

# Exchange of Best Practices: The CAF Experience<sup>1</sup>

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The creation of EIPA in 1981 coincided almost exactly with the launch of regular meetings of the Directors-General of The Public Service. The Directors-General are not only generally in charge of how public administration and general personnel management are organised and regulated but also of programmes aimed at improving and modernising public management.

It was therefore logical that the DGs would be interested in sharing their respective experiences in these two large areas of administrative management.<sup>2</sup>

It was in this context of sharing experience about modernisation of public administration management that the exchange of best practices developed, particularly the joint development of a public management instrument: the *Common Assessment Framework*, now generally known by its acronym: the CAF.

As we will describe below, since its creation the CAF has been implemented in many European countries, and has even been exported outside the European Union.<sup>3</sup>

## **From quality of service provision to quality of management**

The topic of quality was on the agenda of the half-yearly meeting of DGs during the Irish Presidency in 1996 under the title: *Improving Quality in Public Service Delivery*. It focused on the quality of services provided by public administration to its “user clients”.

In the first half of 1997, the Dutch Presidency put benchmarking (or comparative evaluation) of public administrations on the agenda. The study, led by EIPA, compared assessments relating to the quality of administration (speed, efficiency, reliability of services provided) as judged by national federations of firms. In the second half of 1997, the Luxembourg Presidency conducted a survey on the way relations were managed between public administrations and citizens. Right after that, the British Presidency focused on the IT dimension (new information and communication technologies – NICT) to be integrated into the quality perspective of administrative services. In this sequence of topics one can see a development from the pursued goal, i.e. quality of services provided to citizens as well as undertakings, to the quality of means used to reach this goal, i.e. quality of the actual management of public administration.

After taking over in the second half of 1998, the Austrian Presidency offered to launch a European prize for quality in public administration in the EU Member States, based in particular on the experience of the German-speaking countries: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. They have been jointly organising such a prize for several years with the help and authority of the German *Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften* (University of Administrative Sciences) in Speyer.

The conclusion of the Directors-General of the Public Service at this meeting in Vienna was to prefer the exchange of best practice over competitive

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comparison between the public administrations of the Member States. This means that they chose to jointly invest in the development of an instrument aimed at improving the quality of public management that would be similar to the EFQM model,<sup>4</sup> but adapted to the public administration context, its constraints and its actors. To that end, they set up a technical group composed of EIPA experts,<sup>5</sup> the Speyer Hochschule and the EFQM “public-sector” specialist.

### **The CAF: a quality management instrument specific to the field of public administration**

The pilot version of the CAF developed by this working group was presented in May 2000 at the First Quality Conference for Public Administrations in the EU held in Lisbon. The current version is based on the experience gained from the implementation and application of that first version of the CAF.

The CAF is offered as an instrument to help public organisations all over Europe use quality management techniques to improve their performance. The CAF provides a simple and easy-to-use framework for self-assessment by public-sector organisations.

The CAF has four main objectives:

- To take account of the specific characteristics of public-sector organisations;
- To serve as a tool for managers in the public sector who seek to improve the performance of their organisation;
- To act as a bridge across the various models used in quality management;
- To facilitate comparative performance analyses (*benchmarking*) between public-sector organisations.

The CAF has been developed to be used in all areas of the public sector, whether the national/federal, regional or local level of public administration. It can, moreover, be used in a broad range of contexts: e.g. as part of a systematic reform programme or as a basis for targeted improvement efforts within public-service organisations. In some cases, particularly very large organisations, self-assessment may also be undertaken in part of an organisation, a selected unit or department.

Since then, the third version of the CAF was launched in the light of the experiences of more than 900 CAF users. The 2006 version of the CAF was officially presented and disseminated at the fourth European Quality Conference in Tampere (Finland) in September 2006. As the use of the CAF has continued to spread throughout Europe, a growing interest in in-depth knowledge of the CAF, its use and the results that it can achieve have also developed. To that end, a new publication called *CAF works – better results for the citizens by using CAF* has just been published,<sup>6</sup> which aims to:

- bring CAF self-assessment to life by showing specific and concrete results and improvements that this method can produce;
- disseminate the CAF as an instrument for quality management throughout Europe’s public-sector organisations;
- develop mutual understanding via the sharing of experiences by CAF users.

For the first time, detailed information is provided, for citizens and actors of society, about concrete results of the use of the CAF and the improvement actions which it has produced and which have led to a better performance by the public organisations using the instrument.

### **A multi-dimensional exchange of best practices**

Nearly ten years’ experience in quality management within public administrations have been exemplary in several respects.

### **Cooperation between national administrations**

This is the first dimension of such cooperation in the exchange of best practices. At the beginning public administrations meeting in the framework of EUPAN



*Experiences with the CAF were discussed at the CAF Centre in Tampere, Finland, during the 4<sup>th</sup> Quality Conference for Public Administrations in the EU held on 27-29 September 2006.*

(European Union Public Administration Network, the new name and acronym of the network of Directors-General of the Public Service and their services) shared their very diversified experiences regarding quality management. In fact, while most of them had taken initiatives regarding the quality of services provided, only some could resort to quality management tools: a minority used the abovementioned EFQM instrument which had originally been developed basically for the field of private enterprise.

### Cooperation between national administrations and the European Commission

The cooperation between national and European public managers is almost consubstantial in the EUPAN network. At the political level, at the meetings of the Ministers of the Public Service, the European Commission has been present and active from the beginning through the participation of the Commissioner in charge of relations with national administrations. At DGs level, the Director-General in charge of managing the administrative services of the Commission and relations with national administrations takes an active part in the work of the network, both in its half-yearly plenary meetings and in the various working groups to which he delegates competent experts.

In the field of quality management the Commission has supported work by, for instance, sharing its own experiences in quality management, particularly within its Directorate-General for Industry, and has allowed the CAF working group (and Innovative Public Services Group) to use the excellent reports of the Commission with the European Foundation for Quality Management.

### Public-private cooperation

As stated earlier, from the start of the CAF project public experts have used the expertise of the EFQM, whose long experience in this field has represented a considerable asset. This experience was mainly based on ongoing developments in the private sector and the market economy. There were, however, already significant developments in the public sector, especially in the sub-sector of public undertakings, i.e. between the private market sector and public administration.

In this context, the key concepts of the EFQM model were re-examined, particularly on the basis of the experience of the *Speyer Hochschule* and the German-speaking countries, as well as the expertise of the members of the abovementioned technical working group in the field of public management. These key concepts include:

- “Leadership”, which in the field of public administration involves the subtle and democratic play of the politico-administrative structure;
- The concept of “strategy and planning”, which again involves this sensitive interaction between the objectives of political powers that are often preoccupied with short-term results (within the current term of office) and those of public management (senior civil servants) concerned with feasibility, continuity and long-term effect;
- “Client satisfaction” in the EFQM model that has become “citizen/customer-oriented results” in the CAF model, so as to take account of the specific requirements in public management of the “citizen dimension” of the client and the satisfaction of democratic needs, equality of citizens and the quest for the general interest.

### Cooperation between practitioners and academics

The CAF has also developed in the framework of active cooperation between practitioners – both from the private sector and from public administration, as stated earlier – and experts from the academic world, in this case those from the *Speyer Hochschule* and the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht. This cooperation has also given this long-term project the methodological coherence and solidity necessary for its success, as well as the



Seminar: “CAF & BSC: The Common Assessment Framework and the Balanced Scorecard”, Maastricht, 22-23 May 2006.

means needed to constantly update it. This year, 2006, version 3 of the self-assessment instrument was launched.

### Multisectoral synergy

Although the EUPAN network consists only of administrations in charge of the public service, its leaders want to make the instrument they have developed available to all ministerial administrations and public agencies, indeed the entire public sector. The creation of a CAF database centralising the results of CAF applications allows sector comparisons and linkages between services in different countries or sectors that want to share experience and learn from each other.

In this respect it should be mentioned that with this database, managed by EIPA's CAF Resource Centre, comparisons can be made between "types of organisation" (ministries, agencies, etc.), between "levels of organisation" (national, regional or local) and between "sectors of activity" (justice, home affairs, economy, etc.).

### Lessons from experience

We will conclude this quick examination by underlining two factors that we believe have been decisive for the success of this CAF experience, unique in terms of transnational administrative cooperation.

The first factor was and remains the *driving and guiding force* behind the operation provided by the network of *Directors-General of the Public Service*. By setting the project objectives, by releasing and allocating the means necessary for running the project, by continuously evaluating the progress made and by setting new objectives, the DGs have, from the start, continuously supported the management and implementation of the CAF. They have also ensured the continuous support of the political authorities for the project.

The second success factor has, in my view, been the coaching role necessary for the long-term continuity of such a project. This role was and still is played by EIPA, which was asked by the EUPAN network to set up a CAF Resource Centre at EIPA, coordinated by a seconded national expert from the administration of an EU Member State.

The exchange of best practices is without a doubt an excellent way of ensuring that all public administrations in Europe make progress. The effectiveness of such an exchange requires, on the basis of the CAF experience, continuity in its leadership on the one hand, and continuity in its daily and continuous management on the other.

It is to be hoped that other new projects of this scale will develop within the EUPAN network so that public management will be able to even better serve the interests of citizens, of the economy of the EU Member States and of Europe itself. ::

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution is not a technical introduction to the CAF. Readers who are interested in this topic are referred to the following website [www.eipa.eu](http://www.eipa.eu) (click on the CAF logo listed under "Current Projects") which offers a comprehensive overview of relevant publications and projects.

<sup>2</sup> See on this subject: *Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union: A New Space for Public Administrations and Services of General Interest in an Enlarged Union*, 8 June 2005. Study conducted under the responsibility of EIPA. Chapter 2, "Europeanisation through administrative cooperation" is particularly interesting in this respect.

<sup>3</sup> In the framework of a European administrative cooperation programme with China, coordinated by EIPA, the CAF has also been disseminated in Chinese public administration.

<sup>4</sup> EFQM = *European Foundation for Quality Management*: Avenue des Pleiades 11, 1200 Brussels, Belgium, tel.: +32-2 775 35 11, fax: +32-2 775 35 35, email:

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- <sup>5</sup> Professor Michael Kelly and the author of this paper had the honour of being actively involved in the work of this technical group.
- <sup>6</sup> Elisabeth Dearing, Patrick Staes and Thomas Prorok (eds), *CAF works – better service for the citizens by using CAF*, (Vienna: Austrian Federal Chancellery, 2006). This publication is available in English, French and German.



*The CAF expert group after a day of intensive discussions revising the CAF model, Vienna, April 2006.*