

THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: The paper includes one of the most relevant instruments used during the public administration reform process in Romania, which is The Common Assessment Framework (CAF). CAF is an answer to a critical need of providing an easy to use, non expensive self-assessment instrument, that could fill in the gap in the common practice of the public administration as a complete evaluation mechanism, including the advantages that brings with it, giving the possibility for a future bench learning process. The paper contains a short description of the public administration reform process by CAF implementation, the obstacles and the results obtained.

Key words: Common Assessment Framework, public administration, reform.

1. INTRODUCTION

The legislation concerning civil servants has been constantly amended after the Revolution, in order to better accommodate the changes in the administrative structure – and to better respond to the challenges Romanian had to face on its way to EU Accession – as well as a young Member State.

2. MAIN CHANGES IN THE CIVIL SERVANT POLICY IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Some of the most important milestones* are presented below. Viewed chronologically, they shape a realistic image of an administration marqued by centrifugal forces – and facing the great challenge of EU integration.

* part of milestones identified are the result of the research activities developed in cooperation with *Bogdan Nastase*, Ph D student of the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies

The Statute of Civil Servants was published in 1999 and represented a big step forward for the civil service: it aimed to ensure, in compliance with the legal provisions, a stable, professional, transparent, efficient and unbiased civil service, for the benefit of the citizens as well as of the authorities and public institutions in the central and local public administration.

The local authorities were expecting with great interest the Local Public Administration Law of 2001, that regulated the general regime of local autonomy, as well as the organization and functioning of the local public administration authorities.

In order to attract well trained young people into the public administration, a new specific public function with a special statute was created in 2004, by Emergency Ordinance: that of public manager, who benefited from a fast track promotion system and from a motivating level of salary. This measure was considered to better answer the reform needs of the public administration, having as a main target the creation and development of a corps of professional and neutral public servants, comparable with those existing in the EU member state countries.

At the same time, the importance of maintaining an updated view on the body of civil servants was reflected in the Government adopting the Decision regarding the professional record of the civil servants.

In 2004, a new law on administrative contentious was also adopted, to better protect citizen interest against abuse.

In 2004, The Parliament of Romania has also adopted the law on the Code of Conduct for the Civil Servants, regulating the general norms of moral and professional conduct compulsory for civil servants. The Code was aimed at securing the increase in the quality of the public service, a good management with a view to best serving public interests and to contribute to the elimination of bureaucracy and corruption in the public administration sector.

How well did the Code of Conduct manage to improve on the administrative status-quo? That may be seen from the European Commission annual reports on Romania's path to membership – as well as from the post-accession reports. A change in the institutional-administrative system has therefore taken place. A new type of bureaucracy had emerged, more resistant and with autonomous trends of self-protection. With the beginning of the decentralization process, the lack of financial instruments matching the duties of the local public administration has led to an erosion of the public trust in the capacity of these structures to solve their problems.

Although based on these harsh premises, public confidence has represented a constant priority for the Romanian Government: admitting the

importance of fore planning, the Government regulated the management part of civil service, which will be dealt with in more detail in the next sub-chapter of this article, with administrative decisions such as the annual Decision on the approval of the Public Sector Occupational Plan or the Decision regarding the organization and the development of the civil servants' career.

The legislative proposals envisaged by the Government deal mainly with salary adjustments: because 2009 was an electoral year, a lot of difficulties appeared during the implementation process.

The following objectives of the reforms in the Romanian public administration are clear, but their achievement become a problem:

(a) **an open, flexible, equitable and structured civil service framework** – with more flexible means of entry and exit to allow for the intake of talent and removal of non-performers at all levels;

(b) **an enabling and motivating environment for civil servants** – a competitive remuneration package and performance-based reward system to attract, retain and motivate civil servants; and

(c) **a proactive, accountable and responsible culture** – increase the sense of responsibility and motivation of civil servants at all levels, enhance efficiency and quality of service, and nurture a performance-based and service-oriented management culture.

The management of the civil servants is ensured in Romania by the National Agency of Civil Servants[†]. The National Agency of Civil Servants was set up by the Law on the Statute of civil servants as a specialized body of the central public administration dealing with the management of civil service and civil servants. It is subordinated to the Ministry of Administration and Interior

The main objectives of the National Agency of Civil Servants refer to drafting the legislative framework concerning the civil service and civil servants, monitoring and controlling the enforcement of the regulations in the field, managing the programmes related to the civil service, international cooperation, civil servants' national database management.

The main beneficiaries of the activities carried out by the National Agency of Civil Servants are the civil servants, by its monitoring of the law enforcement regarding transparency in organizing and developing the career in the civil service. The Agency is also responsible for ensuring a unitary, transparent, motivating and predictable pay system for civil servants. To this view, it is envisaged that during June 2009, the draft law for creating the unitary pay system will start to be open for consultations.

Nevertheless, the Agency's activity targets other stakeholders as well: the citizens, by improving the efficiency of the civil service – and the public

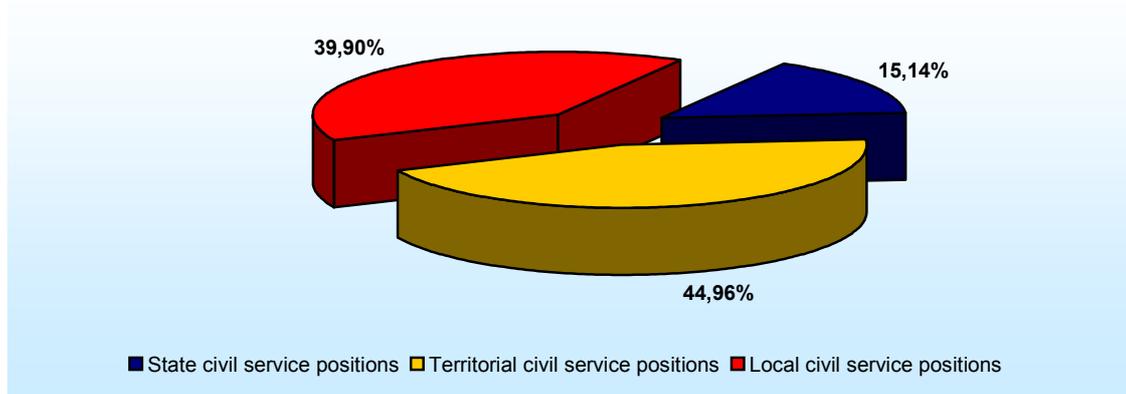
[†] <http://www.anfp.gov.ro>

authorities and institutions of the central and local public administration themselves, by establishing efficient inter-institutional communication mechanisms and by methodologically coordinating the human resources departments within the public authorities and institutions.

Civil servants are required to undergo periodical training programmes (usually every year). Till the year 2009 the main partner to this extent was the National Institute of Administration (INA), even if it was not the only organization which provided training. INA also provided training for the future public managers – or the high civil servants. At the end of 2009, the INA has been included in the National Agency for the Civil Servants. As part of the European administrative system, the Romanian public administration is also welcomed at international training institutes such as the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht. The European Institute in Romania is also a training provider, with core programmes focused on European studies.

In 2007, inline with the decentralization process, 85% of the civil service positions were registered at local and territorial level (40% at local level and almost half of that total at territorial level, as we can see in figure no.1).

Figure no.1- Share of the civil service positions in the central and local public administration in Romania, 2007



Source: National Agency of Civil Servants 2007 Management Report

The connection between the central and the local levels is ensured by the prefecture institution. The holder of this position was initially politically named, ensuring the role of Government representation in the territory. The prefect was apolitical during the last years, belonging to the group of high civil servants. Since 2009, the prefect is again named politically. The prefect

runs the decentralized services. There are no subordination reports between prefects and mayors, city councils, district councils and their respective presidents. Irrespective of the central or local level, the civil servants are mostly women (more than 55% in each case) and permanent (80%).

The reform of the Civil Service management system in the Romanian public administration should contain the following policy areas:

- (a) clear entry and exit mechanism;
- (b) pay and fringe benefits;
- (c) clear disciplinary procedures;

The existence of an efficient public administration in Romania represents one of the most important criteria that define a modern country. This was the main idea of creating real evaluation systems for the institutions/organizations within the public sector. Considering these aspects, for Romania, it is very important to make a real reform through which the Romanian public administration will achieve the European standards and will be characterized by transparency, predictability, responsibility, adaptability and efficiency.

3. THE COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF) – A SPECIAL INSTRUMENT DESIGNED AND USED IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM PROCESS

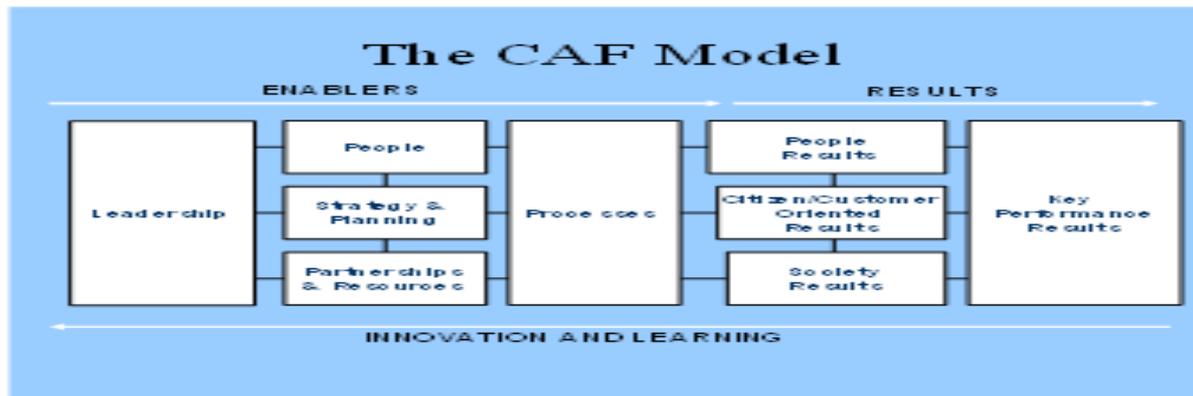
One of the most important instruments already developed in the Romanian public administration is The Common Assessment Framework (CAF). CAF is a result of the co-operation among the EU Ministers responsible for Public Administration. A pilot version was presented in May 2000 and revised versions were launched in 2002 and 2006.

The CAF is an easy-to-use, free tool to assist public-sector organizations in using quality management techniques to improve their performance. The CAF is a **total quality management** (TQM) tool which is inspired by the major Total Quality models in general, and by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in particular. It is especially designed for public-sector organizations, taking into account their characteristics.

The model is based on the premise that excellent results in organizational performance, citizens/customers, people and society are achieved through leadership driving strategy and planning, people, partnerships, resources and processes. It looks at the organization from different angles at the same time; a **holistic approach** to organization performance analysis.

Based on the structure of CAF defined by EIPA (see figure no.2.), the Central Unit for Public Administration (UCRAP) from the Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Interior creates an appropriate version of CAF.

Figure no. 2 - The Common Assessment Framework Model



Source: European Institute of Public Administration

4. MAIN PURPOSES OF THE CAF

The main purposes for the CAF established by the Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Interior were:

1. To introduce public administrations to the principles of TQM and gradually guide them;
2. To facilitate the self-assessment of a public organization in order to arrive at a diagnosis and improvement actions;
3. To act as a bridge across the various models used in quality management;
4. To facilitate and introduce the benchmarking in the public-sector organizations.

Highly appreciated in the CAF implementation is the involvement of staff. CAF is a joint project for management and staff and very often CAF is the first occasion in which management and staff meet to discuss the state of affairs of the organization and the options for the future in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Another CAF purpose is to give support to the public sector organizations in planning an auto-evaluation exercise, in order to identify exactly which are the domains that should be improved and to select the best way to do it. CAF gives a clear and a realistic diagnostic on the way of the institution functioning. Since 2005, the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform, within Ministry of Public Administration and Interior in Romania, coordinates the reform process in Romania. UCRAP has started the process of introducing this modern instrument - Common Assessment Framework (CAF) both at the central and local level (Ministries, Prefectures and County Councils). The Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (UCRAP) is a General Directorate within the Romanian Ministry of Administration and Interior. UCRAP was established in 2002 as the answer

for the co-ordination of the public administration reform process in Romania. UCRAP mission is to co-ordinate the reform process in the public administration in Romania. In this way, at level has b UCRAP een created a CAF team responsible for introducing it in public administration. At operational level, CAF implementation process focused on establishing a clear activities plan for 2005 and 2006, in which all the activities, prerogatives and tasks foreseen for CAF members within, were UCRAP detailed. For a better and faster understanding of CAF and the way it can be applied in public administration, CAF team has elaborated a CAF brochure, which is structured on questions and answers format. The introducing efforts of this instrument within public administration in Romania had been continued by training sessions on CAF for prefects and sub-prefects from the 42 Counties, followed by training sessions for the civil servants within Prefects' Institutions and County Council. The purpose of these training sessions was to aware the participants, and not only these ones, about the importance of this instrument, about its advantages for their institutions. The introduction of this instrument came as a result of the citizens' various demands related to the quality of public services. As a result of these training sessions, some of the Prefectures and the Country Councils sent to UCRAP official papers in which they asked technical support in implementing CAF within their institutions in order to improve their activities and performance which allow them to deliver quality services to their clients/citizens.

5. THE CAF IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Since 2005, the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform has started the process of introducing this modern instrument - Common Assessment Framework (CAF) - in Romanian public administration, both at the central and local level (Ministries, Prefectures and County Councils). Therefore, a CAF team was established at UCRAP level and its overall objective is to introduce CAF in the public administration common practice as the main self-assessment instrument.

A way to find out which are the problems that a public institution needs to adjust/improve is through implementing adequate evaluation mechanisms. A correct evaluation is essential in helping the institution to establish realistic goals and a strategic planning for achieving the targets set.

The Ministry of Administration and Interior through w UCRAP as the main actor who steered the case with the help of National Institute for Public Administration (NIA) and its Regional Centres, as well as the National Modernization Network (composed of civil servants from local and central level in charge with modernization issues within their institutions). Therefore, all the responsibility for developing and managing the process (disseminating and making the civil servants aware of the modern and easy to use self-

assessment instrument, in order to improve their activity) was attributed to the CAF team, within UCRAP.

The CAF team had all the necessary support from UCRAP the management level – both the Secretary of State and the General Director - to handle the process in the most appropriate manner.

There has been a very good collaboration between UCRAP and NIA in order to combine the training session on CAF dedicated to high civil servants with the specific training courses organized by NIA, for the high civil servants from all 42 counties in Romania.

NIA itself and its regional bodies had no financial or coordination contribution in this project, all these being the exclusive responsibility of UCRAP.

The national Modernization Network helps UCRAP to disseminate, analyze, implement and monitor the local level activities related to the public administration reform process.

CAF team started the actual process by sending a newsletter to all the National Modernization Network members, announcing them about the UCRAP initiative on CAF training sessions in order to be able to farther implement it within public administration institutions. CAF team sent them both before and after each training session newsletters keeping the network members informed on the status.

The Romanian approach consisted in a two stages process:

➤ firstly, raising the awareness of the benefits CAF brings separately for the strategic level and the operational level (civil servants).

In this respect, a series of presentations and trainings were developed for both levels. The project was also supported by providing additional information via our website and the newsletter. The presentations and trainings were delivered using power point presentations and a CAF brochure, combining lectures with practical exercise for the participants. There were differences in the way of delivering the information about CAF for the two mentioned levels. The different approach of the presentations and trainings were intended to provide a self-assessment tool at the use of the management level, in order for their strategic planning carried out to focus on achieving the targets set. The civil servants, on the other hand, needed to gain the insight, knowledge and the ability to use the self-assessment tool, since they were expected to become the main actors in the future implementing phase.

➤ secondly, after the first phase, the implementation phase could become operational by providing support, on site, for the central and local government.

An implementation guide was developed and will provide the main support for the CAF team members and also for implementing organizations.

CAF easy seen as an answer to the challenging effort of changing the way of thinking and acting within public institutions in Romania, making them focusing on real important problems in relation with their missions.

The **key steps** followed by the Central Unit for Public Administration from the Ministry of Public Administration and Interior for the CAF implementation were:

Step 1 Training on the Total Quality Management System at the management level;

Step 2 Training of the human resources involved in the TQMS implementation;

Step 3 Receiving and planning of the training process for the public organizations interested in the TQM system implementation;

Step 4 Technical assistance offered by UCRAP along the implementation process.

In September 2005, the CAF team established the CAF implementation plan, stipulating clearly the tasks for each member of the team, the deadlines, the results and the performance indicators for each phase.

CAF team started, according to its plan to draw up a CAF brochure, structured on questions and answers, thus to be easier to read, dedicated to all the persons in public administration who want to understand what CAF is all about. It was published in 500 exemplars.

We decided to deliver training both for the top management level (Prefects, Sub-prefects, County Councils Presidents, General Directors, Managers) and for the civil servants within public administration institutions, thus to be sure of the success of our actions related to CAF dissemination.

Therefore, in order to obtain the needed support for our future actions, the preliminary information for the decision-making persons (top management level) regarding CAF was essential. The first planned action had as target the high civil servants from the Prefectures, respective Prefects and Sub-prefects. In this respect, we contacted the National Institute for Public Administration to propose a CUPAR training session on CAF and to identify, together with them, the best module where it could be properly fit, as NIA was responsible to manage special training courses organized for the high civil servants, the Prefects and Sub-prefects from all the counties in the country (42 counties).

Afterwards CUPAR had a whole module at its disposal called "The management of the Prefects' action" when the CAF team has the opportunity to present the modern self - assessment instrument for the public administration institutions. The training sessions for the Prefects and Sub-prefects, as well as for the civil servants from ministries took place in the National Institute for Public Administration locations in Bucharest.

This action happened during 10th - 14th October 2005 and there were two presentation sessions for all the Prefects and Sub-prefects, separated in 2 groups (Prefects and Sub-prefects from 21 counties first and then the others from the rest 21 counties). The presentation had a theoretical and a practical part. For the theoretical part the CAF team, prepared a power point presentation structured on history of CAF, its structure with criterion and sub-criterion, the advantage of its using as well as its limits, the methodology that has to be followed when they implement CAF. The presentation was accompanied by handouts and the CAF brochure. This part was a very interactive session. The practical part was an exercise consisting of evaluating a sub-criterion selected from the 9 existing criterions. All participants, understanding the process of implementation itself, considered this simulation part very useful.

After we had finished the training sessions with the high civil servants we sent official letters to the Prefectures and to the County Councils and asked them to appoint, at least 2 civil servants within their institutions to attend the CAF training sessions. Moreover these persons had to be able to disseminate the information within their institutions and to be part of the CAF team during the implementation.

The training sessions dedicated to the civil servants were held within the 8 Regional Centers of the National Institute for Public Administration (NIA), around the country and within the National Institute for Public Administration itself in Bucharest. They provided logistical support, consisting of a training room fully prepared. Each of the 8 Regional Centers was considered the most appropriate location for the training sessions dedicated to the civil servants within the respective county (the Prefectures and the County Councils).

Work on providing relevant information via the CUPAR internet site and keeping the members of the National Modernization Network informed continued, from the office.

The results already obtained after the introduction of the CAF system are presented here.

In order to measure the quality of our training sessions, after each training session the participants were handed an evaluation form, through which we asked them to write about the things they liked best during the training, the things they appreciated less at the presentation as well as what they want to do within their institutions in relation to this instrument. Starting from these evaluation forms we tried to improve the delivering of the following trainings on CAF. Analyzing the evaluation forms, the CAF team found out the following:

- ◆ all participants considered very useful the simulation of CAF implementation;
- ◆ the majority of the participants expressed their expectation in receiving a positive feedback, from the top management level, related to CAF implementation.

6. THE MAIN OBSTACLES DURING THE CAF IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The main obstacles appeared during the operational phase are the following: the confidentiality of the process; the realism of the evaluators; the objectivity concerning the public institutions activities; the obtaining of the consensus based on the evaluator's points.

7. INDICATORS USED FOR MONITORING AND MEASURING THE RESULTS OF THE CAF IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS IN THE ROMANIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Ministry of Public Administration and Interior through UCRAP used both qualitative and quantitative indicators in order to monitor the process: 280 persons have been trained on CAF, of which 84 prefects and sub-prefects and 176 civil servants from the local level and 20 civil servants from the central level. The trainees are able to disseminate the information related to CAF and most of them will take part in the auto-evaluation process as project managers or members in the evaluation team; 42 County Councils and 42 Prefectures are ready to implement CAF as well as 15 ministries. The outcome of the presentations and training campaign was that the CAF team within UCRAP received 24 requests to implement CAF from 24 public administration institutions (Prefectures and County Councils). This result has a greater importance if we take into account that all demands for implementing CAF are sent based on *voluntary actions* from the institutions. The Ministry of Public Administration didn't impose this instrument to the public institutions, living them the possibility to choose the proper way in order to improve their activities, thus to be able to deliver quality services to their customers. In this way we succeed to change the common practice in Romanian public administration, related to the way of working and thinking – from the top –down to bottom up approach.

In the end, the most important lesson learned the process of disseminating CAF proved to be a successful one.

The reason behind this statement is 24 voluntary demands to implement CAF. The Ministry of Public Administration appreciated the participants' positive involvement during the training sessions and their enthusiasm towards this new and modern instrument.

This experience showed that a non-imposed action can also have positive results. This is the most important lesson learned and it has its significance within Romanian public administration as there is a common practice to neglect the importance of voluntary actions in favor of legal framework actions (the top-down approach).

8. CONCLUSION

Changes are still needed in the Romanian public organizations in order to increase their human resources capacity for supporting the reform processes. Nevertheless, the Romanian public administration has taken the initial steps in the direction of a functioning, citizen-oriented administration, inline with the general principles of the European administrative system. With the introduction of a Civil Servants' Status, a Code of Conduct for the Civil Servants, and The CAF, as well as other executive decisions targeted

and an improved efficiency of the outputs, Romania has gained in the overall quality of the administrative process.

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