

Considerations Regarding the Application of Management Tools in Public Institutions - CAF (Common Assessment Framework) in a Romanian Regional Context

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Abstract

The ongoing process of building an efficient government, transparent and citizen-oriented public institutions have become, in recent years, more interested in the promotion and introduction of management tools in the public sector.

Strategic reasons and efficient public management led to the European Community, to create a standardized tool for assessing the quality of public management and organization of administrative structures in European countries, generic tool called Common Assessment Framework, abbreviated CAF (Common Assessment Framework).

The paper deals with Common Assessment Framework - CAF as a tool for measuring the performance of an organization by establishing a diagnostic analysis and the ways that can be used in public institutions in Romania.

Regarding the introduction of CAF methodology shows that States have progressed to a certain extent, but self-assessment was only began to develop. It would be desirable for management tools to be implemented in all central and local government institutions - mainly for reasons of transparency, credibility and efficiency.

Keywords *Common Assessment Framework, managerial competencies, public institutions, quality management*

JEL classification: M10, M14

1. The CAF approach

CAF is a self-evaluation of the functioning of public institutions, developed in 1999-2000 by the Member States of the EU as a common framework for evaluating and improving the public domain government. The purpose of CAF is to provide a simple, easy and no cost to self-government organizations in Europe and allowing the use of best practices.

The public sector has to cope with a lot of challenges and has to respond to many new needs and demands in society. The scenery that the public European administrations have to face is in continuous evolution.

Innovation in the field of public services meets the demand of users, citizens and business: a demand for quality in the services delivered, in exchange

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for the resources given to public administrations for their operation. Citizens and business also request improved communications and greater participation and transparency in the administrative decision-making process, both nationally and at the European level.

The European public administrations need to equip themselves with flexible and innovative tools that allow them to answer to such demands in rapid times and with more and more diversified modalities.

Anyway, the process of modernization and reform that has to be undertaken, must be jointly designed and faced, even though with different points of departure, because the direction has to be common, the ways have to be compatible and the tools have to be homogeneous.

Due to these challenges and pressures, the public sector is subject to many reforms. "Over the last two decades there appears to have been a huge amount of public management reform. Although there was also reform in earlier periods, the changes since 1980 have – in many countries – been distinguished by an international character and a degree of political salience which marks them out from the more parochial or technical changes of the preceding quartercentury" (Pollitt, C., Bouckaert, G. 2000).

These reforms introduce new principles. A growing focus on efficiency and effectiveness, attention to transparency and accountability, awareness of public service delivery. Together with these principles, methods and techniques were constructed, focusing on one of these principles or trying to combine them. Techniques like 'management by objectives', 'cost benefit analysis', 'market testing', 'performance related pay', 'value for money' were introduced (Pollitt C., G. Bouckaert (Eds.) 1995)

One of these techniques, Total Quality Management, became a feature of the public sector from the late 1980s and particularly the early 1990s (van Dooren, W., Thijs, N., Bouckaert, G., 2004).

In the late 1990s, many quality models and techniques (EFQM, ISO ...) and subsequently the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) found their way into the public sector. In recent times, public sector quality improvements have appeared on the agenda of Eastern European countries (Engel, 2003).

The new EU Member States in particular are very active in promoting quality tools (Löffler, Vintar, 2004).

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a result of the co-operation among the EU Ministers responsible for Public Administration. A pilot version was presented in May 2000 and revised versions were launched in 2002 and 2006. A CAF Resource Centre (CAF RC) was created at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht following the decision of the Directors General in charge of public service. It works in close cooperation with the network of CAF national correspondents.

The CAF is an easy-to-use, free tool to assist public-sector organizations across Europe in using quality management techniques to improve their performance. The CAF is a total quality management (TQM) tool which is inspired

by the major Total Quality models in general, and by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in particular. It is especially designed for public-sector organizations, taking into account their characteristics.

The model is based on the premise that excellent results in organizational performance, citizens/customers, people and society are achieved through leadership driving strategy and planning, people, partnerships, resources and processes. It looks at the organization from different angles at the same time; a **holistic approach** to organization performance analysis.

The CAF has four main purposes:

1. To **introduce** public administrations to the principles of TQM and gradually guide them, through the use and understanding of self-assessment, from the current “Plan-Do” sequence of activities to a full fledged “Plan-Do-Check-Act (PCDA)” cycle;
2. To facilitate the **self-assessment** of a public organization in order to arrive at a diagnosis and **improvement actions**;
3. To act as a **bridge** across the various models used in quality management;
4. To facilitate **bench learning** between public-sector organizations.

Highly appreciated in the CAF implementation is the involvement of staff. CAF is a joint project for management and staff and very often CAF is the first occasion in which management and staff meet to discuss the state of affairs of the organization and the options for the future in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

The CAF has been designed for use in all parts of the public sector, applicable to public organizations at a national/federal, regional and local level. It may also be used under a wide variety of circumstances, e.g. as part of a systematic programme of reform or as a basis for targeting improvement efforts in public service organizations.

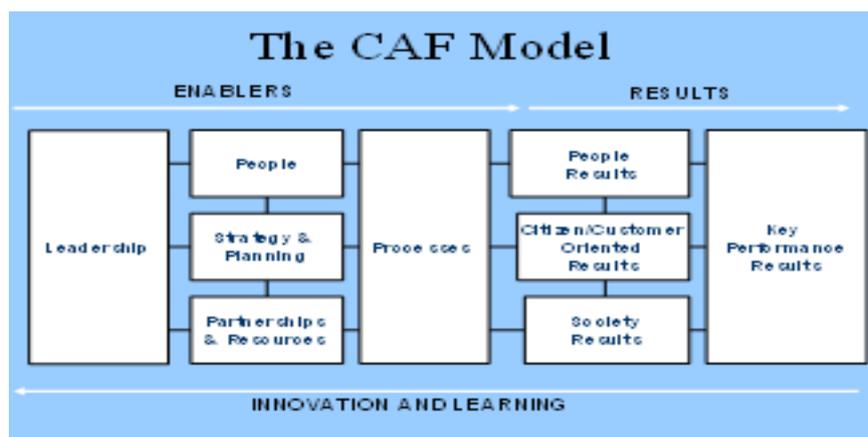


Figure 1 The CAF model

In some cases, and especially in very large organizations, a self-assessment may also be undertaken in part of an organization, e.g. a selected section or department.

The CAF constitutes a blueprint of the organization. It is a representation of all aspects that must be present in the proper management of an organization in order to achieve satisfactory results. All these elements are translated into nine criteria and further operationalized and given concrete form in subcriteria. On the basis of these subcriteria, a group from within the organization evaluates the organization (www.eipa.nl).

The CAF model was applied in many organizations or organization divisions in many countries. The organizations were spread across the various tiers of the government landscape (central, state, provincial, local ...).

In addition, the organizations originated from sectors ranging from the police and judiciary, across welfare and social sector organizations and education, to living environment, economy and organizations charged with coordination or policy functions. The size of the organizations differed from very small (10 employees) to very large (more than 5000), although we must conclude that the middle group is the largest.

The most important reason to use the CAF was as a measuring device to subject the organization to a quick scan in order to identify a number of strong and weak points, which will then serve as a launching pad for a number of improvement projects. This clear identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization is the most important added value of the self-assessment. This strength/weakness analysis can be further used as a basis to set up targeted improvement actions. In addition, matters such as an increased awareness of organizational problems, a better insight into the total functioning of the organization and the exchange of ideas in this respect appeared to be important aspects.

Many of the initiatives launched in the various European countries relating to quality management may be labeled as individual, ad hoc initiatives of the countries themselves. It shows a growing tendency, both in Eastern and Western European countries, towards a common language and a common reference framework. Quality tools such as the CAF model may serve as a framework for this language. By offering such a framework as a guiding principle for organization management, principles of proper management find their way into many administrations and many different countries (Staes, Thijs, 2005).

2. The use of CAF in Europe and beyond

The launch of the CAF has to be placed in the context of 12 years ago, when – as is still the case today – the public sector had to cope with a number of challenges and had to respond to many new needs and demands in society. Due to these challenges and pressure, the public sector has been the subject of large reforms. Particularly in times of financial crises and severe cost cutting in public

administrations, the focus is on efficiency and effectiveness, attention to transparency and accountability, awareness for public service delivery (Pollitt, Bouckaert, 1999).

Together with these principles of New Public Management (NPM), methods and techniques were constructed, focusing on one of these principles or trying to combine these principles. As one of these techniques Total Quality Management became a feature of the public sector from the late 1980s and particularly the early 1990s. In the late 1990s, many quality models and techniques (EFQM, ISO, etc.), and subsequently the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), found their way into the public sector (Van Dooren, W., Thijs, N., Bouckaert, G., 2004).

Following years of informal consultations within European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), there was an increasing need at the end of the 1990s within the European Union for a more intensive and formal response in order to optimize cooperation with respect to the modernization of government services in the Member States and the preparation for the upcoming enlargement. In 1997, this need was given substance in the formation of a steering committee at European level, which subsequently became the IPSG – the Innovative Public Services Group, acting under the aegis of the network of the Directors-General in charge of the public administrations in the Member States, the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN).

The preparatory work that had been performed for several years at informal level by the Directors-General, led in November 1998 to a ministerial declaration containing '*the general principles concerning the improvement of the quality of services provided to citizens*'. The IPSG working group then developed a quality tool specifically intended for and adapted to the public sector. This resulted in the year 2000 in the Common Assessment Framework – a self-assessment framework based on the principles of TQM and derived from the EFQM model and the German Speyer model. CAF was an easy-to-use and free entry tool for self-assessment in the public sector that could help public administrations across the EU understand and employ modern management techniques. It was launched at the first European Quality Conference in Portugal in May 2000.

Since the first launch in 2000 at the 1st European Quality Conference in Lisbon, many things have been achieved. In this part we provide a brief overview of the initiatives taken at European level up till now.

Over the past 12 years, nearly 2000 public sector organizations all over Europe have used the model and the number of CAF Users is still growing.

Let's see now the number of CAF users 2035 users widely spread in Europe and beyond. In bold italic: N° CAF Users registered in the CAF User Database on 26 August 2010. Between brackets: N° CAF Users according to the CAF National Correspondents

In many countries, public organizations express a big interest in CAF, e.g.

- France: 22 regions and 100 county fire and rescue services are inspired by several best practices.

- Lithuania: Thirty state and six municipal institutions are planning to implement CAF till 2015.

Table 1 Number of CAF users 2035 widely spread in Europe and beyond

Italy 322 (350)	Spain 44	UK 7
Belgium 284 (300)	Greece 39 (72)	Latvia 6
Denmark 250	Slovakia 39	<i>EU Institutions and EC 6</i>
Poland 160	Romania 33 (54)	Ireland 5
Portugal 112	Switzerland 20	Sweden 5
Hungary 104	Cyprus 19	<i>Russia 4</i>
Austria 90	Bosnia Herzegovina 18	Croatia 3
Norway 85	Estonia 18	<i>China 2</i>
Germany 68	France 16	<i>Namibia 2</i>
Czech Republic 64	Luxembourg 12	Netherlands 2
<i>Dominican Republic 54</i>	Lithuania 9 (10)	<i>FYR of Macedonia 2</i>
Slovenia 50	Bulgaria 8	<i>Tunisia 1</i>
Finland 50	Turkey 7	<i>Serbia 1</i>

In 2009, the CAF External Feedback has been created to further support organizations in using the CAF most effectively in their future quality management journey. This procedure carried out by peers and experts in TQM aims at providing external feedback on the introduction of total quality management with the help of CAF, not only relating to the self-assessment process, but also regarding the path organizations have chosen to attain excellence in the long run.

3. The use of CAF in Romania

The existence of an efficient public administration in Romania represents one of the most important criteria that define a modern country. This was the main idea of creating real evaluation systems for the institutions/organizations within the public sector. Considering these aspects, for Romania, it is very important to make a real reform through which the Romanian public administration will achieve the European standards and will be characterized by transparency, predictability, responsibility, adaptability and efficiency.

CAF purpose is to give support to the public sector organizations in planning an auto-evaluation exercise, in order to identify exactly which are the domains that should be improved and to select the best way to do it. CAF gives a clear and a realistic diagnostic on the way of the institution functioning.

Since 2005, the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (UCRAP), within Ministry of Public Administration and Interior in Romania, coordinates the reform process in Romania, has started the process of introducing this modern instrument - Common Assessment Framework (CAF) both at the central and local level (Ministries, Prefectures and County Councils). In this way, at CUPAR level has been created a CAF team responsible for introducing it in public

administration. At operational level, CAF implementation process focused on establishing a clear activities plan for 2005 and 2006, in which all the activities, prerogatives and tasks foreseen for CAF members within CUPAR, were detailed. For a better and faster understanding of CAF and the way it can be applied in public administration, CAF team has elaborated a CAF brochure, which is structured on questions and answers format.

The introducing efforts of this instrument within public administration in Romania had been continued by training sessions on CAF for prefects and sub-prefects from the 42 Counties, followed by training sessions for the civil servants within Prefects' Institutions and County Council. The purpose of these training sessions was to aware the participants, and not only these ones, about the importance of this instrument, about its advantages for their institutions.

The introduction of this instrument came as a result of the citizens' various demands related to the quality of public services. As a result of these training sessions, some of the Prefectures and the County Councils sent to CUPAR official papers in which they asked technical support in implementing CAF within their institutions in order to improve their activities and performance which allow them to deliver quality services to their clients/citizens.

In the Timis county, in Romania only one public organization using CAF: Institution of Prefect Timis County.

Following the implementation of CAF by Institution of Prefect Timis County, European Institute of Public Administration has identified as good practice „Specialty practice performed by students of the West University of Timișoara” to the Corporate social responsibility.

- Case presentation

Quality Improvement issues – the broader scope of excellence (i.e. the chosen principle of excellence).

Student practice is an important aspect in the professional development of the student. The lack of any kind of work experience is often considered a disadvantage for graduated students looking for employment. The goal of this intercession is to overcome the gap between the theory and practice in the educational system, by offering practical use of the material learned at the University.

- Case background

The partnership between the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County and the West University of Timisoara (WUT) is substantial for:

- consolidating the theoretical knowledge and training the abilities of WUT students to apply them in accordance with the specialization for which they prepare for;
- improving the employment opportunities for graduates of WUT;
- improving the activity of the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County by using the competences of the human resource available through the specialty practice of WUT students.

On 30 March 2007, the first Cooperation Agreement regarding the specialty practice of the students of the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy and Communication Sciences at the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County, was signed between the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County and the WUT.

In 2008, according to the Cooperation Agreement, a sociological survey concerning the level of information of the Timiș county population, on the fields of competence of the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County, was conducted by WUT students who performed specialty practice at the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County.

- The Actors

The Institution of the Prefect – Timiș County, the West University of Timisoara, the students., the faculty advisors, the institution advisors.

- The Measure of Success

40 students have benefited from performing the specialty practice at the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County in 2007, 45 students in 2008, 41 students in 2009 and in 2010 has began the specialty practice of 30 students.

- Lessons learned

The specialty practice offers:

- First contact with the "life" in an organization (rules of conduct, internal regulations, work procedures etc.);
- Student's specific practice in a domain accordingly to the specialization of both student and institution (public administration, communication, public relations etc.);
- Creating of a close link among the three parts involved in elaborating, implementing and monitoring of the individual training schedule: student, institution and faculty;
- Contributing to the development of the diploma project or of the dissertation project (for master study graduation) on themes agreed by the student with the faculty advisor and the institution advisor, themes that contain elements of interest for the institution.

- Project Innovation Content and Adaptability

One of the future objectives of the partnership between the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County and the WUT, is submitting a funding application through the European Social Fund, regarding a program of internship in the public institutions of Timis County. This project comes in response to the need of the students to gain work experience before finishing the university studies and to assess their skills in public administration, and the Institution of the Prefect – Timiș County will benefit from support for its activity, in terms of personnel undersize of the institution.

Given the real success of the project, new partnerships were formed in 2009 between the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County and "Tibiscus" University Timisoara and the Polytechnic University of Timisoara.

Also, in 2010, 2011 and 2012 the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County participated, as a partner, in the "Job Shadow Day/Partners for a day" program

organized by Junior Achievement Romania in partnership with Wester Technical College Timisoara. Job Shadow Day is an international partnership between the business community, public institutions and educational environment, designed to familiarize the young generation of employment.

The importance of these partnerships is equally significant for improving the activity of the Institution of the Prefect - Timiș County by using the competences of the human resource available through the specialty practice of students, especially in the context of a lack of personnel.

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