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Principal Management Concepts in Greek Public Sector: Part I – The Common Assessment Framework

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Abstract

In the modern era of internationalization, interconnection and rapid technological changes the obligation of the public sector to provide the best possible services to citizens have become challenging tasks. The incorporation of Total Quality Management principles and tools in public services can prove to be decisive given that they contribute to the improvement of the services provided, offer better customer service, help in understanding how the agency is organised and operates, as well as contribute in changing the attitude of employees towards the adoption of a quality culture. Since the mid-00's, several programmes have been implemented in Greece in order to improve the quality of public services which was, up to that point, dictated only by the need to consolidate relative EU financial resources. This paper is the first part of a study about the application of principal management concepts in Greek public sector since year 2004 when Law 3230/2004 was introduced. In particular it tries to record and assess the experience of the implementation of the "Common Assessment Framework" in Greek public services. Towards this end, the views and opinions of experts from the public sector are analysed with the use of interviews and questionnaires.

Keywords: Common Assessment Framework; public administration; Total Quality Management; Greece

JEL Classification: D73, L30.

1. Introduction

The proper function of public administration is a key element of any modern State, a springboard for economic development, social justice, environmental protection and security (Nabatchi, 2012). Today, more than ever,

due to the financial crisis, the public sector is under the fire of criticism. Public organisations are often seen by the public as wasteful, bureaucratic organisational systems that fail to address adequately the various public shortcomings. However, as Cepiku and Bonomi Savignon (2012) aptly suggest the public sector has a crucial part to play in order is to overcome the crisis, to foster sustainable development and to manage the equilibrium between public services supply and demand. Despite the recent introduction of changes aimed at the simplification of procedures, customer service, transparency, accountability, good governance, a.o., it is generally accepted that public administration in Greece still suffers from deficiencies and the demand for improved operation and efficiency of the public services is more up to date than ever.

The acceptance of the principles of Total Quality Management (TQM), focusing on citizen satisfaction, can significantly contribute to the improvement of public services towards a modern way of administration. TQM is characterised by the focus on the citizen - client, the universal participation of all employees in the processes as well as the effort for continuous improvement. Several initiatives and tools such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) are based exactly on these principles.

Despite occasional efforts at a European level, no common EU policy for public administration matters exists, only cooperation on public sector issues on an intergovernmental level. However, the administrative mechanisms of the various countries have significant differences in how they operate; for this reason efforts are made towards a course of administrative convergence of the public sectors of the member states with the implementation of certain community initiatives. To this end attempts were made with policies like the "Single European Act" and the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice. But the inefficient function of public administration made it impossible for these community policies to be applied. For this reason institutional interventions and actions of administrative reform and modernisation were developed, both overall in the EU, as well as individually by national initiatives aimed at strengthening the capability of the public sector.

In this context, Greek Law 3230/2004 introduced the application of TQM principles in the services of the Greek Public Sector by the establishment of MBO, the measurement of the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector services via the CAF and quality certification through ISO standards. This new organisational form instituted a radical change, in contrast to the previous forms of public administration: it introduced the meaning of self-management and quality in Greece's public administration and the involvement of all staff members in the production process. Now the focus is on quality, rather than the result itself.

Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the use of relevant tools does not always lead to significant organisational improvement or at least not to such an extent that would constitute a major organisational change (Lascelles and Dale, 1990; Boyett and Boyett, 2000). Therefore, it is necessary to document the contribution of each tool in the improvement of the administrative organisation. This study aims to investigate whether the application of principal management concepts in Greek public administration had any significant and lasting effect, and if it has led organisations to increase their efficiency and productivity. More in particular, the purpose of this study is to record the experience of the application of the CAF and MBO in the Greek public sector, to identify the problems and difficulties which appeared during their implementation, to draw conclusions and propose measures for their more effective use. The results of the study are presented in two papers. The current paper is focused on the application of the CAF and is structured as follows. In section 2 the concept of TQM is discussed followed by the analysis of the CAF. In section 3 the introduction of the CAF in the Greek public sector is analysed and the research methodology is outlined. The major findings are discussed in section 4. Section 5 provides a short overview of the paper, since the integrated concluding remarks are discussed in the second part of the study.

2. The role of Total Quality Management in the modernisation of public administration: the Common Assessment Framework

The term "quality" concerns whatever contributes in the satisfaction of the citizens. Quality of service, in particular, is defined by the customer's perception of the best possible service provided and this perception is formed and influenced by their previous experiences of the use of this particular service or other, similar, ones (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Berry et al., 1994).

The study of the quality of service is considered more difficult than that of the quality of goods (Black et al., 2001; Lindgren and Jansson, 2013) and it would be useful to mention some of their characteristics which distinguish them from products:

- they are not tangible, resulting in a difficulty in their identification and assessment by the citizens - customers
- sometimes people take part in the provision of a service
- the consumption of a service is, to a large extent, done simultaneously with its provision
- the user is not considered the "owner" of the service provided
- services are not tested before they are generated

It is important that all these characteristics are taken into account when services are planned and before they are provided to the public (Chelladurai and Chang, 2000; Tsitskari et al., 2006).

TQM is defined as the "management approach of an organisation, centered on quality, based on the participation of all its members and aiming at long-term success through customer satisfaction, and benefits to all members of the organisation and to society" (Ljungstrom and Klefsjo, 2002). According to Demirbag et al. (2006) TQM is "a holistic management philosophy aimed at continuous improvement in all functions of an organisation to deliver services in line with customer's needs or requirements under the leadership of top-management".

The adoption of TQM is a strategic choice on behalf of top management and constitutes a radical change in the way the organisation functions, with the changes in its daily operations being visible gradually and the desired results obvious in the long term. Its success depends on the effective achievement of the optimal combination of all factors, human and tangible, which take part in the production process (Calvo-Mora et al., 2013).

TQM, as an innovative form of organisation, is characterised by the following principles:

- it highlights the need for a continuous effort towards long-term improvement of organisational performance
- it gives emphasis on quality at all stages of the production
- it aims at meeting the needs of customers but also of the people working for the organisation
- although individual functional areas of an organisation are often thought of as being independent to each other, the introduction of the concept of the "internal customer-supplier", meaning, in a few words, all people involved in the production procedure and who's total and systematic involvement and cooperation is necessary in order to achieve the final result, proved that they are, in fact, correlated

- demand for continuous improvement of products or services in relation to their costs.

The implementation of TQM was considered innovative for several reasons: it contributed to the revision of the view that quality in administration equals increased costs and is therefore likely to be disadvantageous for the agency. Moreover, for the first time the relationship between internal customers was studied, both between themselves but also in relation to their transactions with external customers. Furthermore, one more element that made TQM innovative was the emphasis it gave to the role of the human factor in the planning, materialisation and after-production controls of goods and services (Boys and Wilcock, 2014).

The CAF is a self-assessment model of the performance of public organisations which emerged from the collaboration of the ministries of public administration in the EU countries, in an effort to introduce the principles of Quality Management in public sector organisations (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2007). The tool is based on the European Foundation Quality Management (EFQM) model as well as the standard of the German University of Administrative Sciences Speyer ("Speyer Quality Award") and has therefore, as a self-evaluation framework, many similarities with these models. This application offers a holistic analysis of organisational performance by approaching it from different angles simultaneously. According to its philosophy, improvement has to do with the combined and efficient function of leadership, strategy and planning, human resources, partnerships, resources and administrative procedures.

CAF use provides organisations with a framework of principles and procedures that contribute to continuous improvement, by offering an organisational assessment based on facts and the opportunity to recognise any possible progress that has been made after implementing it. Additionally, it functions as a means of inducing interest to employees for their participation in the process as well as promoting good administrative practices (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2007).

The CAF has four main objectives (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2007):

- To introduce the principles of TQM in Public Management and lead through self-assessment in an integrated quality circle composed of Planning, Execution, Control and Feedback.
- To facilitate the self-assessment of public organisations in order to adequately reflect their current situation (in regards to inputs and resources in relation with the final output and services) and help design improvement actions,

- To serve as a "bridge" between the different models of quality assurance and TQM used in the public services of the Member - States of the EU
- To facilitate benchmarking and comparative learning ("benchlearning") between the organisational units, in the same, or different, sectors.

The CAF, which today has been adopted by all European Member States, is designed to be used both at a national and local level. Furthermore, it can be applied either to an entire government agency or an organisational unit only.

CAF uses nine criteria, each of them containing a number of sub-criteria (28 in total),which correspond to the basic aspects of an organisation and are divided into "conditions" and "results" as follows (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2007):

Conditions
- Leadership
- Strategy and Planning
- Human Resources
- Partnerships and Resources
- Procedures

Results
- Results tailored to the citizen-customer
- Results regarding Human Resources
- Results on society
- Key performance results

The implementation of the CAF does not evaluate the essence of the policies applied by a public organisation, but its administrative function. The application, as a quality tool depends on how it is put into practice, in other words, its proper use and its potential usefulness is directly dependent on how the people responsible for its implementation "run" it (Tsekos, 2007).

In practice CAF makes it possible to record the condition of an organisation at a particular time and, by repeating the procedure after some period of time, usually two years, to determine whether there was improvement and if so to what extend and where in specific (Ministry of Interior Affairs, 2007).

Nevertheless for the successful implementation of the CAF, political as well as administrative, leadership must be genuinely convinced about its usefulness and necessity in order to, not only, commit to its actual application in practice but also to convince, in return, lower ranking public servants, which are given the task to apply it more directly, to be equally dedicated to the task (Rammata, 2011).

3. Insights on the application of the CAF in the Greek public sector

The financial crisis has, once again, brought to the spotlight the inadequacy of public administrative mechanisms in organising, implementing processes and managing human resources. The large number of ministries, the over-concentration of power, overstaffing, bureaucracy, low productivity and the lack of measurement and control mechanisms are some of the reasons the Greek Public Sector is characterised problematic (Rammata, 2011).

The problems Greek public administration faces affect not only the quality of the offered services but also its growth prospects. The economic costs caused by bureaucratic obstacles and delays are an additional burden on the country's public sector and, consequently, its citizens and constitutes a disincentive for investment projects and investments. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the bureaucracy of the Greek public sector is causing a loss of 2 GDP units annually, while at the same time Greece is ranked in the last position between EU countries in regards to administrative costs (OECD, 2014).

The current economic crisis in Greece necessitates the comprehensive restructuring of the public sector, in order for it to be functional and effective. Today, more than ever, there is need for the fundamental restructure of the public sector with the application of relevant managerial tools, such as the CAF and MBO, which can contribute towards this goal. Regardless of the attempts to modernise public governance in Greece the fact remains that citizens remain skeptical about its true modernisation and appear doubtful in using the various tools being offered for their transactions with public services. This shows that the efforts towards a quality-driven public administration are not sufficient by themselves - the general public must be convinced about the usefulness and functionality of the changes implemented and their potential benefit in order to feel confident and comfortable in accepting these new tools. Therefore, for these changes to be successful not only administrative reforms but also a change in "culture" are required, i.e. a change in how the citizens-clients, but also public servants, perceive public agencies and their role (Tsekos, 2007; Rammata, 2011).

It has been a little over 10 years since TQM processes were implemented in Greek public administration for the first time and terms like "quality" and "self-assessment" were introduced in public governance. Since then the functionality of TQM with its tools and its actual contribution in the reconstruction of the obsolete administrative structures of the Greek state became an interesting question as well as a challenging task.

Many European countries were already using TQM in the public sector for years, having, each of them individually, implemented a series of national plans in order to adapt their policies to what the latest developments in international public management dictated (Staes and Thijs, 2005). At the same time, international organisations such as the OECD, the United Nations, the World Bank and others, with their relevant studies and research, proposed appropriate administrative reforms towards better public governance.

In this context, Greece also adopted a series of national operational action plans in the field of administration. In an effort to improve the quality of services provided to its citizens the Greek state, during the 80's and early 90's, enacted Laws 1599/1986 and 1943/1991 where, for the first time, extensive reference was made to the need for simplification and acceleration of the procedures relevant with the direct contact between citizens and public services (Rammata, 2011).

Furthermore, in 1983 the "National School of Public Administration" was founded, its mission being the development of highly qualified personnel capable of excelling in exercising administrative command. The students of this institution, upon graduation, instantly enter the public sector services and take their place as officials in key positions (EKDDA, 2012). Moreover, the National Bank of Greece in a report entitled "Quality in Public Administration" proposed the introduction of administrative practices in the public sector, which had already been applied in private sector management, such as MBO, work specialisation, planning and monitoring (NBG, 1998).

Later, in the mid-00's the implementation of specific targeted programs began in order to improve the quality of public services which was, up to that point, dictated only by the need to consolidate relative EU financial resources. At the same time, modern means of citizen service started to gradually be applied, such as the use of services via the Internet, the operation of call centers providing information concerning specific services, the operation of "One-stop shops", the use of videoconference technology and more (Rammata, 2011).

Some of the purposes of these programs were, among others:
- the simplification of administrative procedures by reducing bureaucracy
- the promotion of transparency
- an approach towards citizens in order to grow credibility in the institutions and procedures of the public sector
- a holistic approach of all public entities with the reduction of the degree of autonomy of individual public agencies

- the optimal use of modern technology, especially in the field of communications, both in favor of the better function of public services as well as the improvement of the transaction between citizens and the state
- easier introduction of MBO and the use of the relative indicators measuring the effectiveness of the public services
- the alignment of public organisations with moderate socio-economic developments.

Through Law 3230/2004 ("Management by Objectives, measurement of efficiency and other provisions") and the Presidential Act 259/2005 ("Establishment of Administration of Quality and Efficiency"), the application of principal management concepts was officially introduced in the public sector. In particular, through MBO these laws established management by setting targets and the measurement of the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector services, while with the CAF the basis for self-assessment and improvement of the function of public services was set (Hellenic Republic, 2004). Furthermore, and in accordance with the provisions of the aforementioned law, a "General Directorate of Administrative Modernisation" as well as a "Directorate of Quality and Efficiency" (DQE) -today called "Department of Structure Organising & Assessment" (DSOA) were established in the Ministry of Interior Affairs.

3.1. The establishment and dissemination of the CAF in Greek public services

The body responsible for the promotion and support of quality issues in the public sector was the Ministry of Interior Affairs and specifically the DQE of the General Secretariat of Public Management and e-Government. DQE, the main goal of which was the dissemination of the CAF and the provision of assistance to the public services that decide to implement it, has translated the model and its user manual in the Greek language, provided relative assistance tools (like questionnaires, evaluation reference model, score analysis, etc.) and also organised seminars on the model. In addition, DQE was, among other things, responsible for the collection, monitoring, processing and presentation of various information and data which refer to the efficiency and effectiveness of public services and are related to the application of TQM tools (Karyotakis and Moustakis, 2014).

The agencies which were responsible for the actual implementation of the CAF were the "Quality units" established (in application of Law 3230/2004) in the Ministries, the Regions and in some Prefectures and Municipalities. Wherever these units were not created, the responsibility to implement the CAF

was given to the Management Directories of each organisation. Although DQE predated Law 3230/2004, it played an essential role after the enactment of this Law, becoming an instigating power in introducing quality systems and tools in public administration. However, the agency's integration in one of the General Directorates of its Ministry (General Address Management Modernisation) limited its ability to respond to its mission.

Today, many Quality Directorates and Departments are facing serious understaffing and resource (financial and other) shortcomings. It is characteristic, for example, that of the thirteen (13) regions:

- three (3) have not yet set up a quality department,
- eight (8) Quality Departments are staffed by a single employee,
- one (1) has only two (2) employees and
- only in one (Region of Central Macedonia) four (4) employees exist.

Moreover, the vast majority of the Quality Departments officials are assigned to other services as well.

Nowadays, DQE has been replaced by the Directory of Structure Organisation and Evaluation of the Directory of Management of Organisational Reforms of the Ministry of Managerial Reforms and e-Government.

3.2. The research methodology

The primary research was conducted via interviews as well as the use of questionnaires. Interviewees and respondents include high ranking public officials (HO1, HO2, HO3, HO4, HO5 and HO6) with a specialisation on CAF and MBO matters and lower ranking public employees (LE1 and LE2) with experience in the implementation of the two tools.

An interview is defined as the discussion between two or more persons with the aim of interaction of three factors, the examiner, the respondent and the communication framework. The ultimate goal is to detect emotions, motivation, experiences and attitudes which no other technique is able to achieve. The data collected are considered qualitative giving the ability to cover aspects other tools, e.g. questionnaires, would hardly be able to do (Edwards and Holland, 2013).

There are two types of interviews:

- Structured interviews (closed type), where a series of questions exist beforehand from which interviewee and interviewer may not deviate
- Non-structured interviews (open type), where its objectives may be established beforehand, but the researcher leaves great freedom to the interviewee as to the answers.

In this paper open type interviews were used.

Questionnaires, on the other hand, are methodological, educational and social, research tools which are presented as a form in which answers or reactions of an individual are noted. The purpose of this tool is to measure attitudes, opinions and perceptions. Questionnaires are designed before being completed by their respondents and important role in designing those plays the purpose and significance of the study for which they have been created, the words used and the clear instructions towards the respondent (Bell, 2005).

Questionnaires are divided into two kinds:
- the ones filled directly by the respondent
- the ones filled indirectly where assistance is necessary by a specialist or by the researcher himself.

In this paper directly filled questionnaires were used.

Moreover, it should be noted that experts' views are valuable for all kinds of organisations. Björk et al. (2014) have outlined the importance of analysing the perspectives of the managers involved in order to address performance issues.

4. Findings regarding the use of the CAF in the Greek public sector

The research on CAF use in the Greek public sector reveals some interesting findings:

One major point that was mentioned by almost everyone was the absence of a general quality framework. The structure and the overall function of the Greek public sector are not characterised by quality procedures and there seems to be no general administrative planning targeting on improvement based on quality processes. The lack a total quality policy, as HO1 and LE1 noticed was a critical drawback on the correct introduction and implementation of the CAF. Also it was highlighted the absence of a "business plan" similar to the ones developed for private sector organisations with specific planning, goals and timetable. HO1, furthermore, mentioned the absence of clarification, by leadership, of the mission and vision for each public body.

In direct connection with the above was the ascertainment that there was no adequate preparation for the introduction of the CAF: officials and employees were not sufficiently trained in order to implement the CAF properly, HO2 and LE1 mentioned. Moreover, as HO1 and HO4 noted that although some seminars on CAF were organised by INEP, there were not performed in collaboration with DQE (which would add to their credibility) or done repeatedly to reach as many

services as possible. Furthermore, the participation of the latter was rather limited (EKDDA, 2012).

The deficient introduction of CAF caused suspiciousness among public employees and most of them dealt with the tool with reluctance and unwillingness. The fear of evaluation, salary reductions or even let-offs, especially during the financial crisis resulted in a rather negative reaction of public servants towards the application, as HO2 mentioned. The application, therefore, was introduced before employees were convinced for its usefulness, its practicality and its potential benefits. In addition, HO4 mentioned that not only lower rank employees but also Directors and higher officials of the Administrative hierarchy seem to be equally not convinced about the application.

Furthermore, what became soon evident during this research was that Law 3240/2004 was not implemented correctly and that includes one of its tools, the CAF. The results of CAF implementation in the Greek public sector are considered to be limited, as HO1 stated and also the relevant studies of Giannakopoulou (2011), Karipidou (2011) Vakalopoulou et al. (2013) show. In essence the CAF was not implemented as described in the provision of the Law and the relative implementation manual issued later, as HO1 and HO2 noticed. HO3, HO4 as well as most of the employees with participation on the CAF implementation procedures interviewed, noted that the application was usually implemented up to a point, but was almost never concluded properly.

Numerous reasons were mentioned explaining the aforementioned result: The most important drawback of CAF implementation was the inability to come up with actual measurements especially in financial terms as HO4 mentioned. The absence of official documented data, the lack of measurement systems and the struggles of the employees to correctly implement the tool led most agencies not to be able to present actual improvement results. HO2 and LE1 noticed a difficulty of the self-evaluation members to match the evaluation criteria of the CAF with the actual function of the organisation in order to deal with specific problems. HO1, moreover, notes that in implementing the procedure most employees stick to the adherence of the provisions of the Law rather than trying to achieve actual results.

One more critical point that caused CAF not to perform as expected in the Greek public sector was the fact, as HO4 and LE2 noted, that the improvement proposals were, in most cases, not implemented. In essence, this means that the procedure was not concluded as it is provisioned and therefore it is difficult to be expecting any improvement without putting forward the improvement measures according to what weaknesses the application has revealed. Even in cases where this happened they were either non-realistic or of a general nature and

addressed the found deficiencies in a small percentage. The same mistakes were also noted when the results criteria indicators were set, while sometimes, as HO3 and LE2 noted, they were not set at all.

After the first introduction of the CAF DQE suggested specific measures in order to improve the implementation of the tool and its function. Unfortunately, as both HO1 and LE1 mentioned, these were not taken under consideration by higher administrative or political command.

Also, HO2 and others mentioned a difficulty of the organisations to match the evaluation criteria with their actual function in order to deal with the existing specific problems.

Another important drawback of CAF implementation in the Greek public sector was the lack of time. Many employees complained that the time chosen for the processes of the framework to take place was not convenient as it usually coincided with "rush-hours" of the offices. In addition, the procedures to be implemented constituted additional workload for everyone involved, and this further discredited the process in their eyes.

One more factor that stood in the way of an ideal application of the tool was the lack of administrative independence of the quality departments and every other agency involved. Centralisation of the Greek Public sector leaves no room for initiatives to its agencies and also leaves them unprotected against political influence (Ioannou, 2006). A certain amount of administrative independence would allow public bureaus to perform better in their task to implement quality procedures.

As far as employees are concerned, HO1 considers the lack of connection between employee productivity and rewards, the lack of motives and incentives and the absence of rewards in general as one more disadvantage hindering the ideal CAF implementation.

One of the important elements on which the success of the application depends upon is the participation of everyone involved in the procedure, regardless of their rank in the hierarchy. LE1 and LE2 noticed that, most of the times, this was not the case. Moreover, HO2 mentioned that there seemed to be a greater interest in the self-assessment procedures only by particular employees, especially by the leaders of the self-evaluation groups and some directors, particularly of a younger age and a higher educational level. Similarly, another drawback is considered to be the lack of information of employees the mission and vision of their organisation. In other words, employees do not have access to the "bigger picture" and this influenced their participation and their unwillingness to contribute in CAF procedures, HO4 mentioned.

Another element that became evident, especially when communicating with lower rank public employees, was that many of them were not convinced of the feasibility and functionality of the application, this way depreciating its value as an improvement tool. This, as mentioned before, can be explained by their insufficient training and difficulty to fully understand the procedure but also by the mentality that dominates most Greek public services today by which employees are focused solely on their duties and are uninterested in change or adding workload in their existing responsibilities. In this point, it should also be mentioned that these behavioral characteristics are also valid for Directors and Heads of Departments. That contributed in the lack of commitment and support towards the application and their relative actions in relation to their subordinates. This may also explain, as HO2 mentioned, the lack of trust of lower rank employees towards their leaders.

In regards to the positive impact of CAF use in Greek public administration these can be summarised as follows:

One of the most important positive impacts of CAF use was the enhancement of teamwork, the establishment of a culture of collaboration and trust between self-assessment team members and other employees and departments. Good relationships between co-workers are always welcome in every organisation. The excitement, as many of the interviewees noted, of the participation in a process of improvement made employees feel better about themselves, individually and as a part of a group with a common interest.

The CAF proved to be true to its main function, self-assessment. Wherever it was applied it was able to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation under assessment. It was, then, in the hands of the leadership to proceed with the improvement actions and apply the CAF again, or not.

Although, as mentioned before, it is difficult to measure actual results from CAF use some public agencies, especially Municipalities as HO2, HO4 and HO5, mentioned, claim to have seen improvement in the quality of the services they provide.

5. Concluding remarks

The first of the two papers was focused on the implementation of the CAF in Greek public administration. The findings of this paper are inseparable with the findings of the second paper on the implementation of MBO. Thus, the aggregate results are extensively discussed in the second part of this study.

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