Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to stimulate interest in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), a self-evaluation quality tool for the public sector, to disseminate relevant experiences from CAF implementation in Europe, to offer ideas about CAF optimization and to provide a basis and direction for further improvement.

Design/methodology/approach – The methodology that is followed in the paper is based on the study of best practices (BP) of CAF implementation in European public administrations. The BP were selected in order to cover a wide range of political fields and to prove that CAF can be used by organizations in all parts of the public sector with different characteristics of size and structure.

Findings – Studying relevant examples leads to the conclusion that effective CAF implementation can improve the performance of public administration and help establish a quality philosophy. The paper shows that CAF is a tool that can be easily modified and adapted to the organizations’ special needs and characteristics.

Practical implications – The study of the selected cases and the related information that is presented in this paper helps to disseminate relevant experiences from CAF implementation in Europe. It offers managers of the public sector ideas and helps on how to implement the CAF model, by providing real examples of organizations that have implemented it. It also helps them understand the benefits from CAF implementation, as well as the obstacles and barriers that may be faced, in order to be better prepared for its successful implementation.

Originality/value – The value of this paper lies in the identification and presentation of several ideas and tools which have been successfully developed by European organizations and may as well be implemented by others. Ideas about modifying CAF and adjusting it into the uniqueness of every organization can be obtained only through careful study and analysis of its implementation.

Keywords Public sector, Best practices, Service quality, Bench learning, Common assessment framework

1. Introduction

Public administration function is a crucial element, many times a starting point of economic growth and social justice in a country. Rising challenges and demands of today European society have caused the turn of EU public organizations towards the principles of total quality management (TQM). In fact, the need for improvement of performance and results of public services has never been more important. The evolution of needs in European public sectors is a result both of the evolution of their form and external factors. Therefore, there is a diversity of needs as a consequence to the
various forms public sectors have across Europe. There are countries that employed a more rational use of their resources early enough (like Great Britain and France) adapting to economic, societal and political pressures while others (mainly in the south) undergoing such change nowadays. The first group is now addressing quality issues, while the second tries to reach efficiency standards. In a business context the parameters under discussion focus on the use of resources, productivity including efficiency and effectiveness (of policies, programs and employees) and third innovation and change. The needs first appeared to be technical or legal (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011), due to technology and science advances. Later on, New Public Management doctrine calls for business-like approaches to overcome global economic hindrances. Therefore, the needs focused on performance, financial and human resources issues. Moreover, public sectors became more responsive to citizens and businesses regarding them as customers. The purpose during this period is public service quality improvement, competitive tendering, performance-related pay, quality of integrated information systems and quality of information. Lately, especially by countries that have reached that level, great emphasis is given on effectiveness, evaluation, governance, transparency and public trust on behalf of sustainable innovation.

Business strengthening as well as citizens’ life quality improvement can be achieved through the use of TQM tools. One such very important tool for quality management assessment and improvement in the public sector is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The CAF model was developed in Europe over the last ten years and it has already more than 2010 registered (organizations that have implemented CAF) users, while it has been translated into 20 languages (Staes et al., 2010).

The Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), which was created under the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), presented the first CAF edition in 2000. A number of pilot studies took place among public organizations and its first revision took place in 2002 (Löffler, 2001). Later, the study of its use by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) among more than 300 CAF users (based on the first and the second European conferences in 2003 in Rome and in 2005 in Luxemburg) offered important information about its use in Europe and led to its major second revision in 2006.

CAF is a TQM tool that is based on and is heavily influenced by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model for Business Excellence and the related standard of the Speyer German University. It is a simple, costless and easy to use self-assessment tool, applicable to public organisations at the national/federal, regional and local level and it contributes to the introduction of quality management techniques in public administration. Through the use of CAF, every organization’s weakness or problem can be spotted, while at the same time its strong points can be brought in light. Through this systematic self-assessment, specific improvement measures are proposed, bringing change and growth in public services. Furthermore, its contribution to the exchange of best practices (BP) among participating organizations can boost public administration’s effectiveness.

CAF structure involves nine criteria which can be shown in Figure 1. Each of these nine criteria is subdivided into sub-criteria (a total of 28) which determine the main points of examination during the self-assessment process. Each subcriterion is, respectively, subdivided into a set of elements/questions (a total of 212) that better
describe it and are separately marked. Criteria are divided into enablers and results within which a “cause-result” relationship is developed.

CAF promotes the process of bench learning as a consequence of the completion of the self-assessment. CAF self-evaluation should lead to the design of an effective action plan for those areas in the organization in need of improvement. Bench learning through successful identification and study of other organizations’ BP, provides help for these action plans to become true. Nevertheless, simply copying these practices will be neither enough nor appropriate. Everyone involved in the process should try to adapt and adjust them to their own internal environment and working conditions so as for the implementation to be successful. Studying BP and adopting bench learning may turn into a valuable tool of public administration reform. Bench learning focuses on the different cultures and behaviors of public organizations in order to support performance improvement and attain long-lasting benefits. In fact, the special value of bench learning is based on the close examination and analysis of BP in its implementation.

Thus, the target of this paper is the identification, presentation and discussion of specific examples of European public organizations that have successfully applied CAF. The article aims to stimulate interest in the use of self-assessment tools, such as CAF, to disseminate relevant experiences and to offer ideas about CAF optimization. Thus, CAF implementation in practice, its obstacles and challenges, are approached through the examination and critical evaluation of selected BP. It is mainly about real organizations that have implemented CAF and prove the usefulness of this tool in action.

Ideas about modifying CAF and adjusting it into the uniqueness of every organization, as well as the improvement of the CAF model itself, can be obtained only through careful study and analysis of its implementation. The study of the BP presented below, shows that there are different ways to facilitate the use of CAF in organizations with a large number of employees, located in different places. Through their presentation, it becomes possible to detect elements and experiences connected to the reasons of CAF implementation, to how CAF works, to necessary adjustments to organizations’ unique characteristics and finally to the difficulties and benefits of its use.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a brief literature review on quality management in the public sector and the development and use of the
CAF model, while it refers to obstacles and challenges in CAF implementation. Section 3 discusses the research methodology that was followed, Section 4 presents ten selected “best practices” related to CAF implementation and finally, Section 6 presents the conclusions of the paper.

2. Literature review

Quality nowadays represents a valuable strategic weapon for politicians, scientists and administrative personnel alike, in order to improve the effectiveness of public services and citizens’ satisfaction (Singh and Mansour-Nahra, 2006). In fact, public organizations undergo great pressure in order to provide high quality services (Randall and Senior, 1994), to improve their performance, and to conform to government regulations (Robinson, 2003). Thus, a number of researchers have studied quality in the public sector, emphasizing the implementation of quality management systems in public services, the motives for their implementation, the problems during implementation, as well as the overall benefits that may be achieved (Robinson, 2003; Williams, 1998; Dewhirst et al., 1999; Lentell, 2000; Singh and Mansour-Nahra, 2006; Agus et al., 2007; Fard and Abbasi, 2010).

Literature is full of interesting reading concerning divergences and convergences between the private and the public sector, in terms of organizational structure, organizational management, human resource management, pay systems, employee satisfaction, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. A summary of this literature related to the differences between the public and the private sector, reveals several special features of the public sector, which are assumed to be the main causes for these differences (Dahl and Lindblom, 1953; Niskanen, 1971; Walmsley and Zald, 1973; Rainey et al., 1976; Ranson and Stewart, 1994; Farnham and Horton, 1996; Ferlie et al., 1996; Flynn, 1997; Vasu et al., 1998; Talbot, 2011; Fryer et al., 2007). These special features include:

- ownership (by the community instead of the private equity);
- financing (through taxes instead of customers’ direct payment);
- influence (by political forces instead of market forces);
- mission (public interest, equity, non-discriminatory access to services and probity);
- organizational goals (multiple, contradicting, not clearly defined, for multiple stakeholders, forced by the political rather than the management system); and
- audit mechanisms (based on legitimacy and accountability).

Donelly (1999) identifies the specific characteristics of the public sector that complicate quality principles’ implementation. He claims that the quality itself has a completely different meaning in the public compared to the private sector. While quality in the private sector is related to keeping current and attracting new customers in order to increase profits, in the public sector, increase in customers results in higher demand for the offered services, while keeping resources constant. That is why quality improvement in the public sector is limited to the improvement of the internal organization’s operations, instead of improving the final services in order to offer new and more services. Provision of new services in the public sector is mainly related to societal needs for such services, as well as to the degree to which these services are offered by the private sector.
While TQM supporters claim that large private and public organizations share the same bureaucratic problems and may equally benefit from quality management systems and tools, others believe that they operate under completely different conditions and have different needs and problems. However, many of these differences are increasingly fading in most western countries, eliminating managerial distinction between the private and the public sector (Löffler, 2001).

TQM and self-assessment tools have been greatly discussed in the international literature. In the case of the public sector, the basic sources of information for the CAF model are the sites of the related organizations. More specifically, CAF implementation is supported by the CAF Resource Centre (CAF RC), which was established in 2001 and operates under the supervision of the EIPA in Maastricht. The role of the CAF RC is both coordinating and assisting. It functions as a database of the best European administrative methods and practices, providing the ability of interactive communication among the subscribed members.

Promoting and spreading CAF, as well as sharing relevant experience, is achieved through quality conferences (QC), relevant seminars and official speeches. Every two years, beginning in 2000, QC take place in different cities (1st QC Lisbon, 2000, 2nd QC Copenhagen, 2002, 3rd QC Rotterdam, 2004, 4th QC Tampere, 2006, 5th QC Paris, 2008). Additionally, every two years, beginning in 2003, European conferences are held exclusively about the CAF implementation. Four such conferences have been held until this day (1st CAF users’ event, Rome, 2003, 2nd CAF users’ event, Luxembourg 2005, 3rd CAF users’ event, Lisbon, 2007. 4th CAF users’ event, Romania, 2010).

Based on Staes et al. (2010), the registered CAF users are 2,035 and they are spread in 38 countries both in Europe and beyond Europe’s borders. At the top of the class are countries like Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Poland, Portugal and Hungary. However, the implementation of CAF extends the continental borders to countries like the Dominican Republic, Tunisia and even China and Namibia. Also, there are European institutions such as the court of auditors and the Europol that have successfully implemented the model. Moreover, CAF implementation is obligatory in some countries such as Czech Republic (central level), Slovakia (central level) and Romania in order to encourage quality management in their central administrations (EIPA, 2005a).

CAF users according to the EIPA CAF database (Staes et al., 2010), come from all sectors of public administration, while the most prominent sectors are local administration (542 users) and education and research (403 users). EIPA has already identified this trend and has developed a tailor-made CAF version for the education and research sector. As CAF spreads further – in other sectors – it might be that in the future more of these specialized CAF sector versions will be developed (Staes et al., 2010). Similar efforts have been made by particular countries for certain sectors such as for example local government (Belgium, Hungary), police (Germany, Denmark, Hungary), the judiciary sector (Germany), voluntary relief organizations (Denmark), pension insurance offices (Hungary), etc. (EIPA, 2005a). In fact, it is interesting to examine to what extend these versions can be exchanged among the European countries and influence the sector-oriented versions that might be developed by EIPA.

Last but not least, CAF may be applied in all types of public organizations regardless of the number of employees, since it has been successfully implemented to organizations with sizes varying from less than ten employees to more than
5,000 employees (Staes and Thijs, 2005). Also, in large organizations, CAF implementation may also be limited to only one selected section or department.

On the other hand, the sluggish establishment of quality practices in the public services and organizations is amplified by the difficulties emerging when measuring outcomes, by the lack of free action and by the demand for legitimate decisions (Teicher et al., 2002). More specifically, Sotirakou and Zeppou (2006) have revealed 18 reasons related to the difficulties faced in the implementation of performance measurement systems in the public sector, which can be categorized in three main categories:

1. “Knowledge issues”, i.e. issues that are related to the lack of related knowledge in the public sector.
2. “Behavioral issues”, i.e. issues that are related to the absence of related values that will motivate employees in the public sector to implement such systems.
3. “Ethical issues”, i.e. issues that are related to ethics and lack of organization’s alignment to measures and actions that will assure the ongoing use of such quality measurement and improvement systems.

Choppin (1994) claims that there are five basic issues that must be carefully studied and worked out in order to adopt a TQM culture in the public sector and these are:
- clear identification of internal and external customers and establishment of related, clearly defined goals;
- simplification of the complex organizational structures in the public sector, in order to align the individual, often isolated, departmental goals with the overall organization’s goals;
- the development of a culture that supports organizational change and reduces lack of trust among employees;
- help employees to realize the link between their individual work and the overall service offered to citizens; and
- careful design of standardized work processes, followed by all employees, to avoid improvisations.

Especially, regarding CAF implementation in public organizations, it often meets obstacles that affect both the administration’s decision to start and complete the self-assessment project and the quality and reliability of the project. A list of typical obstacles encountered are related to difficulties linked to the CAF itself, to the maturity level of the organization, to lack of support and time and to the lack of information. The results of a research conducted by EIPA (2005a) on a representative sample of 133 public services, on the main difficulties – obstacles of self-assessment were proved that “lack of a measurement system” is the most important obstacle for successful CAF implementation. This is why the establishment of a similar system is often the first improvement action decided after CAF implementation. Also, many employees complain about additional work due to CAF implementation alongside their usual duties. A wrong understanding of the concept of the criteria and the scoring system, lack of faith in the whole exercise and difficulties in getting and collecting sufficient
data/information from colleagues are other obstacles mentioned during CAF implementation. The political and administrative support of the organizations and the appropriate communication strategy are crucial for a correct CAF implementation.

Furthermore, with regard to national and organizational cultural effects on quality implementation, in nations like Greece, Portugal, Belgium and Mexico, where people try to avoid unstable situations, they are not resilient to new ideas and they require sets of rules and regulations to feel content, the implementation of quality management systems is of ambiguous success, if the abovementioned aspects are not taken into account and properly resolved (Tata and Prasad, 1998).

For all the reasons described above, the European authorities in charge have focused their attention to the formal evaluation and feedback of CAF use. Their main aim is not just to increase the number of users, but also to help towards the correct, suitable and effective CAF implementation. Within the course of the “CAF external feedback”, external experts – the CAF external feedback actors – visit the organization and gather evidence on how the institution has prepared, implemented and followed up the CAF self-assessment process (Thijs and Staes, 2010). Going through this process, the organization will or will not receive the label effective CAF user (ECU), for a period of two times. This procedure was launched in 2010 and from now on the member states (MS) have to install this procedure in the field (Staes et al., 2010). This may actually operate as a starting point for changes directed towards a total upgrade of quality in public administration.

3. Research methodology
This article is based on literature review. More specifically, the information used in the paper was collected mainly through the internet and more specifically through the EIPA web site, the CAF Resource Center web site, the 5th QC and the 2nd European CAF event web sites. These web sites provide accurate and reliable information about the extent of CAF implementation in European public administrations, offering published studies, statistical analyses, results from related researches and a variety of related BP. Furthermore, conference proceedings from EIPA QC, European QC, CAF events and the International Conference of CAF implementation held in Athens, helped in identifying the ten selected BP which are presented in detail below. Especially in the case of the Region of Central Macedonia (RCM), information was gathered through personal interviews with both managers and employees, as well as through personal working experience of the first two authors.

More specifically, the ten practices that were selected are described in the following Table I, which lists:
- the organizations that implemented the selected practices;
- the country of the organizations;
- the selection criteria; and
- the sites with the related information.

4. CAF implementation – best practices
This section presents ten selected “best practices” applied by public services of different European countries. We chose BP in order to present CAF implementation examples per different country and per different field and sector of public administration. The selected
organizations not only implemented CAF, but they tried to differentiate and adjust it to their individual structure and status. Consequently, we found these practices in order to reach a deeper understanding of the process and the value of self-assessment and to show how flexible CAF implementation is and how interesting ideas can arise. Through their presentation it becomes clear that CAF may be implemented by every kind of organization – regardless of its size, and the amount and spread of its working staff.

These “best practices” are separately presented in the following paragraphs and for each one of them the paper presents some general information regarding the organization and the context of application, followed by the method of implementation that was chosen and the overall benefits that were achieved. Finally, the difficulties faced during implementation are only identified in five of the ten practices presented, since no related information was available for the others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best practices</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Selection criteria</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europol</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe how CAF is implemented in a multi-cultural organization where staff is spread in many countries</td>
<td>Janssen (2008), 5th Quality Conference, Paris, <a href="http://www.5qualiconference.eu">www.5qualiconference.eu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Market Board</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe the use of two assessment groups because of staff spread all over the country</td>
<td>EIPA (2005b, pp. 101-103), 2nd European CAF event, <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region of Central Macedonia</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe CAF as a part of a quality strategy</td>
<td>Tsotsolis (2010), 4th International Quality Conference and Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Directorates for Industry, Research and the Environment</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe CAF as an effective tool for detecting potential improvements and communication tools</td>
<td>Dearing et al. (2006b), <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Finance, Public Management Department</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe how important the evaluation of e-government when using CAF is</td>
<td>EIPA (2005b, pp. 126-128) 2nd European CAF event, <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Interior</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe the idea of an online CAF self-assessment system</td>
<td>EIPA (2005b, pp. 146-149) 2nd European CAF event, <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGAP and INA</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe the idea of training CAF agents</td>
<td>EIPA (2005b, pp. 135-137) 2nd European CAF event, <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Administrator’s Office Ebersberg</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe specific improvement actions after CAF implementation</td>
<td>Dearing et al. (2006a) <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CENTRE for Human Resource Development &amp; Quality Management</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe a CAF dissemination strategy</td>
<td>EIPA (2005b, pp. 149-151) 2nd European CAF event, <a href="http://www.eipa.eu/en">www.eipa.eu/en</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>We selected this BP in order to describe CAF as a part of an administration reform</td>
<td>Mitterlehner (2008) International Conference of CAF applications, Athens, 2008</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table I. Information about the ten selected BP
4.1 Europol: CAF implementation in a multi-cultural organization

General info and context. Europol is a European Union Law Enforcement Organization which aims at improving the effectiveness and co-operation of the competent authorities in the MS in preventing and combating terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international organized crime.

As an international public organization serving the MS of the EU, Europol is operating in a particular context. Without changing the compulsory elements of the CAF tool, some customisation was therefore necessary to implement the assessment. The main influencing factors which make Europol a unique organization are:

- Europol is a multi-cultural organization, with 35 nationalities;
- the organization is located in The Hague (The Netherlands) and has around 600 officials, approximately 500 are contractual Europol staff whilst the remainder are seconded liaison officers representing the interests of their home country; and
- the organization is accountable to a Management Board, composed of senior representatives of the 27 MS with the European Commission as an observer.

Three other specific control committees supervise the daily management of the organization.

Method of implementation. To implement the self-assessment, the standard CAF steps were followed, adapted to the Europol context. The project was communicated internally and externally via various channels. Europol used three independent groups of 12 volunteers to carry out the assessments. Europol staff and liaison officers were invited to participate. In this way, multi-cultural differences were converged.

Action phase. The assessment was carried out over three weeks by means of individual preparations, interviews and several consensus meetings. During a one day meeting, the three self-assessment groups met to “merge” the findings into one consolidated report.

Benefits. As an outcome, ten key actions for improvement were identified, together with nine “quick wins”. The nine “quick wins” are defined at Europol as ways to improve actual or perceived performance problems within a short-time period, three months, and with relatively little effort. A reporting mechanism has been established for these projects.

4.2 Labour Market Board – Estonia: the use of two assessment groups

General info and context. The Labor Market Board operates as part of the Ministry of Social Affairs. It has four departments and 16 Employment Offices. The aim of the Labour Market Board and employment offices is to reduce unemployment and provide assistance to employers and those seeking work by means of an efficient labour market policy. The essence of the good practice was the experience gained in using two assessment groups.

Method of implementation. As there are offices all over Estonia (in every county), the desired assessment group was too large (18 persons) to work efficiently. The establishment of two separate groups, with nine persons in each was necessary. In forming the group, they took into account differences in sex, age, length of service, position in the organizational structure and the geographical position.

Action phase. The self-assessment process was carried out in a period of one month. During this period four meetings were held, including the training session. Both assessment groups evaluated all nine criteria and at the end of the consensus
meeting, every member was given one criterion to prepare for the final consensus meeting. Group members from both sides were asked about their evaluations and briefly explained the arguments used in reaching them. Subsequently, both groups had to reach consensus.

**Benefits.** The use of two separate assessment groups is beneficial to organizations who want to involve as many from their staff as possible in the assessment process and whose departments are not located in only one place. Moreover, group members were better motivated by this process and they turned to be more careful when evaluating and commenting on the criteria, because they knew that there was another team which had also done the same work.

**Difficulties.** The self-assessment process met difficulties as regards the time schedule. All the employees involved should follow a very strict schedule. Moreover, there was a confusion as to whether to evaluate the Labour Market Board, the employment office or the whole system.

### 4.3 RCM – Greece: CAF as a part of a quality policy

**General info and context.** The RCM is a decentralized administration unit that is responsible for a number of competencies and resources transferred from the central administration, like planning and development, public works, control of construction works, environment and town layout, etc. Since 1 January 2011 the status of the region has changed and is transformed into a local government authority. The following section presents the activities and quality tools that RCM developed in the years 2006-2009 and which led RCM to the winning of the first National Quality Award during the second competition held in 2009.

**Method of implementation.** Under TQM’s directions, RCM implemented a series of actions that supported one another and they were later integrated into a whole. It all started with the establishment of the “quality and efficiency department” and the implementation of CAF. RCM and its directories (six directories in 2006, six in 2007 and three more in 2008) implemented CAF and thus, RCM took part in the European network of services implementing CAF. Through self-assessment, RCM directories spotted their strong and weak areas and decided on measures of improvement which were then included in their next year’s goals.

**Action phase.** Following and supporting CAF implementation, a series of actions were developed, which are described below:

- **Management by objectives.** The introduction of “goal setting” into the function of RCM’s services first appeared in 2006 and is now applied in all 42 departments of RCM. Quality improvement requires the definition of specific, mutually accepted and countable goals. This entire effort started with a number of actions that aimed to inform and motivate all employees and mostly the supervising directors. RCM participated in a project which aimed at the development of specific rates of measurement for effectiveness and efficiency. Each directory had specific goals to achieve – expressed quantitatively if possible – and their level of fulfillment was examined throughout the year. At the end of the year, it was possible to draw conclusions about the effectiveness and efficiency of the services offered, and to have data for the next “goal setting”.

- **Employees’ satisfaction survey.** RCM planned and performed a survey regarding employees’ satisfaction, which was designated and coordinated by the quality...
and efficiency department. The survey aimed at defining important issues that affect employees’ duties and create an effective communication channel between staff and officials.

- **Rewarding personal or groups efforts.** RCM made a step forward and implemented a system of reward for its working staff either in personal or in a team basis, in order to motivate and boost staff’s performance.

- **Benchmarking.** RCM decided to conduct a research in order to compare itself with chosen strong regions of Western Europe on issues of nationalisation, international networking and others when planning a relevant strategy. These results of benchmarking were then used to set future targets and improvement goals.

- **ISO 9001 certification.** The Regional Development Fund Department operates as a financial department responsible for the majority of projects performed in the region. In 2008, the department’s quality management system was certified according to the international standard ISO 9001:2000.

- **Continuous improvement of citizens’ service.** RCM takes advantage of every opportunity given by EU or other programs, in order to perform actions that are bound to have a direct impact on citizens’ satisfaction. Under this policy, two main programs were completed: the “One-stop shop for aliens” and the “One stop-shop for investors”. These two platforms inform citizens on the status of their applications and on existing opportunities. Furthermore, in order to evaluate citizens’ satisfaction from RCM services, a number of collection boxes of questionnaires were placed in the Planning and Development Department, where information is gathered regarding the quality of services provided to citizens by the employees.

**Benefits.** CAF and other TQM instruments helped RCM boost its productivity and effectiveness. The every year evaluation of certain objectives, the employees’ satisfaction survey and the rewarding system brought better management, time reduction, staff motivation and citizens’ satisfaction.

Due to the successful CAF implementation and its continuous commitment and efforts towards quality improvement, RCM won the first National Quality Award in May 2009.

**Difficulties.** RCM had some problems in TQM implementation because some employees were unwilling to participate. It was difficult for them to spend some working hours in order to take part in these projects instead of finishing their individual work. A better communication strategy was introduced by the Quality and Efficiency Department in order to make clear TQM benefits and maximize staff participation.

### 4.4 Regional Directorates for Industry, Research and the Environment – France: improvements after CAF implementation

**General info and context.** The Regional Directorates for Industry, Research and the Environment (DRIRE Aquitaine) perform a number of activities which come under the authority of the French Ministry of Industry as well as activities to stimulate business. The DRIREs are responsible for ensuring that regulations are properly applied by industry with regard to the environment, nuclear safety, industrial safety and the safety of vehicles.
Method of implementation. DRIRE’s improvements have been achieved by implementing a quality management system based on its compliance with the ISO 9001 standard and the CAF model. The results are measured both through CAF self-evaluation and through an internal barometer. This barometer is a periodic questionnaire that evaluates employee satisfaction and their perceptions regarding quality policy, while it offers an opportunity for employees to make suggestions. The results of self-assessment show weaknesses and malfunctions and reveal areas and ways for improvements.

Action phase. Each year, self-evaluation is led by one self-evaluator selected by the management committee. He/she is preferably chosen from outside the management committee and the basic criterion is the degree to which this leader is well accepted for his/her neutrality and ability to grasp the whole picture of the organization. The self-evaluation is carried out by a team of self-evaluators (3-9 persons) chosen by the leader of staff volunteers. After a half day training, each self-evaluator is given about 15 days to complete his/her form alone. The self-evaluation report is prepared by the leader and the self-evaluators’ consensus is achieved during the feedback meeting. Within about two weeks the leader asks the self-evaluators to specify pathways towards achieving progress and to propose lines of action. After that, the leader prepares the final self-evaluation report.

Benefits. Since their first self-evaluation, management has provided a certain number of internal communication tools to improve quality (internal letters, presentation meetings for new projects, intranet, etc.). Also, actions to obtain staff feedback have dramatically increased and various tools have been put in place in order to obtain customer feedback and measure customer satisfaction. Suggestions for improvement and for rectifying any weaknesses identified have been implemented systematically. Another route to improvement developed out of CAF is based on internal reflection. It has been possible to identify malfunctions during the product elaboration phase, non-conformities in design and difficulties associated with the organization or lack of training and deal with them more effectively.

4.5 Ministry of Finance, Public Management Department – Finland: evaluation of e-government when using CAF

General info and context. The Public Management Department (Ministry of Finance) is responsible for CAF dissemination in the Finnish public administration. Among other actions, a checklist was launched to help organizations to devote extra attention to matters of e-government when using CAF for their self-assessment.

Method of implementation. Although e-government plays a key role for qualitative services, at the same time, it is not given the appropriate importance when assessing the quality of public organizations. Thus, the Ministry of Finance provided a checklist of examples with respect to all nine CAF criteria, for the self-evaluation of e-Government.

Action phase. The checklist is also available in Finnish and Swedish on the homepage of the Ministry of Finance. On the same site, three other similar checklists can be found (human resource management, output/outcome orientation and service provision language policy). Some examples from this checklist are questions like these: how is the net service strategy aligned with the general strategic plans and operational objectives of the organization? How are the demands regarding net services recognised in recruiting and training personnel? What type of effects do the net services have
on the efficiency and quality of the organization’s processes? What is the customer satisfaction level regarding net services? How does the organization’s e-government facilitate the implementation of sustainable development principles?

**Benefits.** The CAF e-Gov checklist shows that e-government issues should be seen and assessed as part of the routine assessment of functions. The innovative aspect of this practice is the encouragement of organizations to focus attention on these high-priority issues in their self-assessment processes. The checklist has been very useful in highlighting some relevant important issues during the self-assessment process.

4.6 Ministry of Interior – Hungary: online CAF self-assessment system

**General info and context.** The introduction of the online CAF self-assessment system in Hungary was supervised by the Public Administration Organization and Civil Service Office of the Ministry of the Interior.

**Method of implementation.** The system operates on an SQL 2000 server. The individual components were developed in a Delphi 7.0 intraweb 5.1 environment. The local CAF administrators can download the original CAF questionnaire template, and if needed, tailor the questions to local specific features. In order for the system to work, the administrators require a sufficient number of questionnaires, which were identified by their personalized accounts and passwords.

**Action phase.** The respondent may start completing the questionnaire with this login information. Completion may be interrupted at any time, and may easily be continued from home, provided the respondent has internet access at home. The user may change his/her personal password, so that no one else can have access to the information while he/she is working on the questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaire, other user information can also be stored, if required, for processing. The manager software system allows administrators to review the surveys, as well as the questionnaire completeness level.

Since, one of the most important issues in CAF implementation is consensus, this e-tool provides an extremely good opportunity for the participants to express and defend their views. For the efficient orchestration of the process leading to a consensus, the software provides the facilitator with the appropriate summary and detailed lists. The open atmosphere of consensus-based decision making may have a larger impact on the participants’ attitude than the mathematical analysis of the entire process.

**Benefits.** The dissemination of CAF was facilitated by the online CAF system, because of its flexibility, speed, and cost-effectiveness, while the system also allows for national benchmarking and comparisons between older and current organizations’ results. This e-tool can be used flexibly, even after office hours and create easier the necessary consensus. There was a major positive change in participants’ attitude and a better understanding of the quality management efforts of their institutions.

**Difficulties.** It was a specific Hungarian problem that the CAF assessment system partially overlapped with the scoring system of the Hungarian education system. In Hungarian schools, five is the best grade, while 1 means failure. The participants were unconsciously inclined to simply grade the areas concerned instead assigning them scores in accordance with adequate criteria. For this reason, the scores often failed to reflect the assessment criteria of CAF. In fact, they turned out to be one score higher, as 1 means failure at school. However, in the CAF system, this score should be given if certain steps have already been taken in a field, e.g. introduction, measurement, etc.
4.7 Directorate General for Public Administration and National Institute for Public Administration – Portugal: training CAF agents

General info and context. This project was developed through a partnership between Directorate General for Public Administration (DGAP), a direct state administration service, integrated into the Ministry of Finance and Public Administration and National Institute for Public Administration (INA), an indirect state administration service, integrated into the same ministry. The DGAP strategy to disseminate CAF aimed to provide guidelines to guarantee a satisfactory CAF application.

Method of implementation. Diploma of CAF specialisation (DECAF) is a CAF training course, developed by traditional training and e-learning. It comprises all the phases of the CAF application cycle in order to train CAF agents and to disseminate CAF in the Portuguese Public Administration. The final DECAF activity is a report concerning the CAF application in the administrative service of each participant.

Action phase. When the DECAF commenced, 200 h of training were given (e-learning and sessions) to 27 participants, mostly from central administration. It should be stressed that participants should have IT skills to deal with an e-learning platform and participants should be given sufficient time to become acquainted with the platform. The tutorship included evaluating activities, monitoring working groups, clarifying problems, answering e-mails and monitoring discussion forums and provided feedback to participants/groups.

Benefits. As each participant had to apply CAF in his or her own organization, this experience increased the number of effective and potential CAF users in public administration. Moreover, DECAF is important to the CAF dissemination strategy, as the participants share their difficulties and put forward questions and suggestions regarding the use of CAF. Also, civil servants who apply CAF develop the appropriate professional and behavioral skills, while the creation of a group of CAF agents in cross-sectional services (secretariat general of ministries and services that coordinate municipalities) boosts the dissemination of effective CAF implementation.

Difficulties. Participants had difficulties in time management. E-learning involves self-discipline and self-study and the time needed to perform e-learning work and management should free workers for e-learning tasks. E-learning format creates difficulties with group dynamics. Meetings should be held periodically to clarify doubts and facilitate working groups.

4.8 District Administrator’s Office Ebersberg – Germany: improvements after the CAF application

General info and context. Landratsamt Ebersberg is both a lower public authority and a local autonomous body. As a public authority it performs supervisory tasks, such as planning permission procedures and as a local authority, it is mainly concerned with social issues such as social and youth welfare and educational matters.

Method of implementation. CAF was mainly used to analyse the continuous improvement process and in particular, to identify the areas where the organization was not yet enough active. Through the self-assessment process, various areas in need of improvement were identified and subsequently addressed.

Action phase. 12 evaluators from all departments and different levels of hierarchy were involved in self-assessment. Approximately 1.5 h was made available to fill in the standard European evaluation form anonymously. A one-day workshop was held for
shared reflection, where every indicator was discussed. The management had not made CAF participation compulsory. The majority of the staff were in favour. Only one level of the hierarchy – manual workers – could not be persuaded.

Benefits. This workshop identified potential areas of improvement. In the area of leadership, managers were assisted on an individual basis through coaching programs, since the self-assessment revealed the need for improvement in the process of agreeing objectives and the instructions given to staff.

In the area of human resource management, CAF clearly highlighted opportunities for improvement in the suggestion scheme and this was borne out in a subsequent staff survey. In terms of citizen orientation, CAF gave an additional boost through citizen surveys on a continuous basis, while service guarantees have been introduced in several offices within the Landratsamt. Also, CAF highlighted clear weaknesses in the inter-authority performance table, most of which have now been tackled through comparisons with other administrations, by benchmarking groups. Finally, through CAF implementation, measuring results in leadership, human resource management, citizen orientation and benchmarking became a clear and repeated procedure. Feedback from staff, coaches and citizens helps to demonstrate whether plans and improvement actions are effective or not.

Difficulties. The majority of the staff was in favor. Only one level of the hierarchy – manual workers – could not be persuaded.

4.9 Centre for Human Resource – Development and Quality Management (SCKK) – Denmark: CAF dissemination strategy

General info and context. The name “KVIK” was chosen to promote CAF in Denmark. In Danish KVIK means quick or fast and the name therefore gives positive connotations that this is a tool that could be used quickly and effectively. KVIK/CAF is promoted as the most relevant self-assessment tool for organizations with little or no experience regarding self-assessment. Organizations wishing to perform self-assessment on a permanent basis (annually or once every six months) can continue with KVIK/CAF, but if they wish to be further challenged and use a more sophisticated scoring tool, the excellence model is still considered the best choice.

Method of implementation. Active co-operation and co-ownership between representatives of management and employees at the state level was of core concern for the project. An experimental approach was deliberately chosen. Tools and methods were tested and debated on an ongoing basis in order to learn how to best meet the needs of organizations with little or no experience in the field of quality management.

Action phase. Three types of activities have been part of the KVIK project. First and foremost the development of tools and guidelines to support self-assessment, which include:

1. More emphasis on the explanation of the self-assessment process, the assessment panels and the concrete examples to support the explanation of the sub-criteria in CAF. A self-assessment booklet and some “do it yourself” tools were included to be used for individual self-assessment.

2. An online tool, called www.kvikselv.dk was introduced in order to be used for compiling the individual scores and providing the KVIK co-ordinator with a coherent document including all individual scores and evidence as input for the consensus dialogue.
(3) A DVD on the self-assessment process documenting the experiences of two organizations as they undergo the phases of self-assessment. This DVD is intended as a means of providing management with a realistic idea of what carrying out self-assessment actually entails.

Second, SCKK supported the formation of six learning circles, where organizations share knowledge on how to carry out improvement projects relating to four topics: strategy, HRM, working processes and measuring.

Finally, a process of development and conceptualisation of the tools and methods used in learning circles took place in order to make these available on a more general basis to organizations not participating in learning circles.

Benefits. It was clear that dissemination of CAF was not just to produce a Danish version of the CAF. This strategy ensures self-assessment outcomes and increase CAF users. Also, e-tools decrease time spent, build a community of CAF users and facilitate consensus and benchmarking.

4.10 Ministry of Finance – Austria: CAF as a quality instrument for a general administration reform

General info and context. The Ministry of Finance is divided into a central Ministry and five subordinate regional directorates which consist of 40 tax offices, nine customs offices and eight large trader audit units. The total number of staff is around 11,500 people. From 2003 to 2007, the Austrian Finance Administration was reorganized. The aim of the reform was to establish a more service-oriented, cost-saving, and flexible organization by focusing on the individual needs and demands of citizens.

Method of implementation. For reaching the strategic quality management goals, the Austrian Ministry used instruments like CAF, quality and service standards, audits, benchmarking and complaint management. CAF model worked on all levels of Finance Administration and offered good amendment to the existing quality management instruments. Necessary adjustments of CAF questions and training programs were also installed.

Action phase. A “CAF group” was founded, whose members are trained and act as consultants during the CAF-process, in order to make sure that the CAF results are practicable for all users. Every year, special CAF activities take place for top management. During these events, the latest CAF results are discussed, and if necessary, strategic decisions are taken.

Benefits. CAF implementation had good amendment to the existing QM instruments, helps precision of competencies/responsibilities and the analysis of tasks, processes. Self-assessment shows weaknesses which can be cured in order to increase citizens’ satisfaction.

Some of the reform’s outcomes are the reduction of tax offices from 80 down to 40 – although most of the locations are kept in order to ensure the service concept for the clients – the implementation of e-government within the tax administration (e.g. electronic tax declaration via “Finanz-online”, customer-tailored opening hours that particularly take into account regional differences, increasing activities to combat fraud, highly professional quality standards in face to face and telephone contacts with customers, etc.)
5. Conclusions and discussion

Public administration is changing rapidly both in the national and the international level. The request for improvement of results and performance in public services is crucial. The need for public organizations to take over their strategic role into their operational environment, and the undergoing changes, leads them to the TQM principles and the use of tools like self-assessment and CAF.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that CAF implementation does not exclude the use of other quality models, such as the EFQM, ISO, balanced scorecard, etc. On the contrary, it encourages services' initiative to use techniques that contribute to the establishment of a quality and continuous improvement culture.

CAF offers a complete study of the structure and the function of a public organization in a specific time. The self-assessment process is based on actual facts and argumentative judgments by the organization’s employees, without the need for help by private consultants. CAF implementation is an ongoing procedure, since the evaluation results lead to the formation of action plans. When these action plans are put into practice, they are reassessed based on CAF, in order to have a constant administrative improvement.

The benefits of CAF implementation are verified by the growing number of CAF users that reach a total of 2,035 in Europe. The exchange of BP among participating organizations makes bench learning easier and multiplies the benefits. This paper presented a series of BP from different countries and various organizations. Their study proves that CAF is a quality tool, easy to use, that can be implemented by all public organizations, regardless of their nature or political field, size or structure, while a great amount of flexibility allows modifications and adjustments to specific needs.

Europol’s example proves that CAF was successfully implemented in a multi-cultural organization with staff in 35 countries. Respectively, the Labor Market Board in Estonia used two separate assessment groups, due to the amount and the geographic location of their employment offices. This way, they enabled the active participation of more employees and the reach of realistic conclusions. The study of this case proves the need for CAF adjustments to the specialised conditions of every organization. Also, the example of the Finnish Public Management Department shows that CAF is a tool that can evolve and adjust itself to the new challenges and special features of every public administration. E-government can directly improve the service quality, as well as any internal procedure. For this reason, its evaluation is considered to be useful and crucial.

Quality philosophy requires a wider change in the mentality and the function of the organizations. CAF implementation must be combined with a series of other measures, so as to reach the desired results. The RCM in Greece, followed a coordinated effort in order to improve the quality of the services offered. In this effort, emphasis was given not only on the external, but also on the internal customers. In this way, even though the citizen became the centre of attention, emphasis was also given to the region’s employees.

Similarly, CAF implementation offered significant progress and results in the French Regional DRIRE, and also in the District Administrator’s Office Ebersberg in Germany. A clear identification of strengths and areas for improvement seem to be one of the most crucial benefits which arise after CAF implementation, while it gives rise to new ideas and a new way of thinking.
The creation of electronic tools and programs – like the one made and applied by the Hungarian Ministry of Interior – can simplify the self-assessment process. They may also help to achieve the necessary consensus easier. Furthermore, by identifying difficulties connected with understanding the criteria, the scoring system and the BP, it becomes all the more evident that training in matters of self-assessment and quality tools is very important. The creation of a group responsible for the CAF project exclusively for the specific period of time may prove helpful. The approach followed by the DGAP and INA (Portugal) is very interesting, since it involved a system of CAF training consultants and the relevant DECAF. They promote the correct CAF implementation and contribute to the CAF spreading. Providing traditional training and e-learning activities and offering executives’ support during the self-assessment process, helps ensure the successful use of CAF as a quality tool.

In Denmark, the importance of self-evaluation was highlighted from the very beginning, leading into a well coordinated and complete CAF spreading strategy. Providing relevant guidelines, manuals, electronic tools and others, helped the promotion of CAF. Finally, the case of the Austrian Ministry of Finance shows the importance of CAF, in combination with other managerial tools, for the overall reform of public administration. Ensuring the political and administrative support of the organizations is a basic prerequisite for the successful CAF implementation; this can be translated into incorporating a complete quality policy into the organization’s service strategy. The RCM (Greece) and the Ministry of Finance (Austria) constitute the most characteristic examples, since they have implemented a complete quality strategy within which CAF was incorporated.

Many organizations meet difficulties and obstacles in CAF implementation. Some of them are related to time management, wrong understanding of the criteria and the scoring system, lack of faith in self-assessment tools and lack of management support. Moreover, difficulties often are connected with the legal status and the perception of assessment that every country has.

The study of the selected ten best practices and the related information that is presented in the paper helps to disseminate relevant experiences from CAF implementation in Europe. The managerial implication of this paper is that it offers managers of the public sector ideas and help on how to implement the CAF model, by providing real examples of organizations that have implemented it. It also helps them understand the benefits from CAF implementation, as well as the obstacles and barriers that may be faced, in order to be better prepared for its successful implementation.

Further research should focus on the specific needs and characteristics of different countries or different sectors and more specifically on the specific obstacles/barriers/challenges that they may face in CAF implementation. More specifically, it will be interesting to:

- conduct country-specific studies, with extensive, in-depth case studies of organizations that have implemented CAF, so as to detect country-specific challenges and/or BP of implementation; and
- conduct sector-specific (municipalities, prefectures, etc.) studies, with extensive, in-depth case studies of organizations that have implemented CAF, so as to detect sector-specific challenges and/or practices.
Services such as EIPA and CAF RC have contributed to CAF dissemination by organizing QC and relevant seminars, by exchanging BP, by creating a relevant database and by providing counseling services. It is their activation that helps European public administrations overcome obstacles in CAF implementation, while it is also their role to correspond to current challenges and demands.

Through this time of financial crisis, many people would regard CAF use as a luxury for public organizations. However, the truth is exactly the opposite. Effective CAF implementation is an opportunity to change the mentality and reform the common conception of public administration, without great cost or effort. The adoption of quality principles by public administration may drive towards an administration that is able to deal with malfunctions and grasp improvement opportunities. It may also help to upgrade the quality of the services offered and thus contribute to a parallel improvement of citizens’ every day life.

References


**Further reading**


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