

Implementation of CAF Self-evaluation and Corresponding Processes

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Abstract

: Previously, mainly before 2007, only the accreditation committee as advisory body of the government of the Slovak Republic has evaluated regularly universities in periodic intervals according to the results from educational and scientific field as a basis for this assessment. The reformation effort, in the field of education was the main reason, motivating the present administration to include the principles of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model in the form of the main requirements into the Project of technical support in human resources development prepared and executed for the Ministry section of education, in the frame of the loan from the World bank. The methodologies as well as the impact of these activities are the main topic of the paper.

Introduction

The application of the CAF model in the Slovak Republic into the state administration has started in 2003 when the Administrative centre for Public Services and the Agency for Standardization, Measuring and Testing mutually with the Slovak Society for Quality had promoted the implementation. Since 2006, the Slovak Society for Quality represented the particular implementation unit guarantying quality of provided trainings, consulting and executing external assessment of the involved organizations from the area of public services, including also self-government organizations.

The central administrative department of the Ministry of Education has been one of the first in the country, which had participated in the project of implementation of the CAF model in Slovak public service institutions. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic has been developing the Quality Management System using the CAF model since 2004. In this time, the first *self-assessment report* was developed. Later in 2006, the Ministry has undergone the process of external assessment and elaborated *operational improvement plan*. The tendency of applying the CAF model procedures in the Ministry of Education has been intensified after 2006, when the new government was formed. The Ministry priority was an enhancement of this successful model.

The reformation effort of the present government, in the field of education was the main reason, motivating the present administration of the Ministry to include the principles of the CAF model in the form of the main requirements into the Project of technical support in human resources development prepared and executed for the Ministry section of education, in the frame of the loan from the World bank.

Previous situation

Annual reports on activities of public universities, which have a character of legal demands, are required by the Ministry of Education. They are annual reports on the activities and results of the university in the field of science, technology or art as well as annual reports on the economy and administration of a public university and in the case of financial allocation from state budget also a private university, which contains a balance with an auditor statement, summary of incomes and expenditures divided according to the resources with a special selection of expenses for business activities, balance and flow of university properties. The *accreditation committee* as advisory body of the government evaluate regularly universities in periodic intervals according to the results from educational and scientific field as a basis for this assessment.

There are several universities or faculties, which already implemented standardized approach of *ISO 9001* norms to build up the quality management system. Predominantly, this approach was preferred by universities, employing experts in the field of quality management, especially teachers of management subjects. Relating to the experience

of these faculties, the process of building up quality management system based on their own initiative was very complicated, long-term and also expensive.

Since 2006, the *Common Assessment Framework model* has become a part of the National prize for the quality in the category of institutions of public services. In that time, the CAF became one of the significant motivations.

Several universities have participated in the programme of *international evaluation* executed by *EUA* (European University Association). This evaluation has been carried out in a complex way. In the beginning using self-evaluation reports and then the subsequent site-evaluation followed. As a result, the recommendations created and formulated within the context of comparison with modern European university models can be supportive references for the adaptation of our educational institutions taking into account main expectations and requirements of the present global economic environment.

The evaluation of the universities confirmed the strategic orientation to implement successfully the Bologna reforms, with the main target to improve the system of management and government and in this way to increase the transparency and attractiveness of the education sector for the society.

Slovak universities have also used the opportunity of *EU programmes* to enhance quality of the university management. Mostly thanks to the bilateral partnerships, they have investigated existing models of the management and quality evaluation at partner European universities. These programmes also encouraged to generate quality culture of the management systems. However, their diversity did not preserve the sustainability in the broader context.

Objectives and expectations of the implementation of the CAF Model

The situation in the area of the quality management at the universities is actually relatively variable. According to the available records, a majority of Slovak universities investigate suitable systems of the management which could help to increase quality and make university/faculty management or university/Ministry of Education relationships more transparent. The improved management system is sure to result to the important benefits not only for involved parties in the education sector, including students as university customers and industrial partners or institutions. From the existing approaches for creating and improving the quality management systems in organizations such as a university, *CAF model 2006* was identified to be most appropriate because:

- the CAF model is adjusted the European Foundation for Quality Management – *EFQM model* for the purpose of a public administration and follows logic of the EFQM model as well as provides interaction of assumed and resulting criteria with the accent on continuous learning through a feedback. This logic is transparent, understandable and offers a sufficient chance for identification of opportunities for improvement;
- the form of exploitation of the model through the self-evaluation process of CAF team members creates conditions for a *motivation* increasing of participants, in addition during the evaluation process, and this form can be suitable even for the university management level;
- application of CAF model can help to the university management to recognize the strong faces, to identify the *improvement* potential and to determine the priorities for improving of the quality management;
- the structure of outputs provides a *sufficient freedom* to respect the essential requirements for information providing by a university to the Ministry of Education.

Expectations from the implementation of CAF model at the universities are very large and may have a multifaceted impact:

- availability of the tangible and *reliable system* of the quality management, especially in the case of universities examining without success different existing models,
- simplified and transparent *relations* between relevant organizational units of the universities,
- greater *homogeneity* of results provided by universities for the central managing body,
- thanks to the evaluation to *identify* strong faces and discover the *improvement* potential,
- exploitation of the potential of the uniform evaluation approach for beginning the benchmarking process of educational institutions and consequently to identify and to implement the *best practice*.

Participants' Motivation

The sustainability of project outputs depends not only on a successful implementation, but mainly on positive ex-

amples. Thus, a great attention was paid to the motivation of participants. It was important to have *convinced* the university project partners that they could gain from the project by getting significant tools for improvement and simplification of the processes on the level of the management but also for internal and external relations. Most of the outputs are focused on university staff. However, the first objective is to achieve a positive effect affecting involved participants, especially students and the other stakeholders or university partners. For this purpose, the self-evaluation report has been elaborated. On the basis of the results of this report and next external evaluation, an Action plan of improvements was prepared.

The predominant university *motivation* to take part in the project was rather diverse. Universities searching a suitable quality management system had occasion to recognize different measures for administration of the implementation process of CAF quality model. The procedures include training, report preparation and consulting, elaboration of an action plan of improving as well as the report on external project evaluation. The self-evaluation report of Universities with already implemented quality management system was very useful documents to prepare the required standard reports by the Ministry and the Accreditation Committee. The CAF self-evaluation report would prospectively serve as a base document for carrying out complex evaluation of educational institutions by the Ministry of Education..

Necessary steps to perform in the frame of the project:

- identification of university managerial level participating in the process of CAF model implementation,
- formation of CAF team, appropriately representative and dedicated,
- appropriate form of report, especially outputs structure, which satisfies requirements for next common exploitation,
- project sustainability, mainly after project completion and terminated agreement with a consulting organization.

Procedure and Applied Tools

The project implementation of the CAF model at the universities has been under preparation and in *advertisement* period for a rather long time. The prepared project was being explained from the level of the Ministry in a form of written information, by presentations at official meetings as well as by personal encounters with representatives of the university management. After the consulting company choice, selected and nominated universities representatives were contacted and *informed* in details about the project objectives and expected outputs, applied procedures, individual tasks as well as cooperation requirements for the participants. A meeting of public universities rectors or the corresponding educational institution representatives demonstrated an *interest* to include in the CAF 2006 project all levels of the university, including service departments (library, information or technology centres). Consultants from an external company prepared the *application brochure* with instructions for carrying out the self-evaluation process and a preparation of the self-evaluation report. In comparison with common CAF model, the documentation has been partly adjusted to the university conditions, particularly from the point of view of a terminology. Advisory supplementary suggestions from university education environment have been also amended. In the frame of the project, special *courses* have been prepared to train university representatives. After that, it was possible to *create* the key CAF *team* members. Together with consultants from the external organization, they have prepared the self-evaluation reports, applying a structure of the CAF model 2006 in its advanced evaluation version. The process of *external evaluation* was executed by the evaluation commission, which incorporated also representatives of universities as associate members. The main purpose of this measure was to prepare human resources from the participating universities, ensuring future *sustainability* of the process of external evaluation with limited engagement of exterior assistance. Based on the results of the external evaluation, the *feedback* report was prepared. This document and the self-evaluation report served as basic references for editing of an *Action Plan* of Improvements of the participating university for the future period. Consultants and evaluators of the consulting company, executing training and evaluation prepared the report, which summarized experiences from the evaluation process. The reports could also provide a possibility of transfer of the best practice from the management system at an organization of the university nature.

Implementation Experiences

From aspect of the CAF model, universities present a *special* target group of public service organizations, because they are characterized by the high level of autonomy. Moreover, their development is traditionally influenced by creativity, limiting effort to adapt to conventions. For this reason, it was necessary in this project to define correctly the requirements of evaluated organizations and to adjust application procedures of the CAF model, with the purpose to well respect *particularities* of the university sector. The rather large justification campaign preceded the involvement of universities in the process of CAF model 2006 evaluation. The Ministry decision to use resources provided by the loan of the World Bank was very suitable for this purpose. Training of participants has been executed in two forms:

- information for the management of universities on the CAF model with the purpose to motivate and to explain potential difficulties but also common profits from the implementation,
- training of potential CAF team members to acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills for preparing self-evaluation reports as well as action plans of improvements.

Consultations at the initial training facilitated to identify organizational units of universities incorporated in the self-evaluation process according to university administration vision. More than 40% of the participants have agreed to include in the self-evaluation process all organizational units, i.e. rector's office, faculties and university institutes.

The application manual for implementation of CAF model 2006 in university environment was prepared by consultants as a supportive material. This handbook was adjusted during training and consulting. Several suggested modifications attuned sub-criteria. However, the resulting requirements respect all criteria, sub-criteria and their examples in the self-evaluation report. No quite important element was eliminated from CAF model.

The most active members of university CAF teams were involved in the process of external evaluation. An evaluation team consisted of two external consulting company experts and one evaluator from a university, too. Of course, due to objectivity and exchange of experience, the person from other university than the concerned one was engaged. These evaluators should operate in the next phase as the external ones.

Impact of the CAF Model Implementation

Initial experiences may demonstrate that the potential utilization of the CAF model outputs for the process of evaluation could generate the following advantages:

- thanks to the CAF model implementation, universities participating in the self-evaluation process can check *transparency* of relationships among relevant organizational university units, recognize their strong faces, investigate possibilities of improving and identify the priorities in the quality management
- Ministry could get necessary data, in concentrated and structured form for *decision making* process on the basis of the facts,
- motivation of participants greater than before for achieving *better results*, even due to the evaluation,
- during the self-evaluation, in the case of exceptionally excellent results in certain area, it can be possible to identify *best practices* and to create conditions for achieving these outputs. This information can be very valuable for benchmarking of equally oriented universities.

Concluding Remarks

The Universities might support financially improvement of its human resources. Through participation at conferences, various training and similar experience exchange, but also by the outputs transfer from quality oriented activities. Unified system of quality evaluation should be implemented in directly managed organizations as well as at universities. Thanks to the quality CAF model, essential data for annual reports on university activities could be provided more effectively.

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