4 – Measurement, Analysis, & Knowledge Management
- Category 5 – Workforce
- Category 6 – Operations
- Category 7 – Results

## Sidebar: The Baldrige Excellence Framework

“The Baldrige Excellence Framework® is the Baldrige Program’s signature product and includes the Core Values and Concepts and the Criteria for Performance Excellence®, a set of questions that represent the leading edge of validated leadership and management practice.” These U.S. Government Publications are helpful to those seeking to understand and achieve excellence in their organizations:

- the U.S. Department of Commerce NIST/National Institute of Standards and Technology website “How Baldrige Works”: <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/how-baldrige-works>
- the book *2023–2024 Baldrige Excellence Framework (Business/Nonprofit): Proven Leadership and Management Practices for High Performance* <https://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/baldrige-excellence-framework/businessnonprofit>.

The Baldrige Excellence Framework Core Values and Concepts are listed below. The definitions of the Core Values and Concepts are adapted from the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

- **Systems Perspective:** “Managing all the components of the organization as a unified whole.”
- **Visionary Leadership, Customer-focused Excellence:** “Valuing People, recognizing that the organization’s success depends on an engaged workforce.”
- **Agility and Resilience:** “A capacity for rapid change and for flexibility in operations.”
- **Organizational Learning:** “Continuous improvement of existing approaches and adoption of best practices.”
- **Focus on Success and Innovation:** “Making meaningful change to improve products, services, and operations.”
- **Management by Fact:** “Measuring and analyzing performance and the competitive environment.”
- **Societal Contributions:** “Contributions to the public and societal well-being and benefit.”
- **Ethics and Transparency:** “Ethical behavior in all stakeholder transactions and interactions.”
- **Delivering Value and Results:** “Delivering and balancing value for stakeholders.”

Although each category stands alone in focus, all categories are integrated together in the Framework. Further “The Leadership Triad,” made up of Categories 1, 2, and 3 (Leadership, Strategy, and Customers) and the “Results Triad,” Categories 5, 6, and 7 (Workforce, Operations, and Results) are linked and supported by Category 4, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management. The different elements of the Baldrige Excellence Framework interact seamlessly to help create and sustain high performance and excellence.

## Implementing the Baldrige Excellence Framework

Because the Baldrige Excellence Framework is non-prescriptive and can look different for each organization that uses it, it is helpful to see examples of successful implementation.

A comprehensive example of an implementation of the Baldrige Excellence Framework is Alan Mulally’s Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System as described in the Spring 2022 *Leader to Leader* journal article by Alan Mulally and Sarah McArthur, “A Conversation with Alan Mulally about His “Working Together”© Strategic, Operational, and Stakeholder-centered Management System” {<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ltl.20628>}.

## Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System

Similar to the systems approach provided by the Baldrige Excellence Framework, Mulally’s Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System is made up of elements that function together to achieve the outcomes of creating and maintaining a stakeholder-centered culture that implements the principles and practices and creates value for all stakeholders and the greater good.

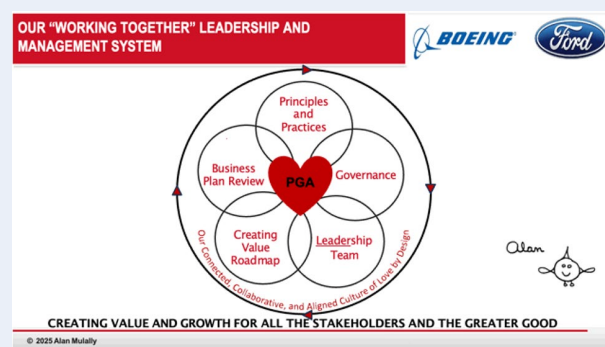
The Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System, as the title indicates, goes far beyond what we have seen in most leadership

systems. It encompasses the entire organization, sets expectations for how everyone will work together to achieve the mission and vision, in alignment with the organizational principles and practices, and it includes all stakeholders. In just a few descriptive charts, the Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System communicates simply the implementation of the Baldrige Framework in a way that is easy for every stakeholder to understand and implement.

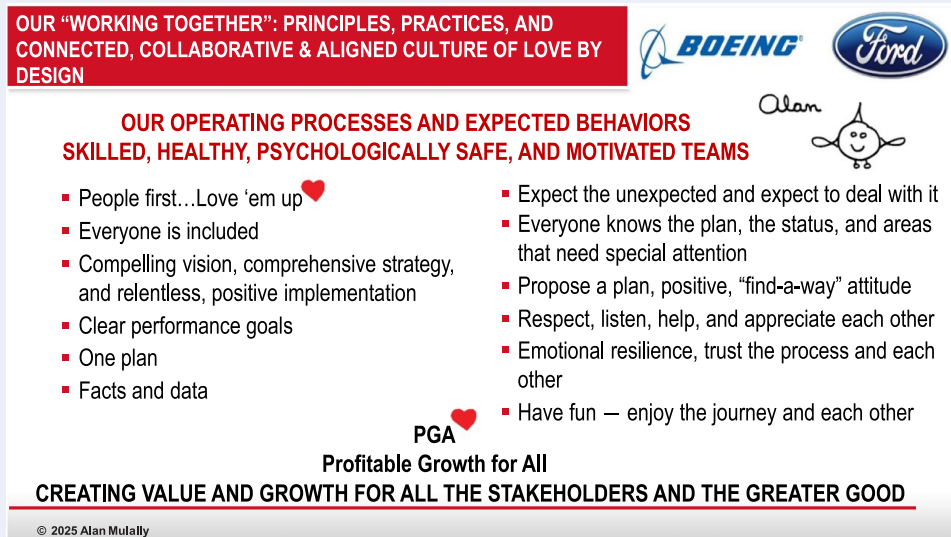
The communication and implementation of the Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System ensures that everyone in the organization and every stakeholder understands their role and holds themselves and their teams accountable. It creates a culture that enables achievement of plans and the ability to effectively adapt to a rapidly changing world.

The Our “Working Together”© Leadership and Management System (Figure 2) always works because it is easy to understand and implement, is scalable to any size organization, everyone is held accountable to the principles and practices, and the leader holds the space for the team to do what they do best!

Based on years of experience with both “Working Together” and Baldrige, we believe that the magic happens when leaders use Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System to implement the Baldrige Excellence Framework. This belief was confirmed recently when Alan Mulally received the Baldrige Foundation’s E. David Spong Lifetime Achievement Award for Leadership. <https://baldrigefoundation.org/news-resources/press-releases.html/article/2025/01/28/announcing-recipients-of-baldrige-foundation-leadership-awards-for-2025>.



**FIGURE 2.** OUR “WORKING TOGETHER”© LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



**FIGURE 3.** OUR "WORKING TOGETHER" PRINCIPLES, PRACTICES, AND CONNECTED, COLLABORATIVE, AND ALIGNED CULTURE OF LOVE BY DESIGN

Let's walk through how the Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System implements each element of the Baldrige Excellence Framework.

Both approaches start with a foundational set of concepts or practices. Just like the Baldrige Core Values and Concepts are the starting place for the Baldrige Excellence Framework, the Principles and Practices are the starting place for the Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System.

**Baldrige Core Values and Concepts.** These are beliefs and behaviors defined in the Baldrige Excellence Framework as "embedded in high-performing organizations..."

In the same manner, Mulally's **Our "Working Together" Principles and Practices** are the starting place of the Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System. They are what Mulally described as "What we believe in, and what we make come alive with our implementation of Our 'Working Together' Leadership and Management System." The Principles and Practices are designed to create and maintain a culture where people work together to achieve compelling visions and serve the greater good.

Figure 3 shows the Our "Working Together" Principles and Practices.

Collectively, the Our "Working Together" Principles and Practices provide a way to respond to the following Baldrige Excellence Framework® Criteria for Performance Excellence® categories.

**Category 1, Leadership.** The Leadership category asks how senior leaders' personal actions guide and sustain the organization, the organizational governance system, how the organization fulfills its legal and ethical responsibilities, and how it makes societal contributions.

## Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System

In Mulally's Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System, the overall integrated system addresses expectations for leadership and management of the organization. (The word leader is underlined to emphasize the importance of starting with the leader of the organization who is fully committed



to “Working Together.”) More specifically, the system elements of “Principles + Practices” (expected behaviors), “Governance” (how the team manages itself), “Leadership Team” (all leaders fully committed to stakeholder-centered leadership, vision, strategy, and holding themselves and their teams accountable), “Creating Value Roadmap” (vision, business environment, strategy, and plan), and weekly “Business Plan Review” address the detailed questions in the leadership category of the Baldrige Criteria.

**Category 2, Strategy.** This category asks how the organization develops strategic objectives and action plans, implements them, changes them as circumstances require, and how the organization measures progress to the strategies.

At the foundational level, Our “Working Together” Principles and Practices sets the stage for strategy, specifically with the principles and practices of: “Compelling Vision, Comprehensive Strategy, and Relentless Implementation,” and “One Plan.” Then, the Creating Value Roadmap element of Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System, which includes the vision, strategy, plan, products, processes, people, and Profitable Growth for All plan, comprehensively addresses the requirements for developing and implementing strategic objectives and action plans. Measuring progress to the plans and making changes as circumstances require are addressed specifically in the “Business Plan Review” element of the system.

In turn, implementing the “Business Plan Review” demonstrates and teaches the organization the overall Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System. In the “Business Plan Review,” the leader models the principles and practices and holds everyone accountable to do the same.

We described the “Business Plan Review” in great detail in our Fall 2024 *Leader to Leader* journal article, “The Business Plan Review – The Heartbeat of our Organization” {<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ltl.20846>}

**Category 3, Customers.** This category asks how an organization engages its customers for ongoing success,

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*We have experienced  
Business Plan Reviews  
first-hand.*

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including how the organization listens to customers, determines products and/or services to meet their needs, builds long-term customer relationships, and enhances the customer experience.

Customers are a key part of the stakeholder-centered Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System and are included in all five of the Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System elements.

**Category 4, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management.** This category asks how the organization measures, analyzes, reviews, and improves organizational performance and how it manages its information and organizational knowledge assets.

Beginning with the Our “Working Together” Principles and Practices element as a foundation and working through all of the elements of the Our “Working Together” Leadership and Management System, organizational performance is defined, measured, analyzed, reviewed, and improved on a continual basis.

The Business Plan Review element of the system is a weekly meeting led by the organizational leader with all team members also representing all of the stakeholders. Because all stakeholder groups are represented and report on progress to plan in the weekly cadence, the consistently implemented process enables the organization to manage information and knowledge in real time, while measuring, discussing, analyzing, reviewing, and improving organizational performance.

We have experienced Business Plan Reviews first-hand and are believers that this approach always

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## *People are the heart of the organization.*

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works. Managing a meeting with all stakeholder groups represented is unusual and we sometimes hear that it's impossible, though we know it is possible because we have experienced it in action. The Business Plan Review requires discipline and is the best way to work together comprehensively and effectively.

**Category 5, Workforce.** This category asks how an organization addresses workforce capability and capacity and provides a workplace climate to support high performance. It asks how an organization engages, manages, and develops the workforce to use its full potential in alignment with the organization's overall business needs.

People are the heart of the organization and are how everything happens. In Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System, "People first, love 'em up," is the first item of the "Principles and Practices" element. People are the ones that work together to accomplish what the organization is trying to do. This focuses on including, respecting, appreciating, thanking, and celebrating people for their talents and contributions. Another item of the "Principles and Practices" is "Everyone is included," which means that every member of the company's workforce is one of the stakeholders in the organization. While the leader creates the culture of the organization, people in Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System live and reinforce that culture every day.

**Category 6, Operations.** The Operations category asks how an organization designs, manages, and improves its products/services and work processes, and ensures operational effectiveness to deliver customer value

and achieve ongoing organizational success. In other words, this category is focused on how things get done throughout the organization to ensure success.

An overall question in this category asks, "How do you ensure effective management of your operations?" The implementation and consistent use of Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System answers this question comprehensively. Used as intended, "Working Together" ensures that from the Chief Executive Officer/CEO throughout every level of the organization everyone understands the vision, strategy, plan, and processes.

The "Principles and Practices" include: "Clear Performance Goals," "One plan," "Facts and Data," "Everyone knows the plan, the status, and areas that need special attention." Everyone in the organization works together to ensure effective operations of the organization, creating value and growth for all the stakeholders and the greater good.

**Category 7, Results.** The Results category asks about an organization's performance and improvement in all key areas.

By using Mulally's Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System, an organization is always aware of its performance, benchmarks, and opportunities for improvement. Specifically, Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System with its weekly "Business Plan Review" ensures that all the stakeholders in an organization know how it is performing and how and where it can improve.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout our careers, we have had extensive experience with the approaches described in this article. We believe that Mulally's Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System comprehensively and effectively implements the Baldrige Excellence Framework. When working with an organization to create or improve their leadership and management system, we start with the Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management

System, knowing that it is so effective in and of itself and also that it implements the Baldrige Excellence Framework, designed to help organizations achieve excellence. A winning combination!

Although Alan Mulally's journey is unique to him, you can learn from what has made him so successful and use his Our "Working Together" Leadership and Management System to effectively lead your organization in today's dynamic and challenging environment, manage competing priorities and focus on what's important. As we have discussed in this article,

when you implement this proven approach, you will also be aligned with the Baldrige Excellence Framework of proven leadership and management practices for high performance.

Leaders, we challenge you to include these approaches in your service, organization, and life today, to create a culture of "Working Together" to create value and growth for all stakeholders and the greater good. We wish you success on your leadership and service journey!

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**Debbie Collard** is Co-Founder of Seasons Leadership, focused on driving worldwide leadership excellence. She also leads an executive coaching practice as an ICF Professional Certified Coach. Leadership and performance excellence have been Debbie's focus throughout her career starting with the U.S. Air Force and including 30-years across all divisions of The Boeing Company, multiple executive leadership positions, and Chairman of the Board of the national Baldrige Foundation. Her impactful contributions have earned her organization multiple prestigious awards, twice including the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award—the Nation's highest honor for performance excellence. She co-authored the book *The Making of a World-Class Organization*.



**Susan Ireland** is a certified coach with extensive experience in leadership development and program management operations. Over her 30-year career at The Boeing Company, Susan served in pivotal roles, including 777 program management operations, gaining deep expertise in navigating complex organizational challenges and driving innovation. She expanded her impact at a hydrogen power solutions start-up, demonstrating how Working Together principles and practices can scale across organizations of any size. As Co-Founder of Seasons Leadership, she and Debbie Collard work together to champion global leadership excellence. Together, they equip leaders with the tools to drive results, build meaningful connections, and navigate challenges with purpose.





**Sarah McArthur** is editor-in-chief of *Leader to Leader*, thought partner and trusted advisor to world-class leader former CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes and Ford Motor Company Alan Mulally, and executive producer of *Defining Moments: The Life and Leadership of Quiet Revolutionary Frances Hesselbein*. She is author and editor of numerous books, including *Making Waves*, *Work Is Love Made Visible*, and *Coaching for Leadership*; advisory board member of the *Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum* at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public and International Affairs, founding member of *Marshall Goldsmith's 100 Coaches*, and former chief executive operating officer of *Marshall Goldsmith, Inc.*