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The Common Assessment Framework in practice: a performance enhancing tool or a box-ticking formality? Evidence from the Greek public sector

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Abstract

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is recognized as a tool for improving the performance of public bodies based on the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) (e.g. measurement, Key Performance Indicators (KPI), assessment, standardized procedures, etc.). Organisational self-assessment constitutes a key element in CAF application, and it enhances the integration of essential management principles in the every-day working routine of public services. During the last decade, the Greek public sector has been placed under external scrutiny and domestic pressure to overhaul its structures, improve its overall performance, and upgrade its positive impact on the socioeconomic development. In light of these challenges, it is important to discuss if CAF and under what conditions can effectively contribute to introduce quality improvements in the performance of the Greek public sector. Hence, this paper examines and discusses critically CAF implementation in specific Greek public services, e.g. a general hospital A&E department, a recruiting office, and a directorate of a central government ministry. The existing literature on CAF applications is reviewed and fieldwork interviews are used to provide empirical testing in three of the CAF applications. Findings demonstrate its limited impact so far, the piecemeal approach followed in many cases, and perceived weaknesses of abstract, catch-all sub-criteria designed to cover all types of services. However, in the majority of cases studied, CAF has been the first application of quality management principles and thus introduced performance measurement tools and improvement action plans. Key recommendations include the need to provide incentives to authorities for encouraging CAF applications and promote a standardized approach, which could pave the way for quality accreditation of the organisations involved.

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JEL classification codes

H110 Structure, Scope, and Performance of Government

Introduction

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is based on the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM) and is a tool for improving the performance of public organizations. In the context of its implementation, the core element is the self-assessment of organizational structure and staff, the preparation of an improvement plan based on the evaluation and its implementation.

During the last decade, the Greek public sector has been placed under external and domestic pressure to overhaul its structures and improve performance. In light of these challenges, it is important to tackle the issue of *if* and *under which* conditions CAF could effectively contribute to uplift quality standards and to improve the overall functioning of the Greek administration. Hence, this paper examines and discusses critically CAF implementation in the Greek public services. The existing literature on CAF applications is reviewed and fieldwork interviews are used to provide empirical testing in three of the CAF applications.

Analyses of CAF applications are divided into three parts, following a three-step adaptation model. Thus, the first step concerns the mapping of the *ex-ante* situation before the introduction of the CAF to the organisation and the presentation of the institutional and legislative framework governing the CAF in Greece. In the second part, in-depth examination of administrative change induced through the implementation of the CFA in the organization units is conducted. In the third part, progress of implementation in the selected public services is assessed and recommendations for improvement are made. Conclusions and lessons learned from CAF implementation are presented.

Findings show that in the majority of cases studied, CAF has been a first-time application of quality management principles and thus introduced performance measurement and improvement action plans for the first time. Additional positive findings include the introduction of novel practices in the context of organizations studied, such as staff satisfaction measurements (Thijs, 2013), as well as the documentation of actions and the bottom-up promotion of the drive to achieve excellence in the organization (EIPA, 2011). However, the spread of the tool across and within public service organisations remains limited so far, and many responses attest to the piecemeal approach followed in many cases, and perceived weaknesses of abstract, catch-all sub-criteria designed to cover all types of services. An important issue that has emerged from fieldwork interviews, is the alleged lack of strong top management commitment to the application of CAF, which leads to discontinued efforts without connection with an overall quality strategic approach. Key recommendations include the need to strengthen policy coherence and coordination on public service performance measurement and its link to quality policy, to provide further incentives for CAF applications and promote a standardized approach, which could pave the way for quality accreditation of the organisations involved.

1. Quality in public administration as a necessary component of modern governance

Empirical evidence and research gave emphasis to the need to enhance quality in services delivery and to diminish unnecessary burdens and bureaucracy that prevailed in the public sector. Especially during the 1980s it was a common reality that the investment in resources and plans in the public sector did not lead to a proportionate expected enforcement of quality and quantity in available services. The interest in the public sector was concentrated on the development of complex intra-services function and to a lesser degree to the satisfaction of the needs of users in a user centered logical approach. At the same time, members of society did not obviously see the outcomes of their sacrifices in financial terms and did not experience the positive outcomes in their everyday standards of life. Gradually, best practices in the private sector illustrated a good example to be transferred to the public sector as people-clients of both sectors were demanding to be recipients of equal high-quality services from both the public and the private sector (Vakalopoulou et al., 2013).

Respectfully, the notion of quality came to the fore, as well as the approval of common and high-quality standards and preconditions for the delivery of services that should be executed under harmonious and common principles. The term “Total Quality Management” was initiated by Deming since the 1970s (2000) when he saw that the managers neglected to see how all systems and subsystems interacted and were influenced by each other, a fact that led to the argument that the management did not pay attention to the social side of managing people and evaluating staff. He introduced a list of 14 things *to do* for the management and 7 deadly diseases that it *should avoid*.

By putting quality first, organizations tend to eliminate the waste of “unquality” by diminishing the unnecessary operating costs and affirming the famous quote “quality is free” as Crosby noted back in 1979 . Administrations could no longer afford to overpay operational costs without increasing the potential outputs and outcomes. The policy of “if it ain’t broke why fix it” or the *institutional inertia* that comes with it, came to their limits and organizations could not only aim at surviving but also at the uplifting and enhancing of their performance (Hood, 2012).

Indeed, public organizations recognize the need to act to remediate problems whenever they occur and to be guided by the driving force of improvement in a journey to investigate into what can and must change so as to be always productive and reliable. In a sense, the notion of quality demonstrates *the great need to be efficient through a constantly change and adapt model (aligned with the “adopt and adapt” principle) to keep up with the external environment, its challenges and controversies*.

This era was included into the bigger New Public Management (NPM) Reform wave, introduced in depth into the Reinventing Government of David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, advocating for the adoption of the doctrine of Total Quality Management (TQM), customer service delivery and a redefinition of the organizational culture in the public sector (Rammata, 2011, Sotiropoulos and

Dalakou, 2021). Substantively, the notion of quality, the amelioration of performance management and the empowerment of the citizen became of vital interest, and in the heart of it was sitting the definition of critical success factors and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that should encompass public services, in members of OECD or European Union.

1.1. Definition, Content and Objectives of quality

Quality is a notion with a rather subjective dimension. For the American Society for Quality (www.asq.org) quality is: "A subjective term for which each person or sector has its own definition. In technical usage, quality can have two meanings: 1) the characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. 2) a product or service free of deficiencies. By quality we tend to refer to the delivery of an administrative product or service under specific requirements that will certify that the needed product or service was delivered under very precise preconditions and so it should be reliable to users for the present and the future. Regarding another definition "quality is considered as the capacity of a product or a service to execute in a reliable manner the expectations of citizen-client".

Those considerations led to developing the notion of certifying quality to include the submission of each product or service under the same specifications, diminish deficiencies and dissatisfaction and ensure a higher level of trust and satisfaction among the users. Quality and models of quality in the public sector are prevailing through-out the whole administrative apparatus for the delivery of public services, starting from the submission of an application of a citizen, until the final delivery of the document or service of any kind (from education to the defense or the health sector). It is worth noticing that the need to be reformed and to define the above-mentioned specific conditions of service delivery that encompass the whole administration is regarded as an important contemporary mission of public administrations. These quality requirements and conditions have been studied at an international level and have been codified so as today any organization can be certified for instance a Hospital for its Department of Intensive care, or for the satisfaction of its clients, etc., through an ISO standard qualification, bearing in mind that these judgments are being held under the same criteria that define the level of quality for each administrative work.

In a more concrete way, the quality management includes three interdependent tasks: **design, quality assurance and control**. The design consists of the definition of the quality requirement for each project or procedure which must rely both on quality standards and on the policy of quality even from starting point of the selection of the project. It was pointed that if a problem is found after the delivery of a service it is sometimes too late to avoid costs or even fatal mistakes that relate to basic individual rights in a democratic State (eg. protection of life, human rights, freedom of movement, etc., that their

violation, due to a false delivery are detrimental for members of society). The best way to approach the delivery process in order to achieve quality standards is to focus on the design and process so as to gain control over the final output that should be produced under the specific predefined requirements. Apart from the requirements to design, the stage of design concerns the decision about how these requirements are satisfied during the execution of the work but also about the project or the service itself. Some indicative examples and methodological tools that are used to design quality are: the cost-benefit analysis, the cost-effectiveness of the project, the judgment regarding the allocation of resources, the benchmarking of procedures, the flowcharts of procedures through the Business Process Modelling Notation tool (BPMN), etc. The **quality assurance** relates to the follow up of the specific results of the projects so as to confirm their accordance with quality requirements, to define the different ways of diminishing the negative consequences and waste that do not satisfy the needs and to settle a plan to remediate their causes. The **control** consists of the ways to follow up: the accomplishment of intermediate goals, the quality of consistency of the whole project, the impact, the appropriateness, and quality of measures aimed at sharing the outcomes within and outside the participating organisations. For the better control of outcomes various tools are being used that can be of great assistance to the management. For instance, the use of flow charts, helps visualize the sequence of actions and decisions through connected visual symbols. The flow chart diagram helps to follow up the operations, to understand the sequences and to repair if there is any misjudgment regarding the way the procedure was designed. Also, Kaori Ishikawa diagram also known as cause and effect, or fishbone diagram helps conceptualize the problems and to have an overall view of the problematic areas of implementation of the policy.

In order to achieve a horizontal approach into what degree a certain project is implemented the benchmarking tool can be of great assistance as it will be analysed.

2. Benchmarking and peer review

Benchmarking and peer review are methodologies that permit a certain kind of competition through comparison among similar public organisations that all aim excellence in their operation. In this kind of network governance, public organisations gain knowledge and innovation by sharing and marking their performance that has been meticulously scrutinized under specific criteria of performance. Starting with the spotting of the misfunctions, the use of the tool of benchmarking is leading to the amelioration of performance and can guide organizations to pinpoint at an early stage any weakness that can be treated adequately so as to uplift the quality of performance of the organization. The need to compare the delivery of public services among European states in relevant services (benchmarking) was gradually paving the way to the need for constant change. This also was the ultimate goal for

European Union as many countries, such as the Scandinavian, along with United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and others, had already achieved great advancements in terms of citizen's services while other states remained at an immature stage.

For OECD, similar organizations use the benchmarking tool so as :

- To define the business operations that make the best use for the production of products or services (process benchmarking)
- To define the organizations or operations that offer the best satisfaction to citizens or clients (outcome benchmarking)
- To define the objectives that can be considered as prototypes for effective function (standards benchmarking) (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004).

Benchmarking tools stimulate performance as they permit to focus on the side effects of bad management and to initiate the adoption of plans to remediate or even eliminate medium and bad performances. Through benchmarking activities administrations communicate smoothly with each other and similar departments acquire an in-depth knowledge and experience about how each case is treated in other organizations that are facing the same challenges. By consequence, the staff of the organization, without experiencing the negative connotations with which control by itself is associated, become aware of the reasons behind an organizational problem, they also become inspired by other organizations and tend to reproduce similar patterns as a cure to remediate similar problems. So, it is understood that through benchmarking public administrations are investigating not only the differences and variations in performance between organizations, but also the path through which other organizations found their way out and implemented a proper and functional plan for a vital issue that is in their agenda.

Benchmarking at a European level was developed as soon as there was a great divergence between how the same problems were treated by various member states. In fact, the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) early noted that there was a missing link between member states that were practicing various modes to face the same problems. Other States put the accent to the leadership and the human factor while others stressed the need to develop more sophisticated systems to manage projects and present results to the society. Civil servants from all European states were in quest of a tool that would assist public administrations to develop a continuous and consistent form of quality development applicable to all member states. The expansion of this coordinated common quality practice was expected to lead the management of organizations to adopt the openness and the networking, as well as the cooperation with other organizations when there was a space to develop further bilateral or multilateral cooperation. This pattern differs a lot in comparison with the patterns created in the private sector, because in the public sector there is no negative

competition so, organizations are permitted to function similarly regarding other organizations for the better service delivery and the satisfaction of the public interest.

2.1. Theoretical background of Common Assessment Framework (CAF)

In the framework of the aforementioned gap, in 1991 the Business Excellence Model (BEM) was developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and was used extensively in Great Britain by local administrations.

The CAF was initially proposed by the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG) which acts as a support group of experts below the level of the Member States' Directors-General for Public Administration. The network of Ministers is responsible for the European public administration network (European Public Administration Network - EUPAN). The Innovative Public Services Group was established in 1997 and presented the CAF at the 1st European Conference on Quality in Public Administration, in Lisbon in 2000. The Research Center (CAF Resource Center - CAF RC) was established one year later to support and develop the CAF under the supervision of the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht. Following the example of the EFQM, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) was perceived as a tool of total quality management by Member States of European Union aiming to achieve administrative convergence and is, in essence, an internal self-assessment tool that is using a holistic organizational performance analysis framework (Bemowski, 1996) which seeks to achieve excellence through a comprehensive road map Van Dooren and Van der Walle, 2003). CAF captures all the administrative operations and highlights the possibilities for resilience and better performance in public organizations. It is indeed a model for performance management acting as a "compass" to help managers finding the appropriate paths to excellence. With its graphical representations it explains the cause/effect relation between organisational factors and performance results (CAF manual, 2020).

More than 3,000 public organisations have registered to use the CAF Model since its launch. Each Member state nominates its CAF correspondent and is monitoring the implementation of the model in the country. The CAF was revised recently in 2020 and twice, namely in 2002 and 2006.

The CAF supports public administrations to:

- Introduce the culture of excellence.
- Progressively implement the PDCA (PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT) logic of Deming.
- Carry out the self-assessment process.
- Come up with a diagnosis that shows the strengths and weaknesses and propose solutions that can lead to the amelioration of performance.

It comprises nine criteria which are considered as principles and 28 subcriteria. All these come under

a great consideration of the eight principles.

Principle 1: Results orientation

The organisation focuses on results. Results are achieved which pleases the organisation's stakeholders (authorities, citizens/customers, partners and people working in the organisation) with respect to the targets that have been set.

Principle 2: Citizen/customer focus

The organisation focuses on the needs of present as well as potential citizens/customers. It involves them in the development of products and services, and the improvement of its performance.

Principle 3: Leadership and constancy of purpose

This principle couples visionary and inspirational leadership with constancy of purpose in a changing environment. Leaders establish a clear mission statement, as well as a vision and values; they also create and maintain the internal environment in which people can become fully involved in achieving the organisation's objectives.



Principle 4: Management of processes and facts

This principle guides the organisation from the perspective that a desired result is achieved more efficiently when related resources and activities are managed as a process, and effective decisions are based on the analysis of data and information.

Principle 5: People development and involvement

People at all levels are the essence of an organisation and their full involvement enables their abilities to be used for the organisation's benefit. The contribution of employees should be maximised through their development and involvement, and the creation of a working environment of shared values and a culture of trust, openness, empowerment and recognition.

Principle 6: Continuous learning, innovation and improvement

Excellence is challenging the status quo and effecting change by continuous learning to create innovation and improvement opportunities. Continuous improvement should therefore be a permanent objective of the organisation.

Principle 7: Partnership development

Public sector organisations need others to achieve their targets and should therefore develop and maintain value-adding partnerships. An organisation and its suppliers are interdependent, and a

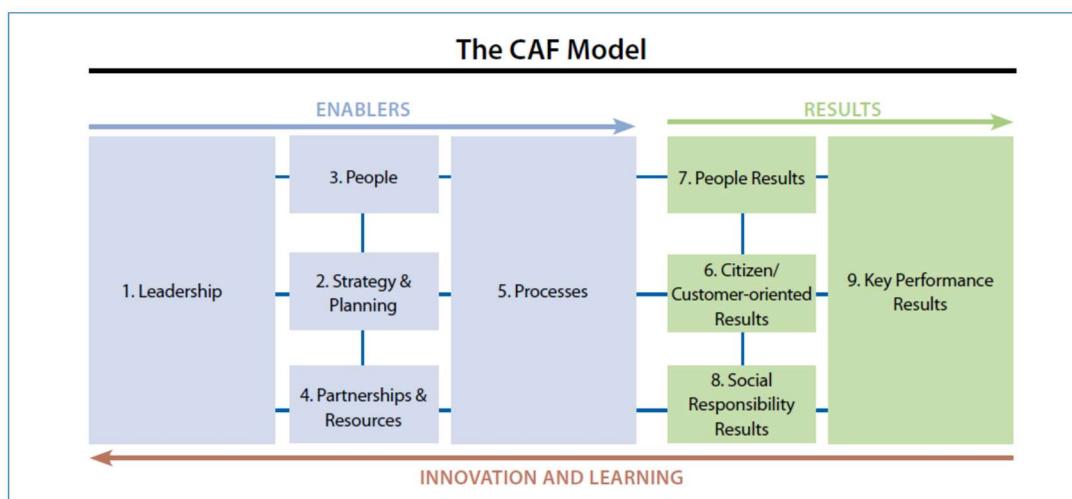
mutually beneficial relationship enhances the ability of both to create value.

Principle 8: Social responsibility

Public sector organisations have to assume their social responsibility, respect ecological sustainability and try to meet the major expectations and requirements of the local and global community (EUPAN, 2020, p. 9).

The revised CAF2020 strengthens the focus on **digitalisation** and pays attention to **agility**, **sustainability** and **diversity** regarding the connection of the operational with the strategic levels to support **reforms implementation**. Some major changes have been introduced at the level of the examples and the glossary that have all been reviewed.

The model of the CAF is captured in the next table :



The five enablers boost the organisation to perform at its best.

- ❑ Above all is the leadership (1), which sets the strategic direction of the organisation and creates the organisational foundations.
- ❑ Good leadership uses instruments of strategy and planning (2) as well as human resources management (3), cooperates with partners and manages resources (4) such as budget, knowledge and IT.
- ❑ On these bases, the organisation defines and documents the internal processes (5) and develops these permanently.
- ❑ If the organisation is well placed to boost the enablers, it will also deliver excellent results for their customers, stakeholders, employees, citizens and society. The CAF defines four criteria which measure the results of the organisations work (EUPAN, 2020, p. 11).

Contemporary approaches

The integration of quality in public administration becomes a necessary part of modern governance for all countries that are members of the European Union and not only. In most cases the responsibility for the dissemination of quality prerogatives is entrusted to a central Ministry which may be usually the Ministry that is responsible for the Public administration or the Ministry for Reforms or even the Prime Minister's office. In an even more advanced version, in several countries there is a recognised coordination between the central administration and the institutions responsible for quality such as Universities, Public Administration Organizations, as well as private bodies and consultancy companies. Through quality systems, there is a quest to interconnect systems between them in order to avoid their autonomous working and to be effectively united, finally forming a single "system of systems" where each subsystem can maintain its identity by communicating satisfactorily with the others.

The traditional approach to quality tended to emphasize specialization and satisfaction of criteria while total quality management requires continuous improvement (optimization) (Michalopoulos et al. 2017). The trend is to achieve both and to acquire an integrated internal control combined with the modern performance systems. The aforementioned Common Assessment Framework as well as the equivalent EFQM model system provide strict performance criteria and systematization of measurements that can be smoothly combined with flexibility and a holistic view of quality promoting in an integrated performance system (Bemowski, 1996).

3. The institutional framework for CAF in Greece

4. Methods

This paper employs a mixed method's approach which entails literature review on CAF and its applications in Greece and more in-depth case studies of three of the CAF applications in critical services. The innovative aspects of this research lie in the new approach that bypasses the traditional assessment of public services from a hierarchical stand point to a softer and more participative way that pays attention to the stakeholders, the employees as they are responsible for the performance (good or bad) and the quality of the services delivered by their organisation. By upgrading the role that employees hold in the overall functionnment of the public services they become more focused and motivated so as to intensify their efforts and ameliorate their contribution towards achieving the goals and targets set by the leadership. The inclusion of employees in the process of assessment of their public organisation is going to add an important asset in the effort of making public services work better and smarter in a more non-linear and efficient way. For this research reviewed works include

academic and practitioner output on CAF as well as grey literature including CAF guidebooks and Ministry of Interior guidance. In addition, interviews have been used as a method of data collection and corroboration of literature review findings (Keats 2000; Burgess 1984). Thus, face-to-face and phone, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with CAF stakeholders including management consultants, Academics and administrators. The selection of interviewees was based on chain referral sampling and was driven by availability of potential respondents. The three case studies of CAF applications include the following public services: a) the Emergency Department of the “KAT general hospital, b) the army recruiting service and c) the General Directorate of Contemporary Culture of the Ministry of Culture.

5. Case Studies

5.1. The Attica General Hospital (KAT)

The General Hospital of Attica KAT is a legal entity governed by public law mainly specialising in Traumatology and Orthopedics and is under the control and supervision of the Governor of the 1st Attica Health Region. According to the data kept at the Hospital, it has 549 developed beds and employs a total of 1285 workers, while in 2017, 24,564 patients were hospitalized.

With the decision (614 / 13-09-2017) of the Hospital Manager, the CAF has been implemented since December 2017. Based on the above decision, the CAF implementation team was set up and notified to the Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction on 13-09-2017. The above group consists of 9 members from different departments.

According to the evaluation report, the CAF application in the hospital focused at the organizational analysis of administrative practices applied by the examined organizational structures and especially the scrutinization of “what they do-how they do it” and the depiction of results achieved as regards the CAF criteria (Evaluation report, p. iii). The intention of management has been the integration of the self-assessment procedure at the level of procedure planning with the ultimate aim to bring about changes, which will result in administrative improvement as well as in the exchange of information and experience with other similar national and European services that have implemented CAF (Evaluation report, p. iii).

The team’s objectives were to observe the CAF guidelines, share results with the management as well as to participate at the contest for the National Public Service Quality Award, especially for the promotion of Digital Governance under Law 3230/2004 regarding the application of special awards for public services (Evaluation report, p. iv).

Through the CAF application the hospital management expects to:

- Monitor the current situation, record strong and weak points as well as the various pressures exerted on the hospital.
- Motivate staff to take active part in the assessment of structures and leadership.
- Encourage the participation of staff, patients and citizens in the formulation of proposals for operational and organizational restructuring.
- Develop cooperation between team members with the aim of implementing new TQM models as benchmarking tools for the comparison of the hospital operation performance.
- Establish relations with other hospitals for the exchange of information and experience from CAF implementation.

The conduct of the survey, distribution and submission of questionnaires, data collection and processing lasted six months. The simple method of rating was followed, as suggested by the Guide. In addition, the proposed multi-phase CAF method has been followed. The Hospital applied CAF in the Emergency Department (hereinafter referred to as ED), the All-day Function (Afternoon Doctors) and the Financial Department. In order to draw conclusions about the application of this tool to the Hospital, the first department was chosen because of its importance in the operation of each hospital.

The Emergency Department has cross-sectoral staffing and operates 24 hours a day with eight (8) shifts, while in 2017, the total number of cases examined amounted to 95,954. In essence, the department forms the link between pre-hospital and in-patient care and also acts as a filter that protects the hospital from unnecessary hospitalisations. The ED is one of the main gateways to the hospital. Thus, in 2017, out of a total of 220,803 visits to the Hospital, that Department accounted for 43%, or 95,954 (pp. 12, 13).

As regards the methodology of implementation, 120 employees of the Department participated, 85 of which were Clinics and Laboratory Directors, on-call doctors, heads of administrative departments, social workers, psychologists, 5 physicians, 21 nurses, 2 paramedics and 4 radiology technicians. Also, the sample was categorized by directorate of employment, position of responsibility and level of education based on its particular demographic characteristics, such as age and gender, 77 employees of all specialties responded (p. 13).

The plenary of the working group used the simple way of scoring. In addition, the Management Team also participated in the scoring group, which contributed to the improvement actions. The rating of the criteria was conducted by seven (7) of the nine (9) members of the team, due to obligations to the Service (p.13).

For the sake of brevity, only criterion six, which relates to citizen perceptions about the organization and the perception on the efficiency of the unit is presented below, because in this case the citizens-clients are the patients. The remaining criteria and subcriteria are presented in an Annex.

For the measurement of patient satisfaction, 280 questionnaires were distributed, of which 139 of the patients were filled-in by the patients as they were leaving or during their waiting time at the Department, from 15 December to 15 January 2019. From the total of respondents the highest percentage was given by men (72), aged 18 to 45 (74), university graduates or technological educational institute graduates (49) residents of the Prefecture of Attica (126), of Greek nationality (114), the cause of the visit was accident (75), the place of the event was Attica (124), the means of visit was private car (118), while 18 of the 139 subjects went through ambulance service. The SPSS statistical tool was used to analyze the survey results. Based on citizens 'rating (4.08), citizens' perception of on-call duty operation, treatment of cases, quality, validity, and trust, show a high level of satisfaction, adequacy and efficiency. Improvement measures have been proposed, such as the right to systematically measure public opinion or improve the parking space with special provision for people with disabilities.

In addition, in order to provide a more comprehensive appraisal of the CAF application in the above Service and a more generic appraisal of its application in the Greek public sector, interviews have been conducted with the head of the assessment team at the KAT general hospital as well as executives from various other services, experts and consultants based on the questionnaire drafted by the authors which is included in an Annex.

5.2. The Army recruiting office.

A further CAF application examined here is that in an army recruiting office command in 2009. The army recruiting offices constitute a public service with a strong citizen-client orientation. The offices collect all necessary information for the preparation of army recruiting and monitoring its implementation for all Greek citizens with such an obligation (Ministry of National Defence, 2009). The army recruiting command, in which CAF has been applied consisted of 8 army recruiting offices, of which 5 were located in Athens and 3 in neighboring regions. The total number of staff amounted to 88.

The application followed a methodology comprising of four phases. It has also been supported by a consultancy and enjoyed the support of the Command, which issued all necessary orders for its implementation. In the first phase (project design) and following introduction to the project and procedures, the management expressed its commitment to the application and ordered the establishment of a project team comprising of Offices staff (two members per office) with knowledge

of procedures. The assessment team developed a specific project plan in order to meet the timetable, divided the project into phases and set out specific responsibilities, and deadlines for tasks. An online application has been used to facilitate coordination, grading of criteria and sub criteria and gathering of documentation. In the second phase (finalization of implementation methodology) the team examined the implementation methodology, discussed thoroughly the CAF criteria and sub criteria, and the required documentation for marking and decided that the questionnaires will be collected from all the members of staff. In the third phase (drafting of assessment report) the consultant paid a visit to all Offices and handed out questionnaires to members of staff, 83 of which have been completed. In addition, a total of 240 citizen questionnaires have been collected under the responsibility of the deputy directors of the offices. Following that the assessment team conducted a statistical analysis and processing of responses, which were scrutinized for their credibility, clarity and completeness and validity. In the fourth phase (drafting improvement measures report), the team provided a thorough grading of CAF criteria and sub criteria, identified strengths and weaknesses and prioritized necessary corrective actions.

As regards the criterion 6 citizen/client-oriented results, as a concomitant of the CAF application a customer satisfaction survey was conducted for the first time. Previous circumstantial data had shown positive perceptions of the public on the results of the Offices. Improvement areas identified include more flexible hours for the public and increase in staff during high demand periods. The evaluation team graded sub criterion 6.1 with 62.81 as an average of all offices.

In terms of sub criterion 6.2, which refers to results achieved by the Command as regards the needs and expectations of clients through indicators regarding measurements for citizens/clients, performance is also very good in this sub criterion as the majority of applications is processed within the day of submission or in a very short time period. This is also confirmed in review reports by supervisory bodies. As regards fields for improvement those include further staff training in customer service and especially service of non-cooperative citizens. In addition the introduction of efficiency measurement indicators is deemed as necessary especially through the use of electronic protocol. Measures to improve security of premises are also proposed as well as the dissemination of a citizen rights charter. In terms of sub criterion 6.2 the Command has been graded by the evaluation team with 64.06, which reflects the fact that main objectives are being fulfilled (Army Recruiting Command, 2009, p. 73).

5.3. The Directorate for the Development of Modern Creation in the General Directorate of Contemporary Culture at the Ministry of Culture

The organizational objective of the Directorate for the Development of Modern Creation is to promote

and develop modern (artistic) creation. The application of CAF in the Directorate has been assigned in December 2016 by the General Secretariat of the Ministry of Culture to Unit C (Evaluation) in cooperation with Unit A (Programming). A working group for CAF implementation, consisting of seven members including the head of Units C and A, Heads of Units of the 4 Directorates of the General Directorate of Modern Culture as well as a member of the Human Resources Directorate had been established. All group members were qualified in the field of management. It was decided that the application should be expanded from the initial 2 to the other 2 Units of the Directorate. In total 9 questionnaires have been submitted to 9 members of staff of the evaluated units including the Head of the Directorate. The application followed a good practice model of the University of Macedonia. The implementation report was completed within a month of issuing the decision for establishing a working group (Lenos, Papathanassiou et al. 2017, pp. 9-10).

As regards Criterion 6 it has collected the lowest grade among all criteria in the self-assessment, both in terms of sub criteria 6.1 and 6.2 with 0.77 and 0.93 respectively. On the other hand, sub criteria 4.4 (information and knowledge management) and 1.3 (role of leadership for staff motivation and support and as a role model) were the highest graded (4.41 and 4.33 respectively). It is worth noting that some questionnaires were returned blank as regards sub criteria 6-9. The working group asked all respondents, as the process has been anonymized, who stated that they regarded those questions not relevant based on their responsibilities as defined in the Organisation of the Ministry, for instance they cited no relations with citizens and society. Following guidance from the Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction non-responses were graded 0.

The report recognizes that the small number of participants and the limited range of participation of other units in the General Directorate of Modern Culture limit the possibility to extract conclusions. In terms of conclusions and improvement measures it was noted that the implementation encountered difficulties and obstacles including preconceived notions on evaluation. The fact that the Directorate of Modern Creation has been the only CAF application within the General Directorate and the small size of the sample has been noted, however it was regarded that it allows the study of service conditions in small units, and lends itself to the analysis of procedures based on which the responsibility of the units are exercised. In addition, it contributes to management considering human resource needs and the promotion of participative management through the effective cooperation of parties involved (Lenos, Papathanassiou et al 2017, p. 35). Improvement measures identified include: a) strengthening participative procedures in all stages of operational planning, b) improving building infrastructure c) rational allocation and use of human resources, c) conduct of a study of institutional aspects in modern culture issues, d) further promotion and dissemination of output of the unit, e) investigation of complementarity of actions between the General Directorate of Modern Culture and

supervised bodies (Lenos, Papathanassiou et al 2017, p. 37).

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Regarding the key influence behind the decision to implement CAF respondents claimed that it was a decision of the service itself (CON1, ACA1). In addition, regarding the applications of the CAF until 2009, some respondents agreed that the circulars and the effort to disseminate the information on CAF by the relevant Directorate of the Ministry of Interior contributed to the implementation of the CAF (CON1). Furthermore, compliance with relevant Ministry of Interior guidance on CAF at times found strong support among political heads of sectoral ministries (ACA1). On the side of the Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction respondents mentioned that horizontal and supportive action on CAF implementation has been exercised in line with orders from political heads who endorsed the relevant initiative on the European level (ADM1, ADM2, ADM3). As regards recent CAF implementations in health structures, those can be attributed to a combination of factors, as more “entrepreneurial” management and teams of officials experienced in quality management tool advantage of the relevant guidance in order to apply the CAF (CON 1, ADM4) possibly as an introduction the EFQM.

Regarding the existence of previous CAF applications in the services, the three cases of applications that were examined (KAT, Army Recruiting Offices and Directorate of Modern Creation) constituted the first application (ADM4, CON1). Fragmented CAF applications seem to be the rule in sectoral Ministries and public bodies and the number of applications mentioned is not an indication of the quality and added value of individual applications (ADM1, ADM2, ADM3, ACA1).

Respondents confirm the finding that CAF applications typically cover a Directorate or Department and not all entities. Executives regarded that CAF implementation is exhausting and time-consuming thus only one unit is selected. In the General Secretariat of Equality and the Hellenic Aviation Industry application was reported to cover the entire bodies (CON1). In the Ministries of Employment and Administrative Reform, respectively CAF was implemented on the level of Directorates. In the ‘KAT’ case CAF covered three departments. Applications in the Ministry of Defense in the period 2008-2009 were focused on the Army Recruiting Service and the military hospitals (Naval, Airforce, NIMTS), which in the latter cases were located in a economic-administrative directorate and a medical department (ACA1).

Regarding the question whether applications have been assigned to an external consultant or carried out in-house responses varied. In the Ministry of Defense applications were carried out in-house while in the Recruiting service an external consultant was employed (ACA1). In KAT respondents noted that the application was conducted entirely in-house (ADM4). Another executive shared the view that

assignment to an external consultant is not necessary and is avoidable for financial reasons and for the sake of expanding experience and knowledge of those involved in the application (ADM2). However, it was noted that any involvement of external consultants does not cancel self-assessment as a fundamental CAF element, as the external consultant only offers technical assistance (ADM2). Besides officials of the services examined mentioned that aid for implementation was provided through the Training Institute (INEP) of the National Centre for Public Administration while they confirmed the supported role of the Ministry of Interior (ADM3, ACA1) and cooperation with the relevant Directorate (CON1).

Respondents gave mixed replies as to the extent the guidance was used. In KAT it was mentioned that the guidance was followed closely (ADM4) and references to the composition of assessment teams and documentation have been confirmed (ADM4). In general, there have not been any issues regarding the composition of the teams (ACA1). However, in at least one case the task of self-assessment was essentially carried by two members of staff. The designation of one member of staff per unit was deemed as more appropriate composition for the teams (ADM2).

Different practices were identified regarding the use of the questionnaires and the selection of the sample. A random sample from all branches and specialties was used by the Manager for the selection of the employees at 'KAT' (ADM4). Patients were also randomly selected, but the time period for completing the questionnaires was determined based on hospital constraints (ADM4). In other cases of applications, the questionnaires were handed out to all recipients and as many of those as possible were collected within the time set and then statistically processed. Regarding the groups, the questionnaires were completed jointly in workshops based on statistical analysis (CON1).

Prior to the evaluation, the current situation was recorded, which led to obvious assessments although in the case of the Directorate for Modern Creation these have been limited as the Directorate had been established two years before the CAF application year. The usual duration of the self-assessment exercise was according to interviewees 4-5 months (ACA1, ADM1, CON1). Also, some respondents reported that the criteria were adjusted (ACA1). In other cases, no adjustment or further specialization of the criteria was made (ADM4). In the cases in which the situation was recorded, adjustment / specialization based on the nature / the objective of each organisation was also mentioned (CON1). Overall, most of the interviewees evaluated positively the contribution of CAF as an administrative tool that highlights strong points and points of improvement in a systematic way (ADM2, CON1, ACA1). In addition, positive points are the measurement of staff satisfaction that may be done for the first time through the CAF, as well as the documentation of actions, the communication stimulus to staff to embrace the effort to achieve excellence in the organization (ACA1) It was also highlighted that CAF

is a cost-free, internal TQM system that does not require specific knowledge from its implementers (ADM2). Among the constraints/problems encountered with CAF implementation mentioned were resistance to change, the need for a more systematic guidance and aid and the need for a hands-on approach in order to combat the lack of knowledge (ACA1). Also, a significant problem is the observed lack of commitment of the top management in the implementation of the CAF which results in formalistic (nominal) applications lacking in continuity and connection with a quality policy (ADM1). In most of the cases there was no ownership of the effort from staff beyond those two-three involved (ACA1). A general remark among the cases reported was that CAF applications are not being updated (CON1, ACA1) and many applications are interrupted without the production of any report (ADM1, ADM3). In other cases, the decision to repeat CAF application was pending (ADM4). There have also been cases where interest of organisations on CAF remained strong (General Secretariat for Equality) (CON1) while in one reported case (Hellenic Aviation Industry) following the CAF application continued the effort and received EFQM accreditation (CON1).

Regarding the connection of the CAF with the target-setting and monitoring of the organization's indicators, it was stated that the CAF resulted in the creation of improvement plans and therefore objectives and action plans (CON1). As an important parameter of the implementation of the CAF was mentioned whether measurements of results were introduced for the first time and whether those led to feedback (ACA1).

The connection of the CAF with the provisions of the National Reform Program and its inclusion in the Quality Action Plan was considered an auxiliary, but not a sufficient condition for the spread of the implementation of the tool (ACA1). The CAF should be integrated into other sectorial strategies and policies (ACA1).

For the dissemination of the CAF, the interviewees proposed the application by the Ministry of Interior of a certifiable standard with a certain duration (e.g. 2 years), as the institutions would be forced to apply it to their advantage (CON1). In the opposite case, even if financing for the application is secured, it would be done once and it would be stopped (CON1). It was also noted that the quality or effectiveness awards that set as precondition for nomination the application of CAF were an attractive incentive for the dissemination of CAF (CON1, ADM2) but after 2007 and 2009 they were discontinued (ADM2). Other respondents cited legislative provision and provision of funding to the implementing agency as incentives for implementing CAF-related actions. The structural funds Partnership Agreement could also contribute to the dissemination of CAF (ADM4, ADM2) although an earlier attempt to do so had been unsuccessful (ADM2). Finally, respondents cited as important factors for the implementation of the process, the commitment of stakeholders, the provision of incentives for the organisation and incentives to employees and the continued will of the political leadership

(ADM4).

Almost all respondents acknowledged the importance of implementing improvement actions (ACA1, CON1, ADM1, ADM3) in order to provide feedback on the results and complete the Deming cycle. However, the improvement actions were implemented to a very small extent or not at all. In two cases, the implementation of one or two key actions was reported (ADM1, CON1). In other cases improvement actions were not implemented or if they were implemented they were not in connection with CAF (CON1).

The inclusion of the improvement actions in target-setting is considered an essential condition for their success (ACA1). The reasons for non-implementation of the improvement actions were the absence of project managers in charge of this task (CON1), the lack of resources and staff and the daily workload (ADM4, CON1).

The respondents confirmed that there were discrepancies between the completion of the questionnaire by the executives and the score of the self-assessment team (CON1, ADM4, ACA1). The statistical results of the questionnaires were used by the groups only indicatively (CON1). The discrepancies observed were attributed to the lack of knowledge of the situation, the influence of personal factors, the general satisfaction from the department, etc. (CON1). The completion by a sample of members of staff was considered to result in a satisfaction survey and not a substantive evaluation of the institution (CON1). According to another source, the employees were stricter, as the management justifies its actions based on the legislation (ADM4). The difference in scores between employees and management was attributed to ignorance and lack of communication (DIO4).

Finally, the respondents agreed that CAF can be a tool for rational change in the State (ADM1, ADM2, CON1, ACA1). Prerequisites for this were the strict adherence to the method of its application, the spread of its application, the continuous review of results and the specific objectives based on the initial objectives and the objectives of the Ministry and Administration (ADM4). In addition, it was mentioned that CAF should become a certifiable standard, with annual supervision by trained speakers and re-certification every three years as the ISO. These changes presuppose the appointment of the competent Directorate as a coordinator, which will certify evaluators (not only civil servants but also experienced consultants) and carry out the certification procedures. It was mentioned that such a proposal implies the payment of an amount per year by the institutions in order to cover the costs (evaluators, etc.) (CON1).

In a nutshell, the CAF model has played an important role in introducing total quality management principles, elements of excellence and key performance indicators in public sector organizations. However, in the two decades of its application only a handful of known applications occur each year and are confined to units or directorates, thus holistic and system-wide approaches seem to be

lacking. In most cases CAF applications are not systematically followed-up or updated and commitment wanes. As a result, domestic institutional benchmarking, and mutual learning through exchanges of organizational practices on performance measurement remains limited.

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ANNEX I- Questionnaire

1. What was the main influence that determined your choice of service to implement the Common Assessment Framework (CFP)?

- Was it a decision of the service itself?
- Has it come from pressure outside the service?
- Was it a product of compliance with rules?

2. Has the CFR been applied to your service in the past?

- If so, did you rely on the previous approach?
- You can refer to the reasons why previous efforts have been abandoned.

3. Does the implementation of the CSF cover your entire organization or is it located in an address or department?

4. Did the CFP process be outsourced or outsourced?

5. The organization received assistance in implementing the CFP:

- Has the Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction been assisted?
- From other agencies?

6. Has the WFP Implementation Guide been followed?

- Functioning of the Assessment Team (of whom they were)
- Ways of Documentation Evaluation

7. Did the questionnaire and scoring report of the senior guide have been used?

1. How did you choose the sample that completed the questionnaire? (staff/service recipients).

8. How long has the process of self-evaluation been conducted through the CFA?

9. Has the criteria been adjusted or further refined to the needs of the service?

10. How do you fully assess the implementation of the CFA at your service?

1. Positively
2. Negative
3. Restrictions

11. Is the Common Assessment Framework updated to your organization?

12. How does the FMC relate to the targeting (tracking of indicators) of your organization and the objectives of each Division and Department?

13. What challenges / problems have you encountered in implementing the CFP ?

- Adequacy of guidelines
- Existence of will for effective implementation
- Problems in the model of the CFA itself
- Staff cooperation
- Ownership of the effort
- Support / time

14. Do you consider that the link between the CFR and the National Reform Program is sufficient for the dissemination of the tool?

15. How could the CFP be more widely disseminated and implemented?

- Legislative provision
- Incorporation of incentives to implement the CFP

16. How do you judge the dissemination of the CFR to the Greek State in relation to other EU Member States where it applies?

17. How do you judge the country's compliance with the conditionality of MS 11 in particular with regard to the 'Action Plan on Targeted and Quality 2015-2016'.

18. What do you think are the most important factors in implementing the CFP implementation process? (eg leadership, commitment, etc.)

19. What is the most important part of the CFR implementation process? (eg implementation of improvement actions)

20. Have improvement actions been implemented?

21. What were the reasons for not implementing the improvement actions?

22. Has there been a discrepancy in the score resulting from the completion of the questionnaire (s) in relation to the self-assessment group score? If so, what do you do?

23. Do you consider that the CFR can be a tool for rational change in the State?

ANNEX II List of interviews

1. Interview ADM1: Administrator involved with CAF implementation, Athens, 13/9/2018
2. Interview ADM2: Administrator involved with CAF implementation, Athens, 13/9/2018
3. Interview ADM3: Administrator involved with CAF implementation, Athens, 13/9/2018
4. Interview ADM4: Administrator involved with CAF implementation, Athens, 20/9/2018
5. Interview CON1: External management consultant, Athens, 18/9/2018

6. Interview ACA1: Academic specializing in the field of service management. Athens, 17/9/2018