

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR BOTTOM-UP EUROPEAN REGULATION

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Paper for the conference:
A PERFORMING PUBLIC SECTOR: THE SECOND TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE, Leuven
(Belgium), 1-3 June 2006

WORKSHOP 2: Performance of regulation and regulation of performance

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ABSTRACT

To cope with the requirements of accession, EU countries were (and some of them still are) seeking to achieve the standards of reliable and efficient public administration. The European Commission doesn't provide a specific model for the organisation and functioning of public administrations (Fournier, 1998:112). In management literature those models for the organisation and functioning of public administrations are presented.

Quality management models, nowadays, have evolved into frameworks for organisational management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1995, Löffler 2002). With the construction of the European Common Assessment Framework (CAF), a self-evaluation tool was designed for the public sector (Engel, 2002; van Dooren et al., 2004). This tool presents the principles for a well performing organisation. With the spread and use of this model in recent years all over Europe, the principles of a well performing public sector organisation also become widespread.

In this paper we look at the convergence (discursive, decisional, practice and results) across the EU in the use and implementation of managementtools, i.c. the use of Quality models, arguing the principles of quality management, as principles of decent governance, spreading across the European Union and form a kind of 'bottom-up European regulation', coping with the fact no formal criteria or legislation concerning administrative reform are existing for candidate countries.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we look at the convergence across the EU in the use of managementtools, more in detail on the use of Quality models by studying the spread, the implementation and the results of the Common Assessment Framework. Can we notice similarities across Europe in the use of this quality model and its principles of organisational performance? And does a quality model can supply the (bottom-up) regulations and criteria for a administrative reform, which have not been explicitly formulated by the EU?

At first we look at the existence of criteria for EU accession in relation to administrative reform, and the evolution of these criteria. Does the EU prescribes criteria which the candidate countries have to meet in relation to administrative capacity? In the second part some principles for governance and public administration for all European member states are presented. These principles are very general and no specific model for the organization and functioning of public administrations is prescribed. Those models for organizational management are presented in management literature. In the third part of this paper we have a brief overview on those models for organizational management. With the evolution of quality management, moving from inspection to total quality management, quality models have taken the form of models for organizational management. The fourth part describes the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) as a model for organizational management. The CAF is a fairly simple, free and easy to use framework which is suitable for self-assessment of public sector organisations across Europe. The CAF is constructed by representatives of the member states of the EU and is widespread across European public sector organisations. This model provides a framework of principles, public sector organisations have to meet. Finally, we examine the convergence across the EU countries in applying the CAF model, looking for evidence that, across the European public sector, organisations meet with certain criteria of good governance and proper management and bottom-up regulation/criteria concerning organization and functioning of public administrations are formulated.

1. EU accession and administrative reform

In recent years some studies have been carried out on the impact of enlargement of the EU and the accession of countries to the EU on specific aspects of the public administration in those countries. E.g. the impact of EU accession on the civil service (system) (Ziller, 1998; Verheijen, 1999; Bossaert & Demmke, 2003) or on financial management (budgeting, control and audit) (Sigma, 1996; Larsson & Allen, 1998) or focussed on structures and institution building (Sigma, 1998b). Other studies have been carried out on the impact on management and the spread and use of managementtools in CEE countries (Löffler & Vintar, 2004; Nemeč et al., 2003). Are all those changes due to the fact that the EU forces these countries to reform, and are there criteria for reform?

To cope with the requirements of accession, Central and Eastern European countries were (and some of them still are) seeking to achieve the standards of reliable and efficient administration found in EU member states. They need to do this in order to fulfil the “Copenhagen criteria” (1993) of democratic

governance for EU membership and to apply the *acquis communautaire* (existing legislation of the EU). They also have to meet the “Madrid criteria” (1995) concerning the adjustment of public administrations to ensure the harmonious operation of Community policies (Sigma, 1999). All these guidelines remain very general in relation to the administrative reform (Fournier, 1998:111). Although underneath all of these guidelines is an assumption that political and economic progress will be matched by appropriate capacity-building measures, administrative reform used to be a relatively neglected area of reform in many countries (Metcalf, 1998: 43).

It was with the publication of the Cannes White paper, administrative reform was generally given a higher level of priority (Verheijen, 1998, 28). The European Commissions avis of July 1997 confirmed that administrative capacity is a crucial ingredient of the readiness to assume the obligations of both becoming and being a European Union member state (Fournier, 1998: 111). The link between European integration and public administration reform seems to become stronger, this has never been an issue in previous waves of accession (Sigma, 1998: 13) .

2. Criteria for administrative reform and the European Administrative Space

The link between European integration and public administration reform is an indirect one, since there is no general body of European law in the public administration sphere. This link maybe indirect, nonetheless it is very real. Having an administration that performs well is crucial (Jenei, 2004: 113). Just as individual states are free to frame their own constitution, they are free to organise their own administration (Ziller, 1998). Candidate countries are not under any requirement as to the means they use (not how they should organise their administration) they do have to satisfy what lawyers call “performance requirements” or “obligation of results” (Sigma, 1998: 13). It is in the interest of all current Members that future members are “administratively competent” (Fournier, 1998b:124). This is a very important requirement for the EU as a whole and for its individual member states. The union is a chain of national administrations. And this chain is only as strong as the weakest link (Sigma, 1998: 13; Bouckaert, 2002).

This administrative capacity isn't a well defined concept and despite the efforts taken to set criteria (Sigma, 1999) it isn't easy to measure (Verheijen, 2000). The EU *acquis communautaire* is a set of non-formalised administrative and constitutional law principles. So no *acquis* is to be formally transposed. This is the case for the system of governance in general and for the public administration in particular. Nevertheless there seems to be a general consensus on the key components of governance in democracies (Sigma, 1999:5). The sharing of these principles of governance –referred to as the constitutional and administrative law principles- is leading the emergence of the European Administrative Space (EAS), that is a set of common standards of governance and public administration for all European Union Member States (Mangenot, 2005). This *acquis* must in any

event inspire reforms of public administrations in the candidate countries of central and Eastern Europe. These principles are (Sigma, 1999:11-17):

- “reliability and predictability”
- “openness and transparency”
- “accountability”
- “efficiency and effectiveness”

The European Commission doesn't provide a specific model for the organisation and functioning of public administrations (Fournier, 1998:112). In management literature those models for the organisation and functioning of public administrations are presented.

3. From Quality to Organizational Management

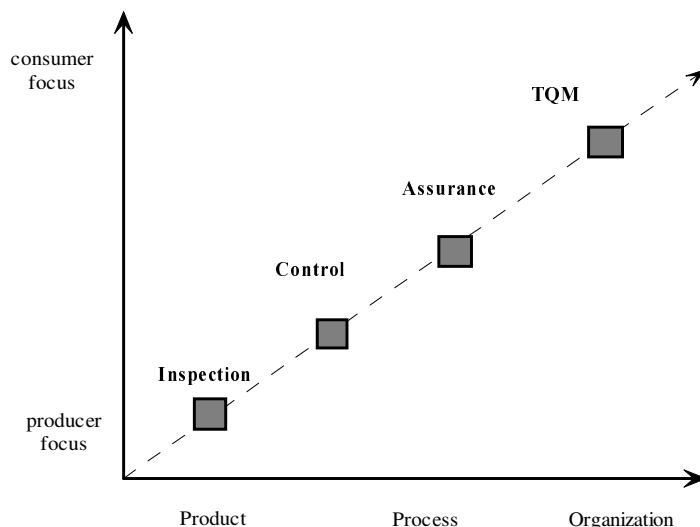
The public sector has to cope with a lot of challenges and has to respond to many new needs and demands in society (OECD, 1993; OECD, 1995; OECD, 2000). Due to this challenges and pressure, the public sector is object of large reforms (Lane, 2000; Kickert, 1997; Kettl, 2000). *“Over the last two decades there appears to have been a huge amount of public management reform. Although there was also reform in earlier periods, the changes since 1980 have -in many countries- been distinguished by an international character and a degree of political salience which marks them out from the more parochial or technical changes of the proceeding quarter-century”* (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). These reforms are characterized by the introduction of new principles, a growing focus on efficiency and effectiveness, attention to transparency and accountability, awareness of public service delivery and the role and place of the citizen/customer (Doherty and Horne, 2002; Shand, 1999; Flynn and Strehl, 1996; Schick, 2000). These principles methods and techniques were constructed, focussing on one of these principles or trying to combine these principles. Techniques like *‘management by objectives’, ‘cost benefit analysis’, ‘market testing’, ‘performance related pay’, ‘value for money’* and *Total Quality management* were introduced (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995).

3.1. THE EVOLUTION OF QUALITY THINKING

The history of quality thinking has its roots in post-war industrialisation and the rise of mass production (Ovrevit, 2005). The emphasis with respect to quality inspection and control was originally related to output and had a strong product focus. Attention gradually shifted from the processes and the guarantee of quality during the course of this process (quality assurance) to Total Quality Management (TQM). A greater focus was placed on the user and the effects that the products and services had on that user (Gaster and Squires, 2003; Bouckaert and Thijs, 2003). Satisfaction became a key concept (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990). TQM is characterized by the permanent mobilization of all the resources (especially the people) to improve in a continuous way: all the aspects of an organisation, the quality of goods and services delivered, the satisfaction of its stakeholders and its integration into the environment. The first and final goal of TQM is to meet customer expectations. Therefore active commitment of all employees, as well as comprehensive

information systems that collect and process information with regard to customers, suppliers, corporate-wide processes are required (Löffler, 2002). TQM is usually used synonymously with continuous quality improvement (CQI), stressing TQM involves cultural change (Oakland, 1995; Ross, 1995; Beckford, 1998).

Figure 1: Evolution of quality management (Thijs, 2004)



TQM was originally developed in the US, was then widely applied to Japanese manufacturing industry and was subsequently re-exported to the West, during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It percolated from manufacturing to the commercial services and eventually to the public services in the late 1980s.

3.2. TQM MODELS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

TQM was officially embraced by the US federal civil service and in the UK a number of TQM-pilots were launched in the National Health Service (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995:4). Many of the ideas and methods were developed and used in the private sector before being introduced in the public sector (Pollitt, 1990). The concern about public sector quality and using methods in the European public sector emerged in the late 1980s and particularly the early 1990s (Ferlie et al., 1996). Research carried out by the European Commission stated that quality improvement was on top of the list in many European countries in the mid 1990s.

Table 1: Priorities for European public services (1997)

	Quality improvement %	Reduction of costs %	Innovation %	Increasing the choice %	Privatisation %
Germany	41	20	17	12	8
UK	63	15	10	9	3
Netherlands	52	17	8	8	9

France	41	23	15	9	10
European Union	48	19	14	9	8

Initially, the quality movement was based on users' charters. The 1991 'Citizens Charter' in the UK, The 'Charte des services publics' of 1992 in France and in 1993 'het Handvest van de Gebruiker' [the Users' Charter] in Belgium, later followed by a number of other countries (Bouckaert, 1993; Staes and Legrand, 1998, Van de Walle et al., 2005). In the late 1990s, many TQM inspired models and techniques (e.g. ISO, Balanced Scorecard, EFQM and PSEM) found their way into the European public sector (van Dooren et al., 2004). We mention the quality systems based on ISO 9000 (www.iso.org). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies from more than 140 countries, one from each country. The most widely known standards in a public service context are ISO 9000. ISO standards and a management system built upon these standards are captured by the term "quality assurance". This approach has been described as "write what you should do, do as you write, write when you don't do it right" (Ovrevit, 2005:549). ISO 9000 has in recent years incorporated TQM ideas including process improvement. ISO 9000 certificates have become highly popular in the private sector and have also found their way into the public sector (Engel, 2003).

Another widely spread instrument is the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) (www.balancedscorecard.org). The BSC is developed by Kaplan and Norton (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). It is a management system (not only a measurement system) that enables organizations to clarify their vision and strategy and translate them into action (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). It provides feedback around both the internal business processes and external outcomes in order to continuously improve strategic performance and results (Kaplan and Norton, 1993). The balanced scorecard suggests that the organization must be viewed from four perspectives: customers, finance, process, and innovation and learning. Metrics must be developed, data collected and analyzed relative to each of these perspectives.

The third most widely used TQM-based method is the EFQM model – the European version of the Baldrige Framework (www.efqm.org). The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) was founded at the end of the 1980s by 14 major European companies and started to focus on the public sector during its evolution. In 1992 EFQM launched its model for self-assessment. This model is based on 9 criteria. EFQM changed its model slightly in April 1999, trying to make it more compatible to the public sector by including an innovation and learning perspective. The nine dimensions of the model are: leadership, people, policy and strategy, partnerships and resources, processes, people results, customer results, society results, and key performance results. The EFQM-model is increasingly used in European public services (Löffler, 2002; Engel 2003, Ovrevit, 2005).

These same dimensions can be found in the Common Assessment framework (CAF) (www.eipa.nl). We will discuss the CAF model in the fourth part of this paper.

The Public Service Excellence Model (PSEM) is another self-assessment framework that is focussing on the public sector, although it is not broadly used or known (www.publicfutures.com). The PSEM

has fourteen dimensions: strategy and plans, leadership, resources, processes, people, resource results, efficiency results, people results, service reporting, service outputs, service satisfaction, programme outcomes, programme satisfaction, and policy and governance. PSEM includes the policy side which also goes beyond the organisation as such and therefore has the broadest scope (Public Futures, 1998). The use of the PSEM model is limited to some UK public services. It is remarkable that there is a historical evolution of these models, that some of these models are converging, and that the coverage of the input/activities/output/outcome chain is being extended. A rough coverage scheme might look as follows (table 2). PSEM has the most comprehensive viewpoint in that it covers the policy context beyond the immediate outcomes of a specific service.

Table 2: Focus of quality management models (Van Dooren et al., 2004)

Model	Input	Activity	Output	Immediate Outcome	End Outcome
ISO	X	X			
BSC	X	X	X		
EFQM	X	X	X	X	
CAF	X	X	X	X	
PSEM	X	X	X	X	X

Quality management ideas and techniques are widely spread across Europe. In recent times, public sector quality improvements have also appeared on the agenda of Eastern European countries (Engel, 2003). The new and candidate EU member states in particular are very active in promoting quality tools (Löffler and Vintar, 2004). Quality approaches among the different countries differed for a long time. The need was felt to establish a common European quality framework that could be used across the public sector as a tool for organisational self assessment.

4. THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF) AS A COMMON ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT MODEL

4.1. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Following years of informal consultations, there was an increasing need within the European Union for a more intensive and formal response in order to optimise cooperation with respect to the modernisation of government services. With the creation of the European Public Administration Network (EPAN) in 1988, the ministers and directors-general responsible for public administration have gradually focused less and less on the direct effects of European integration on their respective civil services and instead are discussing in more general terms public management problems as a whole (Mangenot, 2005). The preparatory work that had been performed for several years at this informal level by the public service heads of the various EU member states, led in November 1998 to

a ministerial declaration containing “the general principles concerning the improvement of the quality of services provided to citizens”.

During the Austrian EU Presidency in the second half of 1998, the possibility of developing a European Quality Award for the public sector was discussed in the framework of the informal meetings of the Directors-General of the Public Administration of the EU Member States. The idea as such was dismissed in view of the fact that the diversity of cultures and visions of “quality” in the public sector in EU countries would not allow for direct competition, but an alternative was developed and finally accepted: the establishment of a common European quality framework that could be used across the public sector as a tool for organisational self assessment (Engel, 2002). The discussions revealed that what was lacking in the realm of quality management, was an easy to use and free entry tool for self-assessment in the public sector that could help public administrations across the EU understand and employ modern management techniques and could be of particular relevance for those public sector organisations that are interested in trying out the use of a quality management system, are just embarking on their “journey to excellence” or those that wish to compare themselves with similar organisations in Europe (Staes, 2002).

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) – as it was later called – should be jointly developed under the aegis of the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), an informal working group of national experts set up by the Directors General in order to promote exchanges and cooperation where it concerned innovative ways of modernising government and public service delivery in EU Member States. The basic design of the CAF was then developed in 1998 and 1999 on the basis of joint analysis undertaken by the EFQM, the Speyer Academy (which organises the Speyer Quality Award for the public sector in the German-speaking European countries) and the European Institute of Public Administration (Staes, 2001).

First pilot tests were conducted in a number of public sector organisations and the “final” version of the CAF was presented during the First Quality Conference for Public Administration in the EU in Lisbon in May 2000. The CAF differs from the EFQM-model on a number of dimensions (subcriteria) and explicitly takes account of the specificities of the public sector. This characteristics of the CAF has been reinforced with the second and improved version of the CAF officially presented during the second Quality conference for public administrations in the EU held in Copenhagen in 2002 under the Danish presidency of the EU. In 2006 the CAF model gets a new revision.

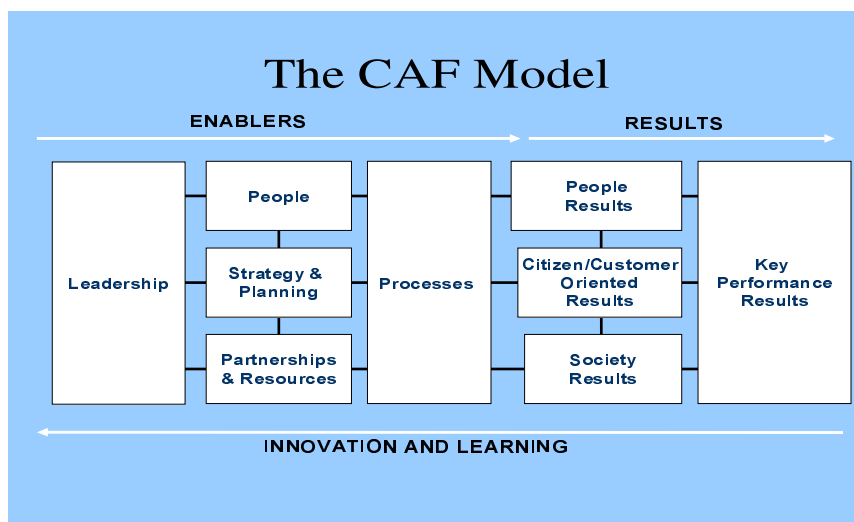
4.2. THE THEORETIC MODEL

The setting up of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) provided an initial impetus for a common European reference framework. “*The main purpose of the CAF is to provide a fairly simple, free and easy to use framework which is suitable for self-assessment of public sector organisations across Europe and which would also allow for the sharing of best practices and benchmarking activities*”(Engel, 2002:35).

The CAF constitutes a blueprint of the organisation. It is a representation of all aspects that must be present in the proper management of an organisation in order to achieve satisfactory results. All these

elements are translated into nine criteria. Five of these are 'Enablers' and four are 'Results'. The 'Enabler' criteria cover what an organisation does. The 'Results' criteria cover what an organisation achieves. 'Results' are caused by 'Enablers' and feedback from 'Results' helps to improve 'Enablers'. Criteria are further operationalised and given concrete form in subcriteria. On the basis of these subcriteria, a group from within the organisation evaluates that organisation.

Figure 2: The Common Assessment Framework



The CAF has four main purposes:

1. To be an introduction to the TQM, especially adapted for the Public Sector
2. To facilitate the self-assessment of a public organisation in order to obtain a diagnosis and improvement actions
3. To act as a bridge across the various models in use in quality management.
4. To facilitate 'bench learning' between public sector organisations.

The CAF has been designed for use in all parts of the public sector, applicable to public organisations at a national/federal, regional and local level. It may also be used under a wide variety of circumstances, e.g. as part of a systematic programme of reform or as a basis for targeting improvement efforts in public service organisations. In some cases, and especially in very large organisations, a self-assessment may also be undertaken in part of an organisation, e.g. a selected section or department. The CAF provides:

- an assessment against a set of criteria which has become widely accepted across Europe, based on evidence;
- opportunities to identify progress and outstanding levels of achievement;
- a means to achieve consistency of direction and consensus on what needs to be done to improve an organisation;
- a link between goals and supportive strategies and processes;

- a means to create enthusiasm among employees by involving them in the improvement process
- opportunities to promote and share good practice within different areas of an organisation and with other organisations;
- a means to integrate various quality initiatives into normal business operations.
- a means of measuring progress over time through periodic self-assessment;

4.3. HOW TO APPLY THE CAF-MODEL

CAF provides a self-assessment framework under which an ad hoc group of employees in an organisation can conduct a critical assessment of their organisation guided by the CAF structure.

Enablers
Criterion 1. Leadership
<i>Consider evidence of what the organisation's leadership is doing to:</i>
Sub criterion 1.1. Provide direction for the organisation by developing its mission, vision and values.
Sub criterion 1.2. Develop and implement a system for the management of organisation, performance and change.
Sub criterion 1.3. Motivate and support the people in the organization and act as a role model
Sub criterion 1.4. Manage the relations with politicians and other stakeholders in order to ensure shared responsibility
Criterion 2. Strategy and Planning
<i>Consider evidence of what the organisation is doing to:</i>
Sub criterion 2.1. Gather information relating to present and future needs of stakeholders
Sub criterion 2.2. Develop, review and update strategy and planning taking into account the needs of the stakeholders and the available resources
Sub criterion 2.3. Implement strategy and planning in the whole organisation
Sub criterion 2.4 Plan, implement and review modernisation and innovation
Criterion 3. People
<i>Consider evidence of what the organisation is doing to:</i>
Sub criterion 3.1. Plan, manage and improve human resources transparently with regard to strategy and planning
Sub criterion 3.2. Identify, develop and use competencies of the employees aligning individual and organisational goals
Sub criterion 3.3. Involve employees by developing open dialogue and empowerment

<p>Criterion 4. Partnerships and Resources</p> <p><i>Consider evidence of what the organisation is doing to:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.1.</p> <p>Develop and implement key partnership relations</p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.2.</p> <p>Develop and implement partnerships with the citizens/customers</p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.3</p> <p>Manage finances</p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.4</p> <p>Manage information and knowledge</p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.5.</p> <p>Manage technology</p>
<p>Sub criterion 4.6.</p> <p>Manage facilities</p>
<p>Criterion 5. Processes</p> <p><i>Consider evidence of what the organisation is doing to:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 5.1.</p> <p>Identify, design, manage and improve processes on an ongoing basis</p>
<p>Sub criterion 5.2.</p> <p>Develop and deliver customer-oriented services and products</p>
<p>Sub criterion 5.3.</p> <p>Innovate processes involving the customers/citizens</p>

<p>Results</p>
<p>Criterion 6. Citizen/Customer -oriented Results</p> <p><i>Consider what results the organisation has achieved to meet the needs and expectations of citizens and customers through:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 6.1.</p> <p>Results of citizen/customer satisfaction measurements</p>
<p>Sub criterion 6.2.</p> <p>Indicators of citizen/customer-oriented results</p>
<p>Criterion 7. People Results</p> <p><i>Consider what results the organisation has achieved to meet the needs and expectations of its people through:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 7.1.</p> <p>Results of people satisfaction and motivation measurements</p>
<p>Sub criterion 7.2.</p> <p>Indicators of people results</p>

<p>Criterion 8. Society results</p> <p><i>Consider what results the organisation has achieved in respect of impact on society, with reference to:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 8.1.</p> <p>Results of societal measurements perceived by the stakeholders</p>
<p>Sub criterion 8.2.</p> <p>Indicators of societal performance established by the organisation</p>
<p>Criterion 9. Key performance results</p> <p><i>Consider the evidence of defined goals achieved by the organisation in relation to:</i></p>
<p>Sub criterion 9.1.</p> <p>External results</p>
<p>Sub criterion 9.2.</p> <p>Internal results</p>

This self-assessment procedure is clearly less rigorous and less detailed than an organisational assessment conducted by trained external assessors. However it is less expensive and has some advantages such as revealing the perceptions of staff towards their own organisation (Stromsnes, 2002: 54).

5. CONVERGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT IDEAS THROUGH EUROPE

5.1. CONVERGENCE: ONE WORD, MANY IDEAS AND THOUGHTS

By looking at the convergence of management ideas, based on the principles of a model such as the common assessment framework, through Europe, we try to find a common set of standards of good management. The easiest way of doing this would be to look at the different countries and count the number of public organisations applied the common assessment framework. Convergence in this sense would be the conclusion that a lot of organisations nowadays apply the model and a number of lines converge to a point, to common practice. This is only one side of the coin.

Although convergence is a term everybody intuitively can quite well understand, the operationalization doesn't seem to be that easy. Convergence in management reform has to be more than just one snapshot in time. Due to the long-term and multi-dimensional characteristics of management reform, Christopher Pollitt (2002) proposed a multi-layered definition of the concept of convergence, cope with the temporal and contextual dimensions of management reform.

Pollitt distinguishes (and following Brunson, 1989) four levels of 'convergence'. First the *discursive convergence*: more and more public opinion leaders are talking (writing) about the same concepts. This is the converging conceptual agenda. Secondly the *decisional convergence*; where many different public authorities have decided to implement a similar modernisation approach, technique, instrument. When speaking of *practice convergence*, public sector organisations actively begin to work in similar ways, using the same techniques. The last form of convergence is the *results convergence*,

were the reforms produce the intended results so that productivity rates and quality levels which were initially different start to converge. Clearly convergence at one level doesn't necessarily imply convergence at the next, in this way convergence reflects the idea of "*management reform possessing a trajectory, rather than it being a binary, have/have not type of phenomenon*" (Pollitt, 2002: 477).

To find out to what account we can notice a convergence in the common assessment framework through the EU, we apply all forms of convergence to the spread of the common assessment framework, dealing with all EU member states, but focussing especially on the new and candidate members. The study of convergence at the different levels is based on the surveys carried out by the CAF resource centre of EIPA (European Institute of Public Administration).

In 2002 a study was carried out on behalf of the Spanish presidency of the European Union to have an overview of the most important quality programmes, major tendencies and the use of quality management techniques in the member states (EIPA, 2002). During the Italian Presidency, the European Institute of Public Administration conducted a study on the use of the Common Assessment Framework within the European Public Administrations. The questionnaire-based study sought to identify the way in which CAF was promoted in the different Member States and how the tool helped public administrations to analyze themselves in an efficient way and to implement improvement actions in the context of a total quality approach (EIPA, 2003). In 2005 the CAF Resource Center at the European Institute of Public Administration carried out a survey on the use of the CAF on behalf of the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU. As was the case in 2003, a questionnaire, prepared in collaboration with the CAF correspondents of each EU member state and candidate member states, was sent to the CAF correspondents to acquire information on the status of CAF in their country (the member states, candidate members and Norway). All 27 national correspondents answered the questionnaire. For the organizations that have used the CAF since then, a questionnaire was put on line. 131 questionnaires by individual organizations from 22 different countries returned to EIPA.

5.2. DISCURSIVE CONVERGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Is the quality management-rhetoric present and "hot" in the EU-countries and do these countries pay lip services to this evolution?

Many authors observe a new wave of quality discourse washing over Europe. Public service quality is 'in'. "*This finds expression in a lot of promotional activities such as the organisation of national quality conferences, European quality conferences, quality awards. One important objective is to get the 'quality message' across to a wide group of public sector practitioners.* (Löffler & Vintar, 2004: 5). Table 3 gives an overview of the different conferences and awards at national level. Besides the national level four quality conferences at European level have been organized (www.4qconference.org).

Table 1: Quality conferences and awards

Quality conferences	Estonia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, Lithuania, Poland
Quality awards / contests	Austria (Speyer), Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Poland

The EIPA study (2005) asked the different correspondents in all the member states for the political support. The different national correspondents were asked at the political support for CAF and other TQM tools in their country, to give an idea as to the overall position adopted by governments on TQM in general.

Table 4: TQM tools and CAF and the political support

No formal policy (1)	Decreasing (2)	Constant (9)	Increasing (12)
Ireland	Estonia, Latvia	Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Slovakia, Norway	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Romania, UK

First of all, we were interested in how the different correspondents view political support for CAF and other TQM tools in their country, to give an idea as to the overall position adopted by governments on TQM in general. Table 4 indicates that TQM tools and CAF have found their place in most of the European Countries. As in the 2003 study, EFQM, ISO, BSC and CAF are the most extensively used TQM tools in Europe in general, not counting specific national tools like VIC (Italy), INK (the Netherlands) and the Swedish Quality model.

Many governments of EU candidate countries also saw quality tools such as the CAF as an opportunity to launch ‘soft’ reforms which were in line with the general mood for change in the EU. The globalisation of public management consultancies and the enlargement of the EU have both played a significant role in spreading the quality ‘rhetoric’ throughout public sectors all over Europe. However this ‘discursive convergence’ should not be misinterpreted as a convergence of political concepts or administrative cultures, both of which are subject to distinctly separate drivers from those influencing the rhetoric.

Together with other authors we can say that the rhetoric of quality management certainly found its way into EU public services.

5.3. DECISIONAL CONVERGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Is this “new speak” also translated in concrete quality management plans and do the governments (actively) support the use of the TQM tools in general and about the CAF model in particular? The stability of the political support for TQM tools and CAF is evident in countries with some history in this

field – such as the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries –, and in the UK the political support is even increasing. In these countries, choices of management tools are basically made at management level. In several other countries the political awareness of CAF and TQM is growing and expressed in central government initiatives (EIPA, 2005). In table five some policy documents are listed for those countries where quality didn't have a long tradition. In these documents reference is made to quality management and quality management models.

Table 5: Quality policies (Engel, 2003:15-16; Eipa, 2005)

Country	Policy Documents
Cyprus	“Public sector performance improvement” Council of Ministers (September 2004)
Czech Republic	National Quality Support Strategy of the Czech Republic (Government Resolution No. 458 of 10 May 2000) Statement of the Government Policy of the Czech Republic (August 2002)
Estonia	Public Administration Reform Programme of the Government of the Republic of Estonia (2001) “Citizen-oriented Public Administration Strategy” (2003)
Greece	Programme of administrative reform “Politeia 2005-2006”
Hungary	Government Action plan for the Improvement of of the public administration (2001/2002, Government Decree No.10057/2001) Dissemination of CAF-model in public sector (resolution 1113/2003)
Italy	Promoting quality in public services
Latvia	Regulations and recommendations for the introduction of a quality management system in public administration (Regulation No.501/2001of 4 December 2001)
Lithuania	Strategy for the development of public administration by 2010
Luxembourg	Governmental programme on quality (2006)
Romania	Updated strategy of the Romanian government concerning accelerationof the public administration reform.
Portugal	Law for the assessment of public sector performance (2004)
Slovakia	National Quality pyogramme of the SlovakRepublic for the period 1998-2003
Slovenia	Government Statementon the “Quality policy of State Administration” (3 October 1996) New public Administration development strategy for the years 2003-2005

In most of the countries, the political support mentioned (in table 4) translates into the recommended use of these tools. The EIPA 2005 study asked for the strategy concerning the implementation of the CAF-model.

Table 6: The implementation of CAF: voluntary, recommended or obligatory

Voluntary (9)	Recommended (15)	Obligatory (3)
Austria, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal, UK	Belgium, Czech Republic (highly), Czech Republic (local level), Germany, Denmark, Greece , Spain (for starters), France, Hungary, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Sweden (TQM), Slovenia, Slovakia , Norway	Czech Republic (central level), Slovakia (central level), Romania

Besides the discursive level of convergence there seems to be also a convergence at the decisional (political) level.

5.4. PRACTICE CONVERGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

We've noticed an amount of discursive and decisional convergence in the EU countries concerning quality management and quality management tools. The next level of convergence is the practice convergence. Do public organisations apply quality models and is the CAF (and the self assessment technique) widely used in the EU-countries?

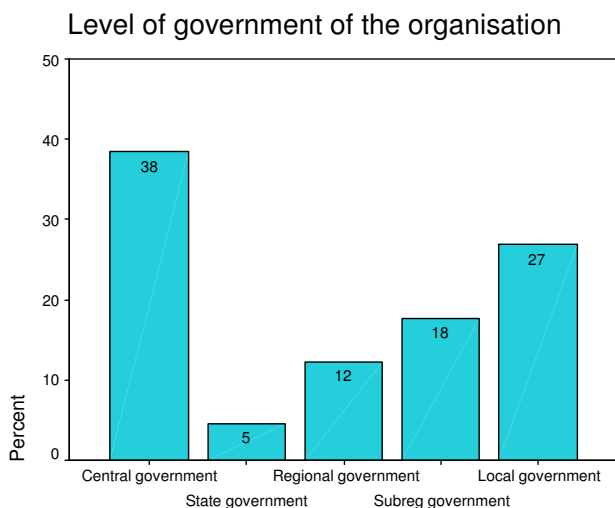
It remains difficult to centralize information on the number of CAF applications at national and European level. This is due to the nature of the tool itself - a stimulus for individual organizational development via self-assessment – as well as the European context in which it was created – an open coordination or voluntary cooperation between countries. As in the 2003 study, the national correspondents were asked to estimate the use of CAF in their country in the 2005 study. In the autumn of 2003, 22 countries estimated roughly having generated 500 applications. In 2005, 20 countries estimated having generated around 885 applications in their countries.

To provide an idea of the spread of CAF, 2 groups are distinguished. Countries with more than 30 applications can be considered to have already established a sound basis for the further use of the CAF. Countries with fewer than 30 applications can be credited with having gained initial experience with the model.

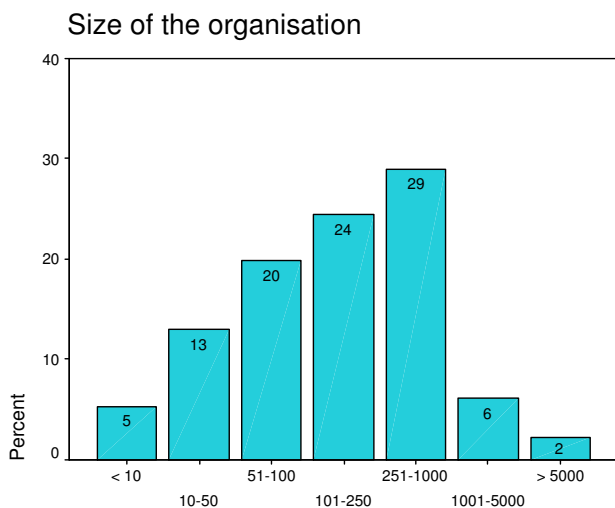
Table 7: The use of CAF in different countries

More than 30 applications	Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden
Fewer than 30 applications	Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia, UK, Romania, Bulgaria

Based on the information gathered from the 131 questionnaires returned to EIPA by individual organizations from 22 different countries, the use of CAF can be looked at from different angles..



Besides the level of administration, the size of the organization is another interesting characteristic to look at.



The size of the organizations is comparable with those who took part in the survey of 2003. The model is applied in all size of public organizations but more than 50% have between 101 and 1000 employees. The very small (<10) and the very big organizations (>1000) remain the exception. This indicates that the model suits all sizes.

Besides the state of affairs it is interesting to look at the plans for the future. The national correspondents give their view (EIPA, 2005).

In some countries actions are not planned (**Estonia**) or not finalised (**France**) due to political or administrative changes. In France, the government will probably recommend the use of CAF in the future. **Luxembourg** has in the mean time build up its national Quality programme on CAF and hopes this will give new impetus to the model. **Ireland** foresees the use of CAF only as part of a tool set in

organisation development projects. The same applies to **Latvia** where CAF is one of the suggested quality management tools besides the Latvian Quality Award, ISO, citizens' charters and recommendations by the Government. The **UK** will continue to support the use of CAF in Europe and to act as the conduit for information/communications about CAF to the UK Public Sector. It will not actively promote CAF in the UK as it will continue to promote the wider adoption and use of the EFQM Excellence Model, but when approached it will provide information and support to those organisations that request it.

Other countries like **Austria, Finland, Italy, Lithuania** and **Spain** will continue to execute their current strategy. **Italy** will decide whether to extend the learning labs and the prize for quality in public services after an evaluation of the results achieved by the current project. It will certainly continue to work on the promotion of the network involving the administrations that have applied the CAF, raise the profile of the administrations that receive prizes for quality and to disseminate their experiences across the wider public sector.

In many countries training is top of the CAF agendas. **Belgium** plans to organise regular CAF training twice a year in the official training office. **Cyprus** intends to prepare an action plan on behalf of the Council of Ministers by examining the possibilities for further training on CAF-related matters and the preparation of a quality conference. **Greece** also seeks to promote the further dissemination of CAF by means of training programs. **Poland** plans to hold training sessions for the Directors-General. **Portugal** will continue with its CAF training courses, focused on the implementation of the tool. **Romania** envisages training by EIPA for 4 or 6 members of the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform to become trainers of the members of the national modernisation network. **Slovenia** will also further invest in training.

The **Czech Republic** plans to continue the pilot project of implementing the CAF model at regional and local administration level, to train civil servants as "regional experts and assessors" for neighbouring PA organisations and to develop a CAF manual for organisations at local and regional level. At central state administration level, the activities of the central state administration reform project "Introduction and development of quality management in central state administration" will continue and a CAF manual for central state administration will be updated.

Germany wants to expand the "easy CAF" to a knowledge database and to continue organising CAF user conferences and producing CAF publications. **Denmark** aims to increase the number of users of CAF and CAF tools, stressing that CAF is a tool of dialogue that is relevant in a period of transformation and can be used in combination with the Excellence Model.

Like Germany, **Hungary** will promote its new online CAF system and disseminate CAF further. It wants to increase the efficiency of CAF and is participating in the pilot project of regional bench-learning.

The **Norwegian** Agency in charge of CAF, "Statskonsult", will continue to disseminate the CAF in its daily work and to offer assistance with CAF applications. It will improve its website and conduct a survey to gather more information.

In **Poland**, the Office of Civil Service plans to continue implementing the information actions in the form of CAF conferences and seminars, and by taking part in similar events in other countries, particularly in EU countries.

To support the CAF users' community, **Portugal** decided to create the «CAF post» on the site of the Directorate-General for Public Administration and to create an electronic worksheet for the self-assessment process to be used by CAF users. The development of a survey of CAF users, of pilot projects or case studies on CAF implementation and on CAF versus other TQM models is also planned.

Slovenia wants to set up a national database on best practices in 2005-2006 and to develop indicators for measuring performance of ministries based on CAF criteria.

5.5. RESULTS CONVERGENCE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Looking at the convergence of results is the most difficult part. Does the use of quality models improve the results of the different organizations?

The question can be raised why organizations went for the CAF. On the basis of the closed questions in the previous questionnaire and the answers on the open questions, a number of possible reasons that could be decisive for using the CAF were presented to the organizations. They were both internal and external reasons. In table 8 the top ten of most chosen reasons is showed.

Table 8: Why do organizations choose the CAF -Top 10

Reasons	Average	Type
The organization wanted to identify strengths and areas for improvement	4,20	Int
To develop sensitivity to quality issues	3,63	Int
Intention to involve staff in managing the organization and to motivate them	3,57	Int
As an input into ongoing improvement activities, restructuring etc.	3,54	Int
The CAF was used as a first diagnosis in the start of a strategic planning process	3,53	Int
To promote the exchange of views in the organization	3,51	Int
Because the top management wanted it	3,43	Int
To prove that the organization is willing to change	3,17	Int
To promote cultural change in the organization	3,14	Int
To embed a new system of performance management/measurement	3,09	Int

These 10 reasons considered to be the most important are all internal reasons. They have the upper hand with a clear accent on the wish to identify strengths and areas for improvement, which is exactly the purpose of a self-assessment tool. Organizations want to use CAF in the first place for themselves, the ownership is very high. On the other hand, external reasons can also be valuable in case the application of CAF responds to a demand from the stakeholders. The benefits from involving stakeholders apparently still have to be discovered.

Self-assessment may have a number of possible benefits. Again a list of typical benefits was provided and in order of importance the following ones were identified.

Table 9: Benefits of self-assessment

Main benefits	Average
Identification of the need to share information and improve communication	4,12
A clear identification of strengths and areas for improvement	3,97
We were able to identify a number of important actions to be undertaken	3,92
People developed a better understanding of the organizational issues/problems	3,89
Self-assessment gave rise to new ideas and a new way of thinking	3,67
The ability to contribute and to share views was felt positively	3,65
We realized how previous improvement activities could be taken forward	3,28
People started to become aware and interested in quality issues	3,22
We developed an understanding of how different initiatives in place fit together	3,21
People started to develop a stronger interest in the organization	3,15
We did not see any benefits at all	1,25

The most appreciated benefits fit perfectly with the most important reasons for using the CAF as registered in table 8.

Using the CAF should lead to a structured improvement process addressing the areas for improvement identified through self-assessment. However, ensuring an adequate and structured follow-up is not always easy. Nevertheless table 10 shows that the CAF resulted in 87% of the cases in sustainable improvement activities.

Table 10: Sustainable improvement activities in different countries

Did the use of the CAF result in sustainable improvement activities in the organisation?

Count		Did the use of the CAF result in sustainable improvement activities in the organisation?		Total
		Yes	No	
Please indicate your country	Austria	4	2	6
	Belgium	14	2	16
	Cyprus	1		1
	Czech Republic	18	2	20
	Germany	5		5
	Denmark	8	1	9
	Spain	2		2
	Estonia	2	1	3
	France	4		4
	Finland	3		3
	Greece	2	1	3
	Hungary	7		7
	Italy	4	2	6
	Ireland	1		1
	Latvia		1	1
	Norway	2		2
	Portugal	13	1	14
	Poland	3		3
	Romania		1	1
	Sweden	2	1	3
Slovenia	3		3	
Slovakia	6	1	7	
Total	104	16	120	

This is a remarkable increase compared to 2003. Noticing that nearly 9 organizations on 10 that applied CAF started up improvement actions does not prove that CAF guarantees the improvement of the organization, but it clearly indicates that it is at least a powerful incentive to start up improvement actions. Table 11 shows the nature of the improvement activity.

Table 2: The nature of the improvement activity

Improvement activity	N°
Input into the strategic planning process of the organization	51
A full action plan (directly linked to the results of the CAF SA)	38
Implementation of surveys for the staff	32
Improvement of the process	30
Improvement of the quality of the leadership	26
Improvement of knowledge management	25
Implementation of surveys for the customers/citizens (needs and satisfaction)	22
Some individual improvement activities (but no full action plan)	19
Implementation of result measurement (targets)	18
Input into running improvement programme(s)	18

A consolidated report handed to the management (leaving the implementation to the latter)	16
Implementation of HRM tools (please specify)	14
Improvement of technology	14
Better management of buildings and assets	6
Implementation of new financial management tools	6
Other	1

The fact that the results of a self assessment are integrated into the strategic planning process of the organization and/or that full action plans are developed shows that self assessment is better integrated in the overall management of the organization than before.

CONCLUSION

During its evolution in time, thinking on quality and quality management has moved to organizational management, including all aspects of management in organizations from leadership, policymaking and strategy, HRM and the management of human capital over processes to satisfaction of the citizen/clients and finally results on efficiency and effectiveness on the major key areas of the organization. These aspects of good management have been operationalized into a number of quality models / tools. One of those models is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). A model designed in a European context and developed especially for public sector organisations, promoting the principles of good management by an instrument of self-assessment.

In this paper we raised the question if these aspects of good management can replace or at least be a part of the solution given the fact that the European Commission doesn't provide a specific model for the organisation and functioning of public administrations. There is a lack of standards of reliable and efficient public administration formulated for the (candidate) member states. As a consequence the main question is: does the spread of quality management principles, as principles of good management, formulate a kind of bottom-up regulation in the EU countries concerning the standards of reliable and efficient public administration.

To answer this question we looked at the convergence in the EU countries, concerning quality management and the spread and use of the CAF-model at different levels of convergence (discursive, decisional, practice and results convergence)

- *Discursive convergence*: the quality management-rhetoric is present and "hot" in the EU-countries and the countries pay lip services to this evolution. This finds expression in a lot of promotional activities such as the organisation of national quality conferences, European quality conferences, quality awards and a large level of political support for quality management initiatives.

- *Decisional convergence*: this “new speak” is also translated in concrete quality management plans or policy documents making reference to quality management tools in the member states. The political support is translated into the recommended use of these tools and governments (actively) support the use of the TQM tools in general and the CAF model in particular.
- *Practice convergence*: the active support results in a large number of organizations all over Europe applying the CAF. On the basis of the estimations of the national CAF correspondents it can be concluded that the use of the CAF has undeniably further increased: from 500 applications in late 2003 to nearly 900 in mid-2005 through Europe. Furthermore, expectations are that by the end of 2006 the milestone figure of 1900 applications may well be exceeded, i.e. another doubling. All tables indicate that the difference between “old” and “new” Member States is fading, the CAF model is growing in its role to present one common language (Thijs & Staes, 2005).
- *Results convergence*: Does the use of quality models improve the results of the different organizations? This certainly is the most difficult level to evaluate, because few comparisons on the results of public administrations across Europe have been made. On the basis of the CAF model we can say that using the CAF should lead to a structured improvement process addressing the areas for improvement identified through self-assessment. Ensuring an adequate and structured follow-up is not always easy. Nevertheless 87% of the cases resulted in sustainable improvement activities, aiming to improve the results of the organization.

Although no regulation concerning the principles of good management or specific model for the organisation and functioning of public administrations is prescribed by the European Commission, a converging movement can be noticed in the use and spread of the principles of good management by promoting and using quality management tools. By spreading these principles a bottom-up regulation is formed in the different member states (old, new and candidate ones) concerning a common set of management principles.

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