

Quality Management on the European Agenda¹



By **Patrick Staes** and **Nick Thijs***

Quality thinking is rising in the public sector in many Member States. Does Europe have a strategy? Is this coincidence or are these individual initiatives, and are those involved at least learning from one another? The setting up of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) provided an initial impetus for a common European reference framework. Did CAF play this role by the end of 2003? What role will EIPA play in the future in this field?

Introduction

Quality thinking has undergone an entire evolution, from the mere inspection of products to an integral part of the organisation strategy. Its rise in the private sector was followed by a similar emergence in the public sector. This trend has been evident in many Anglo-Saxon countries and in Western Europe for a number of years now. In recent times, the same tendency has been felt in Eastern Europe. Does Europe have a strategy? Is this coincidence or are these individual initiatives, and are those involved at least learning from one another?

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."² In the second part of this article we will look at the CAF and the application of the CAF as a European quality tool in more detail.

An important trend in quality thinking and the exchange of best practices within the public sector was set in motion by the organisation of quality conferences specifically intended for the public sector. These conferences will be dealt with briefly in the third part.

Finally, in part four, we highlight the European strategy in the field of quality management and the role played therein by the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA).

1. Quality in Europe

The history of quality thinking has its roots in post-war industrialisation and the rise of mass production. Although 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 process and the guarantee of quality during the course of this process to Total Quality Management (TQM) and a greater focus was placed on the user and the effects that the products and

services had on that user. Satisfaction became a key concept.³

From the late 1980s and particularly the early 1990s, TQM became a feature of the public sector. Initially, the quality movement was based on users' charters (1991 'Citizens Charter' in the UK, 1992 'Charte des services publics' in France and in 1993 'het Handvest van de Gebruiker' [the Users' Charter] in Belgium, later followed by a number of other countries).⁴ In the late 1990s, many quality models and techniques (EFQM, ISO,...) and subsequently the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) found their way into the public sector. In recent times, public sector quality improvements have appeared on the agenda of Eastern European countries. The new EU Member States in particular are very active in promoting quality tools.⁵

In the first half of 2002, a survey was carried out under the Spanish presidency of the EU to map out the most important programmes and initiatives regarding quality and quality management being pursued at the time in the various Member States.⁶ A number of conclusions can be drawn from this survey with respect to the structures put in place to get to grips with stimulating, promoting and supporting quality management. In addition, conclusions were also drawn regarding the application of quality models and tools.

It is striking that most if not all Member States are conducting a number or even a large number of quality initiatives relating to various forms of service provision. The focus within these initiatives is often geared to the relationship with the user/customer (one-stop shops, e-government), innovation, quality of life improvement for citizens, use of modern management techniques, simplification of administrative procedures and regulations and achieving higher standards of service provision. The actions taken are often directed towards an administration that works efficiently and has a result and customer-oriented focus and which is transparent and accessible to users/customers. Most of these actions have been put in place as part of a wider policy with a view to reforming and modernising government services.

Most Member States have specific organisation units (at central, regional and local level) which are responsible for

the promotion of quality initiatives for the public sector.

In addition, the various Member States have organisations that support the public sector in setting up quality initiatives. These may range from private market parties (training organisations, consultants) across professional associations for quality management and universities to training institutes within the public sector.

The use of quality models and techniques to achieve improvements in the public sector has taken root in all Member States. A commonly used model is the EFQM model. In some Member States, e.g. United Kingdom and Spain, it is by far the most prevalent and used model. In other countries (Belgium and Italy) the Common Assessment Framework has made great strides in recent years. Furthermore, international quality standards such as ISO have been applied in numerous Member States for a wide range on activities. Some countries have their own model such as the Swedish Institute Quality Model (SIQ) or the *Instituut voor Nederlandse Kwaliteit* [Dutch Quality Institute] (INK model).

In addition, charters are used in the various Member States as tools to improve the relationship between citizens/users and government administrations by laying down quality standards for service provision. In some Member States (Finland, France, the Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom and Sweden), a national quality prize exists to reward excellent and quality government organisations. User satisfaction with service provision is being measured by means of customer satisfaction assessments and systems for registering complaints and suggestions have been put in place in the various Member States. Channels and forums usually exist (conferences, websites, newsletters) to exchange best practices. A real policy geared towards the use of benchmarking is only evident in a few Member States (the Netherlands⁷, Portugal and particularly the United Kingdom⁸).

2. The CAF as a European quality tool

2.1 The CAF

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. This led in November 1998 during the Austrian EU Presidency to a ministerial declaration containing "the general principles concerning the improvement of the quality of services provided to citizens". 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

By offering a framework such as CAF as a guiding principle for organisation management, principles of proper management find their way into many administrations and many different countries.

competition, but an alternative idea came up and was 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. As a consequence of this, it was decided that a 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 modernizing 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 EIPA and the first version of the CAF was presented during the First Quality Conference for Public Administration in the EU in Lisbon in May 2000⁹.

A first wave of CAF applications was evalua-

ted during the Belgian Presidency in the second semester of 2001. A number of recommendations on improving the model were formulated: further simplification of the model, elaboration of guidelines, adjustment of the scoring panels and the creation of a glossary. The new CAF 2002 was presented at the 2nd European Quality Conference in Copenhagen in October 2002.

The CAF has four main purposes:

1. To capture the unique features of public sector organisations.
2. To serve as a tool for public administrators who want to improve the performance of their organisation.
3. To act as a bridge across the various models in use in quality management.
4. To facilitate benchmarking 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 a part of an organisation, e.g. a selected section or department.

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 and further operationalised and given concrete form in 27 subcriteria. On the basis of these subcriteria, a self-assessment group from within the organisation evaluates that organisation.

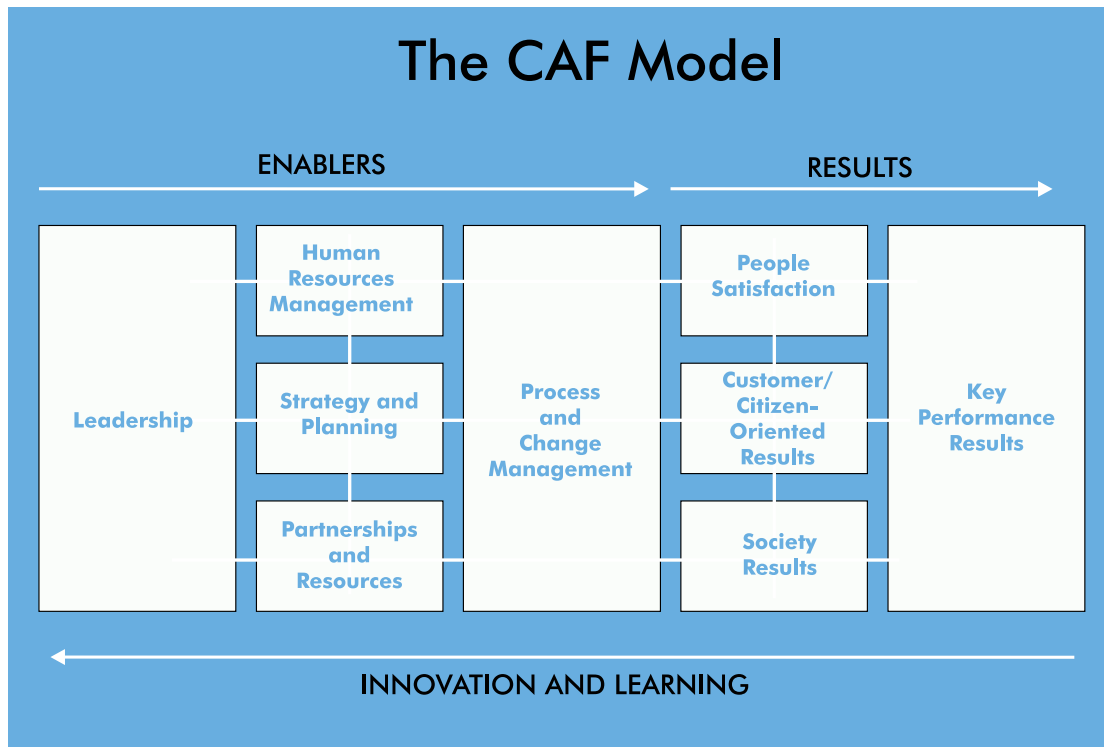
Using the CAF provides an organisation with a powerful

framework to initiate a process of continuous improvement.

The CAF provides:

- an assessment based on evidence against a set of criteria which has become widely accepted across Europe
- a means to focus improvement activity where it is most needed and 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;
- opportunities to promote and share good practice within different areas of an organisation and with other



The list of subcriteria is as follows:

ENABLERS

Criterion 1. Leadership

- Subcriterion 1.1. Give a direction to the organisation: develop and communicate a clear vision, mission and values
- Subcriterion 1.2. Develop and implement a system for managing the organisation
- Subcriterion 1.3. Motivate and support the people in the organisation and act as a role model
- Subcriterion 1.4. Manage the relations with politicians and other stakeholders

Criterion 2. Strategy and planning

- Subcriterion 2.1. Gather information relating to present and future needs of stakeholders
- Subcriterion 2.2. Develop, review and update strategy and planning
- Subcriterion 2.3. Implement strategy and planning in the whole organisation

Criterion 3. Human Resources Management

- Subcriterion 3.1. Plan, manage and improve human resources with regard to strategy and planning
- Subcriterion 3.2. Identify, develop and use competencies of the employees aligning individual, team and organisational targets and goals
- Subcriterion 3.3. Involve employees by developing dialogue and empowerment

Criterion 4. Partnerships and Resources

- Subcriterion 4.1. Develops and implements key partnership relations
- Subcriterion 4.2. Develops and implements partnerships with the customer/citizen
- Subcriterion 4.3. Manages knowledge
- Subcriterion 4.4. Manages finances
- Subcriterion 4.5. Manages technology
- Subcriterion 4.6. Manages buildings and assets

Criterion 5. Process and Change Management

- Subcriterion 5.1. Identifies, designs, manages and improves processes
- Subcriterion 5.2. Develops and delivers services and products by involving the customer/citizen
- Subcriterion 5.3. Plans and manages modernisation and innovation

RESULTS

Criterion 6. Customer/Citizen-oriented Results

- Subcriterion 6.1. Results of customer/citizen satisfaction measurements
 Subcriterion 6.2. Indicators of customer/citizen-oriented measurements

Criterion 7. People Satisfaction

- Subcriterion 7.1. Results of people satisfaction and motivation measurements
 Subcriterion 7.2. Indicators of people results

Subcriterion 8. Society Results

- Subcriterion 8.1. Results of societal performance
 Subcriterion 8.2. Results of environmental performance

Criterion 9. Key Performance Results

- Subcriterion 9.1. Goal Achievement
 Subcriterion 9.2. Financial performance

organisations;

- a means of measuring progress over time through periodic self-assessment;
- a means to create enthusiasm among employees by involving them in the improvement process;
- a means to integrate various quality initiatives into normal business operations.

To summarise, self-assessment against the CAF model offers the organisation an opportunity to learn more about itself.

Compared to a fully developed Total Quality Management model, the CAF is a "light" model, especially suited to gaining an initial impression of how the organisation performs. It is assumed that any organisation that intends to go further will select one of the more detailed models (such as the Speyer or EFQM models). The CAF has the advantage of being compatible with these models and may therefore be a first step for an organisation wishing to go further with quality management.

The CAF¹⁰ is in the public domain and free of charge. Organisations are free to use the model as they wish.

2.2 An analysis of the European applications

During the Italian presidency of the European Union in the second semester of 2003, EIPA¹¹ carried out an investigation into the application of the CAF in both the existing and the new Member States.¹² In this chapter we will reflect on the conclusions of this survey. During the Luxembourg Presidency this year, a new survey is being undertaken. It will be interesting to compare the results of the new study with the

results that will be presented in this article and to see what progress has been made in two years. We hope to present the results of the new survey in one of the future editions of *Eipascope*.

2.2.1. Assistance and support by the Member States

At the end of 2003, there was no single country in which the CAF was imposed as an obligatory tool for the improvement of quality in the public sector, neither at government level nor at the level of a specific sector or activity. However, there were several examples that did attract our interest. For instance, the administration of the Brussels-Capital region decided to apply the CAF throughout its entire administration. The same decision was taken in Turku, the second largest city in Finland.

When we examine this table more closely, the position of the Netherlands and the UK is interesting. Both countries have shown little interest in the CAF, because the INK and the EFQM model, respectively, are being promoted strongly in those countries.

Offering official support for the CAF model is one thing, providing active support by the deployment of both human and financial means is another. When it comes to making means available for active support, three large groups of countries may be distinguished.

In the first place, there is a group of countries that, until then, had invested little in the active support of the CAF model. This group includes Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom. The common link between these countries is that no specific means to support the CAF have

Table 1: CAF support in the Member States

Group 1	No official support for the CAF	Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, United Kingdom
Group 2	CAF is recommended as a tool (in addition to others)	Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Poland, Spain, Norway, Sweden
Group 3	CAF is recommended and supported by actions	Austria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia
Group 4	CAF is recommended as an important quality improvement tool and supported by actions	Belgium
Group 5	The use of CAF is obligatory	

been provided. Even so, the model is promoted strongly in some of these countries, e.g. Estonia and Slovenia.

A second group of countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Poland, Portugal and Sweden) provides both financial and human means of support, although these means are limited.

Finally, there is a third group (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Slovakia) where means are provided and where actions and initiatives to support the CAF were developed and put into place.

The activities set up and efforts made to support the CAF range from the distribution of information folders, producing documentation material and manuals, providing information sessions and training, to organising quality conferences, quality prizes and the setting up of data banks for the exchange of best practices.¹³

With the exception of a number of countries (Czech Republic, Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom), the promotion and support of the CAF were assigned to a specific organisation or organisation division. Irrespective of the extent of centralisation or decentralisation of the political systems, this task was allocated in all countries to the central ministry or agency responsible for public service. By way of exception, Germany assigned this task to the University of Speyer.¹⁴

2.2.2. The spread of the model

By the end of 2003, the CAF model was applied widely in various countries. More than 500 organisations or organisation divisions in 19 countries had applied the model since it came into being in the period 1999-2000. Furthermore, there are probably still more applications of which the central administrations are not yet aware. The model had been translated into 15 different languages.

2.2.3. An assessment of the applications

The organisations that had applied the CAF model were questioned about its application (the context and the reasons for doing so, the course of the application process and finally the experiences with the model).¹⁷ We will explain each of these elements in brief, after we have first provided general information and the key figures concerning the organisations.

General Information

The organisations who participated in the survey were spread across the various regions of the government landscape. The division of the respondents among the various management levels is indicated in figure 1. In addition, the organisations originated from sectors ranging from the police and the judiciary, across welfare and social sector organisations and education, to living environment, economy and organisations charged with coordination or policy functions.

Another interesting aspect is the organisation size. The spread of very small organisations to very large organisations is striking, although we must conclude that there is a very large middle group. Almost three-quarters of the organisations applied the CAF to the entire organisation, the others only applied it to part of the organisation.

Context and Cause

The survey shows that the CAF is used regularly when organisational changes are being made or when the organisation is setting up a quality policy or a performance assessment system. Even so, the majority indicated that they had applied the CAF model in a context where the

Table 2: Spread of the CAF model in the various countries

No applications	The Netherlands
1 to 5	Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom
6 to 10	/
11 to 25	Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden
26 to 50	Austria, Germany, Finland
More than 50	Belgium, Italy, Norway

Table 3: Extent according to sector and authority level

Education and schools	Italy, Norway, Portugal
Police	Belgium, Germany, Hungary
Health and welfare institutions	Austria, Norway
Agencies or administrations with direct service provision ¹⁵	Belgium, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden
Core ministries, core administrations ¹⁶	Belgium, Hungary, Ireland
Local government	Norway, Finland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia

organisation was not subject to modernisation or changes. Half (51%) had no experience with quality models or techniques prior to applying the CAF model.

Organisations that had experience mentioned the use of ISO and quality systems and quality management systems, quality circles, the Balanced Scorecard, EFQM, and customer and personnel satisfaction assessments. Sixty per cent of the organisations had no specific quality service or a separate team that was involved with quality management.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the reasons for using the CAF and to place these reasons in order of importance (ranking). The top 7 answers are indicated in table 5.

This table shows that the CAF is used mainly as a measuring device to subject the organisation to a quick scan in order to identify a number of strong and weak points, which will then serve as a launching pad for a number of improvement projects. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that participation in a quality prize or quality conference is often a reason to apply the CAF. As has already been shown by past experience,¹⁸ such initiatives are interesting to organisations in order to make themselves known. These prizes and conferences have already set a trend in motion in a number of countries. We will deal briefly with these conferences and prizes below.

A final point that we wish to deal with here is the conclusion that almost 50% of the organisations that applied the CAF model had previous experience with another model. The CAF model is being promoted as a user-friendly model, as a step to other models. The survey does not reveal why many of the organisations take this step.

The decision to apply the CAF model is taken almost everywhere by the upper management or the management team. This is not only a logical, but certainly an important step, too. After all, the management must play a leading role during the entire process not only in setting up the improvement actions but also after they have been put in place.

Application process

The application of the CAF model takes place by means of a self-assessment performed by the organisation. For this

Figure 1: Division of respondents among authority levels

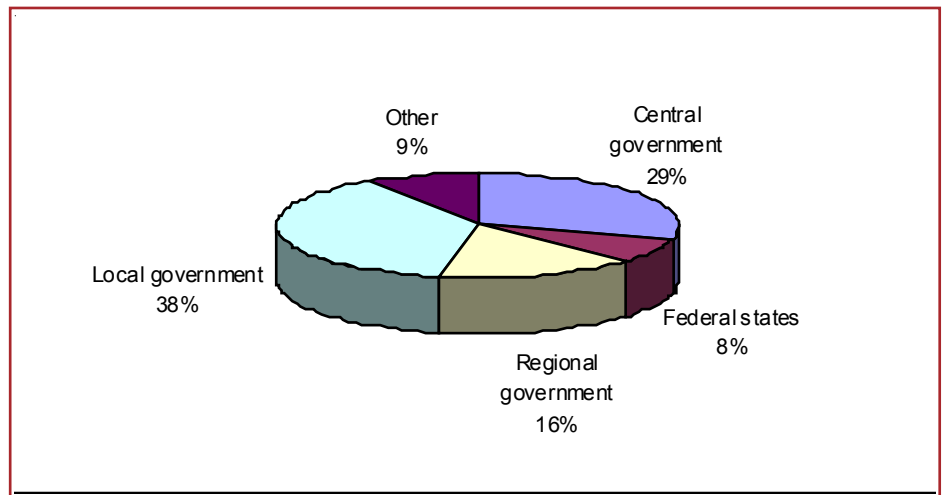


Table 4: Respondents according to organisation size

Number of employees	Number of organisations (%)
< 10	2
10-50	14
51-100	16
101-250	23
250-1000	26
1001-5000	15
> 5000	4

Table 5: Reasons for applying the CAF

Ranking	Reasons
1.	Identifying strong and weak points
2.	Quick scan of the organisation
3.	Input for improvement projects
4.	Participation in quality prize or conference
5.	Exchange of insights into the organisation
5.	Increasing quality material awareness
6.	Because the upper management wanted it
7.	Increasing the quality consciousness of employees

- purpose, a self-assessment group (SAG) is put together.
- This group performs an assessment of the organisation using the CAF model criteria.
- The size of the SAG is shown in table 6. Guidelines are often issued that this group must be representative of the organisation and certainly not too large, as this only impedes discussion and decision making. Most SAG's comprise between 8 and 10 people. This size is also evident

from table 6, in which 48% of the organisations indicate that their SAG consisted of 5 to 10 employees. It is often difficult for large organisations to put together a SAG which is representative of the entire organisation and which is also limited in size. For this reason, several groups are often set up. The second section of table 6 shows that more than half (56%) of the organisations indicate that the SAG was made up of less than 10% of the total number of staff. Nevertheless, more than one-third indicate that their SAG was made up of between 10 and 25% of the total number of staff.

The organisations indicate that these SAGs are mainly made up of middle-management staff, but that the upper management and experts are often included in the group. Staff assistants and young employees often have less chance of being included in the SAG. Even so, it can be very meaningful to include young people in the SAG. Another line of approach and an increasing amount of involvement can have a positive effect.

Of the organisations questioned, only 46% said they had informed all staff that such a self-assessment would take place. Twenty per cent communicated purely with the management. The word "assessment" in an organisation is in itself sufficient to summon up resistance. People often think that they will be assessed and if there is also a lack of proper communication, this assessment takes on an even more covert and clandestine character. It is therefore advisable to provide sufficient transparency regarding the self-assessment in order to overcome a great deal of resistance and negative feelings.

During the preparation of the self-assessment, 58% of the organisations requested external support (particularly from external consultants). This support related mainly to providing a better insight into the model and the terminology used. Of the remaining 42% that had no external support, 43% subsequently concluded that it would have been better to have had support, while the other 57% did not consider the lack of support to be a problem. Performing self-assessment is no easy task, as the methods and terms involved are new and strange to many people.

An introduction or a training session in which a better insight is gained into the model and the operation is therefore to be recommended.

During the actual self-assessment, 35% had external support. Of the 65% that had no support, 42% subsequently thought it would have been more meaningful during the self-assessment to have had some form of support. The terminology and the scoring system are considered to be two of the difficulties experienced during the self-assessment. An additional factor is that an extra effort is often required of the members of the SAG on top of their daily duties. A third difficulty is that often, no culture exists to exchange information and solutions within the organisation.

Table 6: Size of the self-assessment group

# members SAG	%	SAG/Org. (%)	# (%)
< 5	10	< 10	56
5-10	48	10-25	36
10-20	29	> 25	8
> 20	13		

Experiences and results

Most of the organisations indicate that a clear identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation is the most important added value of the self-assessment. This strength/weakness analysis can be used as a basis to set up targeted improvement actions. In addition, matters such as an increased awareness of organisational problems, a better insight into the total functioning of the organisation and the exchange of ideas in this respect appear to be important aspects.

The organisations indicate that the CAF can serve to identify improvement projects, but are these projects actually launched? Of those asked, 62% stated that the result of the self-assessment had led to improvement actions. These improvement actions can mean that a new impetus is given to the current change process and that a contribution to the process of strategic planning of the organisation is made. Individual, separate improvement initiatives or a complete improvement plan can be drawn up. Drawing up such an improvement plan is one thing, communication is another. The table below shows to which target group the results of the self-assessment were communicated.

Table 7: Communication of the self-assessment results

All staff members	58%
Management only	40%
Improvement team	29%
Politicians	19%
External consultants	10%
Other government organisations	10%
Customers/users/citizens	8%

In answer to the question of why no improvement plans were drawn up, "other priorities" and "lack of time" were high on the list. Furthermore, the fact that organisations only participated in a prize or a conference was also frequently mentioned. In addition to the criterion of streamlining the internal operation of the organisation, the desire to raise the external reputation of the organisation appeared to be important. Nevertheless, 82% indicate that they will use the CAF again in the future. With regard to the period in which a repeat of the assessment must take place, there is a difference of opinion: 37% state that they wish to do so annually, 38% are planning to do so once every two years and 11% are considering once every three years. It is

difficult to determine an ideal moment. It is clear that a repeat is necessary, but having said that, it is advisable to leave time for a proper performance of the improvement projects.

2.2.2.4 Areas for improvement in the model and its implementation

The conclusions and recommendations of this survey were presented at the 1st European CAF Users Event which took place in November 2003 in Rome. About 150 people participated in different workshops, where CAF good practices were presented and discussed. It was agreed that it was too soon to adapt the CAF 2002 and that more applications were needed first. The CAF expert group, composed of the national CAF correspondents, was put in charge of the follow-up to the CAF, together with the CAF Resource Centre (RC) established at EIPA. Following an audit of this CAF RC during the Irish Presidency in 2004, more resources were provided. A CAF action plan for the years 2005-2006 was approved by the Directors General.

In March 2005 the CAF expert group decided to start on the revision of the model and to present the new CAF 2006 at the 4th European Quality Conference in September 2006 in Tampere, Finland. The revision will not be as fundamental as the second one, but discussions will be held on the role of the examples, the scoring system and the guidelines.

3. European quality conferences

The organisation of European quality conferences has resulted in a certain trend and continuity in European quality policy. At the initiative of European public service ministers, a European conference concerning quality in government services was organised in May 2000. Within the context of this conference concerning the quality of public services held under the Portuguese presidency and with a view to learning from one another, the 15 Member States of the European Union presented their best administrative practices. Following the first conference in Lisbon, the second European conference concerning quality in public services was held in Copenhagen in October 2002.¹⁹ The third European conference took place under the Dutch presidency of the EU from 15 to 17 September 2004 in Rotterdam²⁰ and the preparations for the fourth conference in Tampere, Finland, in 2006 are already underway.

These European conferences have inspired a number of countries to organise national conferences. For instance, Belgium organised its own quality conferences in 2001 and 2003 and the third Belgian conference in 2005 is already at the planning stage.

4. The role of EIPA at European level

In May 2001, a decision was taken to set up a CAF support centre within EIPA. In 2002, it was decided to evaluate the centre during the Irish presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2004.

4.1 The assessment of the CAF support centre

In early 2004, the various countries that make up the International Public Services Group (IPSG) relating to quality management in the public sector and other relevant parties

were questioned about the operation of the CAF support centre at EIPA.

The following recommendations were formulated. The CAF support centre will remain within EIPA, which will provide financial and material support. In addition, the support centre must generate its own operational budget by organising education and training. The growth potential of the support system is acknowledged. For this reason, the centre must develop into a CAF reference centre for the Member States. In order to effect this intended growth and objective, a long-term strategic vision must be developed and the centre's operational programme must be distilled into detailed project plans. In addition, the CAF network with the various partners, including EIPA, CAF correspondents in the members states and research institutions, must be reinforced.

4.2 The new vision of EIPA regarding its role as a support centre for the CAF

As a result of the conclusions of the investigation, EIPA has realigned and reformulated its strategic objectives with regard to the CAF support centre. The CAF support centre intends:

1. To offer a permanent basis for the further development of the CAF, for the promotion of the CAF and for stimulating good practices within the European public sector.
2. To become a reference point for the dissemination and collection of CAF information and expertise.
3. To become an expertise centre for supervising CAF applications.
4. To become a reference point in creating awareness and supporting quality management in the various European countries.

Of course, it must be clear that the CAF RC will never be able to play this role if it is not fully supported by the Member States (MS) involved in using CAF. At the time of writing, an intensive collaboration between the RC and the MS is growing. Since September 2004, the CAF RC has intervened in five national or regional Quality Conferences, presided over two meetings of the CAF Expert Group and reported at three meetings of the Innovative Public Services Group (IPSG), the expert group of the Directors General. The national CAF correspondents are trying to gather more information on the number of CAF applications in their countries and to stimulate their organisations to go online and fill in the questionnaire for the new CAF survey.

Conclusions

Many of the initiatives launched in the various European countries relating to quality management may be termed individual, *ad hoc* initiatives of the countries themselves. However, we have observed a growing tendency, both in Eastern and Western European countries, towards a common language and a common reference framework.

Quality tools such as the CAF model may serve as a framework for this language. By offering such a framework as a guiding principle for organisation management, principles of proper management find their way into many administrations and many different countries.

The quality conferences, both at national and international level, are a suitable tool to discuss problems, challenges and solutions within various organisations using the same language (within a national and transnational context). They are also a tool to boost effectiveness in the public sector on a permanent basis.

- Maastricht or BrusselsSupport, in all its facets, appears to
- be enormously important. A decision has already been
- taken at European level to expand the European CAF
- support centre as a reference in this respect. Furthermore,
- it is vital that this support can be organised at an operational
- level within the various countries.

NOTES

- * Nick Thijs is research assistant at the Public Management Institute at the Katholieke Universiteit van Leuven, Belgium. Patrick Staes is Senior Counsellor in Public Management at the Belgian Federal Public Service 'Personnel and Organisation'. He is currently Seconded National Expert at the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht, where he is responsible for the CAF Resource Centre.
- ¹ This contribution is based on the article "Kwaliteitsmanagement op de Europese Agenda" [Quality Management on the European Agenda] published by Nick Thijs and Patrick Staes in the Vlaams Tijdschrift voor Overheids Management, Die Keure, Bruges, 2004, No. 2, pp. 32-39.
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 - ⁸ Public Sector Benchmarking Service: <http://www.benchmarking.gov.uk>.
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 - ¹⁰ For more information on the CAF: www.eipa.nl and the CAF brochure, recently re-edited by EIPA. Please contact the CAF RC Centre at EIPA: Ann Stoffels: +31 43 329 63 17 or Patrick Staes: +31 43 329 63 28
 - ¹¹ www.eipa.nl
 - ¹² EIPA, "Study for the Italian presidency on the use of the common assessment framework in the European public administrations", 2003, 92 p.
 - ¹³ For information in Belgium visit www.publicquality.be, for general information visit www.eipa.nl
 - ¹⁴ www.speyer.dhv.de
 - ¹⁵ These relate to both national and regional level.
 - ¹⁶ These relate to both national and regional level.
 - ¹⁷ EIPA, "Study for the Italian presidency on the use of the common assessment framework in the European public administrations", 2003, 92 p.
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Ms Ann Stoffels,
Tel.: + 31 43 3296 317
Fax: + 31 43 3296 296
E-mail: a.stoffels@eipa-nl.com
Website: <http://www.eipa.nl>

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