STRATEGIC PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR CITIZENS OF HARGHITA COUNTY WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CAF BASED QUALITY MANAGEMENT TOOL (CAFHR) PROJECT

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Abstract

The Harghita County Council has decided to carry out a self-assessment to evaluate the adequacy of its processes in the framework of a complex organizational development project using the CAF (Common Assessment Framework). The outcome of the performed self-assessment showed the capabilities and results of the operation, as well as the tasks of ensuring short- and medium-term development. This article aims to point out the needs and possibilities for improving administrative processes by presenting the experiences of the project. An important experience of the project is to prove the necessity of taking into account the specific features in addition to prove the general applicability of the model.

Keywords: *CAF, Quality management, Harghita County Council.*

1. An organization-wide performance tool – introducing the CAF model

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is a complete quality management tool developed by public sector representatives for the public sector on the basis of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Model of Excellence. It was prepared at the request of the heads of directors (directors-general) responsible for the development of the civil service in the Member States in cooperation with the so-called Innovative Public Service Working Group of quality professionals. CAF promotes performance and efficiency-oriented quality development in public administrations using state-of-the-art quality management techniques. The model is simple, easy to use and provides a suitable methodological framework for self-assessment of public administration.

The CAF is designed to be used in all areas of the public administration sector, applicable in all organisations at national/federal, regional and local levels. It can also be used within wide variety of circumstances, e.g. as part of a systematic development programme or as a starting point for development work within a given organisation.

The application of CAF provides an appropriate framework for an organisation to start a continuous development process. Here's how it helps:

– evidence-based evaluation, based on a set of criteria widely accepted in the administrative sphere of European countries;

– the establishment of outstanding levels of progress and performance;

– developing consistency of governance and reaching consensus on what needs to be done to develop organisations;

– the relationship between the different achieved results and the practical solutions or capabilities to be supported;

– the involvement of staff in the development process;

– promote the development of good practice solutions and the possibility of sharing them between different areas within the organisation and with other organisations;

– the integration of different quality initiatives into everyday workflows;

– timely measurement of progress through periodic self-assessments.

It is based on the assumption that excellent results in terms of organisational performance, citizens/clients, people and society can be achieved through management-led strategy and planning, staff, partnerships and resources, as well as through processes. This tool examines the organization from several different perspectives at the same time, and analyses organizational performance using a complete approach.

The main requirement for the model, therefore, in the development process was to be appropriate to the framework and applicable to public administrations, taking into account their specificities and compatibility with other organisational models used in European public administrations.

From the user's point of view, it is important to meet the aforementioned requirements for two reasons: firstly, because most quality systems were developed in the economic sphere and market organisations, therefore the CAF model takes particular account of administrative specificities. On the other hand, it is also important that it can be combined with quality systems, used in the private sector, in particular EFQM, and by methods, in order to present the results from the field of quality management to the public sector.

The model itself is not a quality management system, but a management tool that can be used to define development goals that make the operation of the organization more effective, and also to develop the organizational culture by the self-evaluation process.

The model is related to the requirements of the ISO 9001 standard system in its approach and principles, but differs significantly in content and method. While ISO 9001 is a management tool based on regulation and continuous development, which has a direct impact on the operation of the organization, CAF primarily means continuous organizational performance evaluation and has only indirect influence on the activities of the public administration organization. CAF imposes requirements in the examination of the different areas of operation, leaving the evaluation of the achieved results to the organization.

The CAF is based on the principle that the "level of performance" of an organization depends on the proper management of the five areas of operation. These areas are:

1. management,
2. strategy-making and planning,
3. staff,
4. partnerships and resources,
5. processes.

Excellence should also be assessed in relation to the results of the organization from several perspectives:

6. performance of the organisation (objectives established),
7. perspective of citizens/customers,
8. point of view of the staff,
9. social impacts.

CAF self-assessment is based on a complete approach to the analysis of organizational performance, covering all elements of the system as a whole, since the organisation must be examined at the same time from different perspectives and criteria for both the operation and the results of the organisation.

1.1. Purpose of the CAF

CAF is an easy-to-use tool to help public administrations across Europe, apply quality management methods and processes, to improve performance. CAF provides a self-assessment framework, similar in concept to larger TQM models, in particular the EFQM model, but specifically designed for public administrations, taking into account the differences between them.

CAF is a 'public domain' tool that is accessible to all free of charge and is easy to learn. Moreover, it helps European public sector organisations (hereinafter referred to as 'public service organisations') to use quality management techniques to help them improve their performance. The CAF model is designed to be applicable to all public sector organisations at European, nation-state, regional and local level.

CAF supports the entire development process within the organisation and sets out five main objectives:

– the introduction and dissemination of a culture of excellence and the principles of the TQM in public service organisations;

– the gradual implementation of organisations throughout the PDCA development cycle;

– facilitating the self-assessment of public service organisations in order to identify errors and identify the necessary development measures;

– the creation of bridges between the various models used in quality management, both in the private and public sectors;
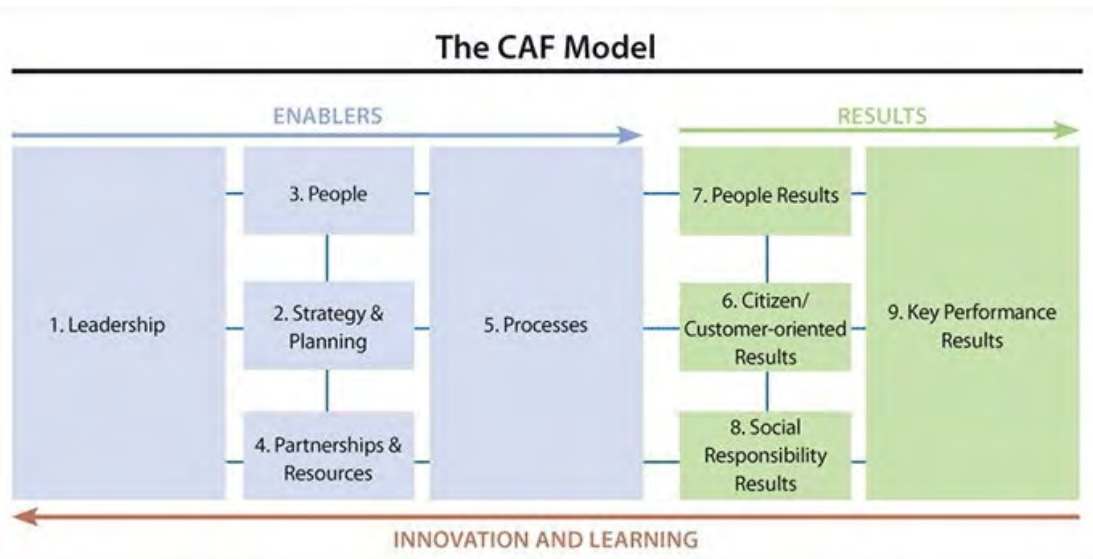
Figure 1. *Model CAF 2013*

– enabling and supporting bench learning between public service organisations.

Organizations that aim to strive for superior performance and that want to localize a culture of excellence are starting to apply the CAF model. Over time, the effective application of CAF can lead to the further development of this kind of culture and way of thinking within the organization.

1.2. Model CAF 2013

The nine-element structure of the CAF model, shown in Figure 1, includes the main aspects that must be taken into account in any organizational analysis. Criterion 1-5, the so-called "Capabilities", takes into account the practices of organization management. These criteria determine what the organization does and how it solves its tasks in order to achieve the desired result. Criteria 6-9 presents "Results" in the areas of citizens/clients, staff, social responsibility and key performance of the organisation, based on personal opinions, personal assessments and performance measurements on the other hand. Each criterion consists of several sub-criteria (The 9 criteria contain a total of 28 sub-criteria.)

The 28 sub-criteria define the main aspects to be taken into account in the evaluation of the organization. Examples explaining the content of the sub-criteria are illustrated in detail in [2], which also suggests the possible areas for determining the organization's compliance with the require-

ments of the sub-criteria. The examples show a lot of good practice from all over Europe, but they are not applicable to all organisations, but they are still suitable for guiding.

The criteria and sub-criteria in the questionnaire cannot be changed, but the examples can be tailored to the organization, expanded and narrowed due to a better understanding. (The Harghita County Council has completed a questionnaire tailored to the self-assessment of the organization.)

Incorporating the conclusions drawn from the evaluation of the results into management practice ensures the continuity of innovation and learning cycles that accompany an organisation on the road to excellence.

1.3. How to use CAF 2013

As explained above, the structure of the criteria and sub-criteria should not be modified, since this structure ensures that self-evaluation covers the functioning and results of the organization in all areas and in all aspects. At the same time in examples related to sub-criteria, it is permissible and important to interpret them and adapt them to the organization.

In Harghita County Council (HCC), a questionnaire tailored to the organization was completed, using a 'traditional scoreboard'. In general, the "traditional" CAF assessment assesses all sub-criteria at the level of the PDCA cycle

1.4. The "CAPABILITIES" side (1-5) criteria evaluation

The PDCA principal assessment method is based on the fact that the point values are determined on the basis of where the measures are in place during the implementation phase and not on the basis of the number or weight of the implemented measures. The questionnaire respondents score according to their subjective feelings. The assessment used can be seen below:

Table 1. *Scores used in the evaluation of the "CAPA-BILITIES" (1-5) criteria*

Level	Description of levels related to capabilities	Score
–	If the organization does not perform the activity set out in the sub-criteria or does not intend to introduce it, then 0 points; if the idea of the introduction has already been proposed, but the design has not started, the value that can be given is around 10 points.	0–10
Plan	There are only plans to develop the applicable practice.	11–30
Do	The sub-criteria area of the organisation is operated as planned, but the experience has not yet been evaluated.	31–50
Check	In the area related to the sub-criteria, the evaluation of the operation is carried out regularly, but the results of the evaluation have not yet been put into practice by the organization.	51–70
Act	The organisation develops its operations on the basis of sub-criteria-related audits and reviews.	71–90
PDCA	The organization systematically (planned and regularly) uses methods of continuous development in the area related to the sub-criteria. It also incorporates the results of benchmarking and learning from each other into the development.	91–100

1.5. Evaluation of the "RESULTS" criteria (6-9)

In summary, self-assessment according to the CAF model gives the organization the opportunity to learn more about itself. The goal of CAF is to hold a mirror to the organization to judge its performance.

Compared to a complete quality management model, CAF is designed to be a very user-friendly model. Any organization that wants to go further will choose one of the more detailed quality management models. CAF has the advantage of being compatible with these models, and this can be the first step for an organization that wants to move forward in quality management.

Table 2. *Scores used in the evaluation of the "RESULTS" side criteria (6-9)*

Evaluation of results	Score
There are no measurable results or relevant information related to the sub-criteria.	0–10
The results are measurable, their evolution over time is deteriorating and/or the results do not achieve the objectives set by the organisation in relation to the sub-criteria.	11–30
The results stagnate and/or in some cases have achieved the organisation's objectives in relation to the sub-criteria.	31–50
The results show an improving trend and/or most of the objectives set are met in relation to the sub-criteria.	51–70
The results show a significant improvement and/or all objectives set are met in relation to the sub-criteria.	71–90
The results are excellent and kept constant, all the set goals related to the sub-criterion are met. Important indicators for the sub-criteria show positive results compared to the results of other organizations.	91–100

2. Project plan for the 2021 organizational self-assessment carried out by Harghita County Council in accordance with the CAF methodology

Within the framework of the project "Strategic planning and performance management for the benefit of Harghita County citizens through the introduction of the CAF-based quality management tool" (CAFHR), HCC council has set itself the goal of organizational development of the council.

During the implementation of the project, HCC decided to introduce a CAF survey, which has been a reliable organizational level performance measurement and self-assessment tool in the European public administration for many years.

By conducting the survey, the aim of HCC is to identify and evaluate the problems inherent in the organisation's activities which affect its efficiency and effectiveness, by examining the criteria set out in the CAF. On this basis, the council may determine its own organisational strengths and weaknesses and develops and implements measures to improve its performance. CAF's repeated annual/biennial audits also provide an opportunity to monitor and compare changes in

employee perceptions of organisational capabilities and performances in a timely manner.

The CAF self-assessment was carried out by HCC for the first time this year.

2.1. Planning the self-assessment project

In connection with the organizational development project, on the HCC senior management a decision has been taken to carry out a self-assessment according to the CAF.

This decision reflected the intention of managers to be actively involved in the process, i.e. to recognise the added value gained through self-assessment and to guarantee that they will have an open attitude, accept results and be ready to make improvements based on them. This included their commitment to providing the resources needed to carry out professional self-assessment.

A high degree of commitment and a shared responsibility from senior management and staff is a key to the success of the self-assessment process in the council.

The HCC involved an expert contributor to this task, who played a key role in the collection and processing of data and information and in the preparation of the report.

During the planning work, the Management of HCC defined the focus and method of self-evaluation. According to this, it was decided:

– that self-assessment covers the whole organisation,
– that self-assessment is applied using the traditional scoring table;
– the evaluation is carried out online.

The senior management decided on the project manager and appointed Mr. István Szőcs – general manager of Management division to the task, who has years of organizational knowledge and experience. His duties included:

– detailed planning of the self-assessment project together with the related communication tasks;
– consultation and communication with all stakeholders;
– organisation of the training of the self-assessment group;
– organising the collection of supporting materials and evidence to support self-evaluation;
– support in setting development priorities and developing development programmes.

Because the language and examples used in the CAF model were foreign and too far from daily practice to be used directly, the "Counselling" of the questionnaire, i.e. its adaptation to the organisation, has been carried out.

2.2. Communication of the self-assessment project

Communication was primarily the responsibility of the project manager. Communication has played a significant role because it has covered all stakeholders involved in the project, in particular middle managers and staff. HCC managers understood that if communication about self-assessment goals and self-assessment activities is not clear, it is likely that self-assessment will only be considered by staff to be another task issued by management and "ticked off". The risk is the reluctance of the participants, who must be fully committed and active in the process for the project to succeed.

Communication focused on ensuring positive results for the whole organization, as well as for citizens and customers, by conducting the self-evaluation process. The project manager stressed the following:

– why it matters whether the organization performs self-evaluation;
– why this has now gained importance for the organisation;
– how self-evaluation and its results relate to the strategy of the organization;
– how self-evaluation relates to other general developments in the organization, such as the ongoing transformation programme in the organization.

2.3. Create a self-assessment group/project group

The self-assessment group was set up in a representative manner in the organization, all units, all functions and all levels of the organisation were sufficiently represented. When determining the number of the self-assessment group, the CAF methodological recommendations were taken into account.

The total number of persons in the organization is 217 and its organisation consists of 8 larger units, therefore 60 people were invited to carry out the self-assessment. During the self-assessment period, 44 people self-assessed as a result of the application of holidays, sick leave or other verified absences, as well as the principles of anonymity and volunteering, thus providing the necessary answers for the interpretation of the data.

The self-assessment group/project group was supported and assisted by the project manager

and a working group appointed by a presidential decree, if there was a disruption in the online login or the completion of the questionnaire, in interpreting a question.

2.4. Realization of self-assessment

Each member of self-assessment team, 44-persons, had to give an accurate assessment of the organisation for each sub-criteria, using the documents and information provided by the project manager. This assessment was based on individual knowledge and work experience within the organisation, as well as related facts. However, regular discussions and communication between each other and with other colleagues were typical during the filling period.

As a first step, in light of the facts revealed, the existing strengths and areas to be developed were formulated in a concise manner, and at the end, based on their findings, the individual sub-criteria were assessed numerically on the basis of the 'traditional' scoring table.

Justifications could also be added to individual assessments, which included:
– interpretation of the strengths identified and areas for improvement,
– interpretation of the numerical assessment if it is to be explained on the basis of the textual assessment.

During the course of completing the questionnaire, the project manager was available throughout and handled questions from the members of the self-assessment team during the individual evaluation.

3. Presentation of the results of self-assessment

As a typical self-assessment report, the Harghita County Council's self-assessment report follows the CAF structure and includes the following elements: strengths and areas to be developed for each sub-criteria, supported by the related evidence and justification.

This data is available to management as background information and sufficiently supports progress in the self-assessment process. After processing these data, leadership presentation was made on the following:
– summary and analysis of the textual and numerical results of the self-assessment,
– highlights of the strengths of greater importance and areas for improvement;
– identification of the strengths and areas to be developed that can be easily and quickly achieved, resulting in rapid success;
– proposal of measures in the areas of priority development,
– proposal of further steps related to self-assessment.

3.1. Presentation of numerical results and comparison with benchmark data

Figure 2 and **3** illustrate how HCC values are based on the following criteria from Table 4 (Partnerships and resources), in criterion (Results of customer-oriented operation), (Social impacts) and (Performance effectiveness) exceeded the organisational average. For criterion 3 (Human
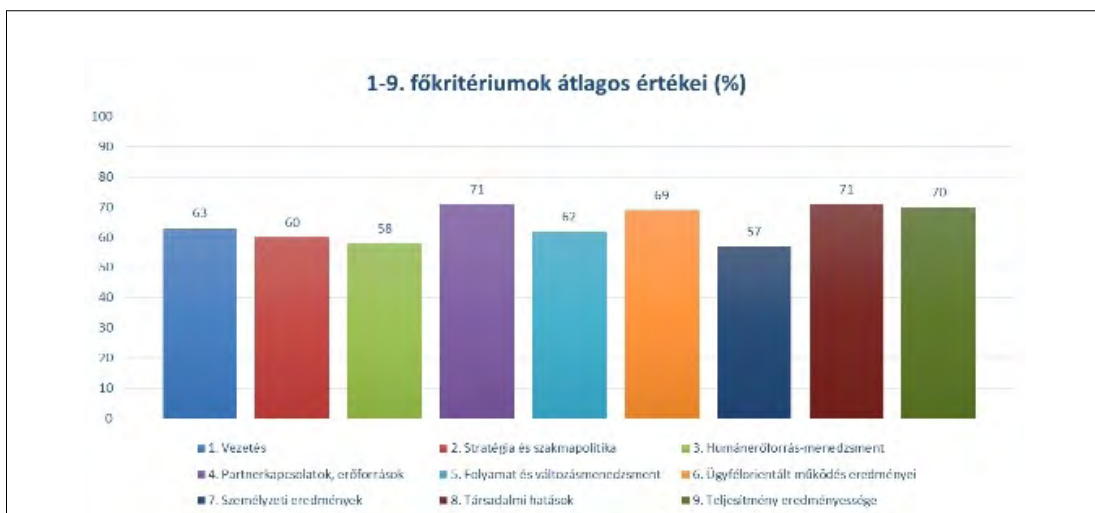

Figure 2. *Average scores for main criteria 1-9* **[2]**

Figure 3. *Standard deviation of point values for main criteria 1-9* [2]

resources management) and criterion 7 (1) (a) and (b) (Staff results /employee satisfaction/) the results were below the average.

The organisational average of the criteria is 65 %.

In the table below, the average of HCC data with the average of 1235 surveys in Hungary was compared. The data of Harghita County Council are in brackets.

From **Table 3.** it can be seen that the results of the Harghita County Council are above the Hungarian national average for all criteria. Significant differences are in the main criteria 4. (Partnerships, resources) and 8(1)(a) and (b). (Social impacts).

For sub-criteria, underperformance is shown in 3.3, 4.1, 4.4 and 5.2..

Table 3. *Comparison of HCC self-assessment results with benchmark data* [2]

		Criteria								
		1.	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**	**6.**	**7.**	**8.**	**9.**
Sub-criteria	**1.**	58 (62)	60 (69)	53 (64)	63 (59)	60 (69)	64 (70)	54 (58)	59 (71)	63 (71)
	2.	60 (62)	57 (59)	54 (55)	64 (74)	64 (51)	64 (67)	53 (55)	58 (69)	62 (70)
	3.	56 (56)	56 (60)	55 (50)	65 (69)	60 (70)	-	-	-	-
	4.	61 (72)	56 (53)	-	61 (58)	-	-	-	-	-
	5.	-	-	-	54 (57)	-	-	-	-	-
	6.	-	-	-	58 (77)	-	-	-	-	-
Average		59 (63)	57 (60)	54 (58)	61 (71)	61 (62)	64 (69)	54 (57)	58 (71)	62 (70)

3.2. Strengths and areas to be developed

In assessing the results of the 2021 organizational survey - in accordance with general practice - when determining organisational strengths and weaknesses, the starting point was the organisational average established for Harghita County Council as a whole. Those properties and results whose mean value deviated by at least 6.5 percentage points from its 65% value were included. The following formula can therefore be used:

organizational weaknesses < 58,5%–71,5% < organizational strengths

This formula provides an opportunity to identify organisational strengths and weaknesses at both the level of the main and sub-criteria and the individual indicators, which is one of the basic objectives of the CAF survey.

Table 4. I*dentifying areas to be developed within the HCC's self-assessment results* [2]

Name of the Main Criteria	Average
1. Leadership	63
2. Strategy and policy	60
3. Human Resources Management	58
4. Partnerships and resources	71
5. Process and change management	62
6. Results of customer-oriented operation	69
7. Staff results (employee satisfaction)	57
8. Social impacts	71
9. Performance effectiveness	70
Organization average	**65**

Based on the self-assessment results, there are only two areas of the main criteria that perform less than the specified condition.

The CAF Self-Assessment Methodology Guide recommends that the report for management should only include key strengths and areas for improvement, due to easier clarity and facilitating management decision-making. Therefore, all the listed strengths and weaknesses in Chapter 3 were ranked to identify the key "strengths" and key areas for improvement listed below.

The defining strengths

Table 5. *The decisive strengths of the operation of HCC* [2]

1	It sets out official, professional values and rules of conduct to be followed, respecting the general values of the public sector.
2	It strengthens mutual trust, loyalty and respect between staff and managers.
3	It has developed an appropriate organizational structure.
4	The members of the HCC management team show a personal commitment and example to the quality of the official work and to the development of their own management activities.
5	The HCC maintains regular contact with partner organisations (NGOs, other public administrations and citizens) that are important for its operation.
6	It ensures transparency in its operations.
7	HCC ensures that all clients' cases are dealt with effectively, and that the case manager is identifiable; individual case management and consulting characterize the customer service activity, the administration is customer-friendly, service-type, flexible, receptive to individual situations
8	HCC ensures that its customers and partners have access to information that is important to them, which is otherwise public.
9	The physical accessibility of the HCC building is adequate.
10	It gives the main managers of each process adequate powers.
11	The HCC employs well-trained professionals, for whom it provides continuous training and the possibility of exchanging experiences (abroad).
12	The HCC representative regularly appears/ voices in the local media in the field of social responsibility.

Key areas for improvement

Table 6. *Areas for improving the functioning of HCC* [2]

1	According to the reviews, there are many overburdened colleagues, there is an unequal division of labour. There is an effort to distribute tasks equally, but in practice this is not done in all areas. It would be necessary to assess workload and make informed and planned use of professional competences.
2	As part of effective internal communication, greater attention should be paid to the integration of new employees into the organization, e.g. in the case of hiring a new employee, to provide information about the organization and to familiarize them with the work of the partner areas.
3	According to reviews, the evaluation of the staff is often only formally implemented at the moment. It would be necessary to improve the methodology for objectives and evaluation, taking into account territorial differences and improving the material communication between managers and staff.
4	In addition to hearing the needs and initiatives of the employees, it is necessary to implement them and/or provide feedback to the staff about the measures taken or the reasons for their failure to do so.
5	It is necessary to systematically analyse its own organizational strengths and weaknesses, to this end it is advisable to carry out the CAF survey, self-evaluation regularly, evaluate and communicate the results.
6	By making even better use of the possibilities in the Task system, more attention should be paid to the parallel workload of employees when issuing strategic and operational tasks.
7	Staff and relevant external stakeholders should be involved in the process planning in all affected areas.

3.3. Further steps in self-evaluation

Considering that this was the first formally conducted CAF organizational self-assessment at HCC, it can be said that the self-assessment ended with a particularly good result. The evaluation has produced results that are suitable for identifying additional organisational development needs.

The review of the implementation of the development programmes and related action plans that can be determined by senior management based on the PDCA cycle will entail another CAF assessment. Monitoring progress is an ongoing task, the repetition of self-assessment is due within a year.

4. Conclusions

The results of the project were evaluated jointly under the leadership of Harghita County Council, and thus it was jointly established that CAF, as a professional tool, can be used effectively in the development of administrative activities in Romania, but it would be of great help in assessing performance if objectively recorded Romanian benchmark data and experience were available on the subject.

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