



# Five Years of CAF 2006: From Adolescence to Maturity – What Next?

A study on the use, the support and the future  
of the Common Assessment Framework

## Executive Summary

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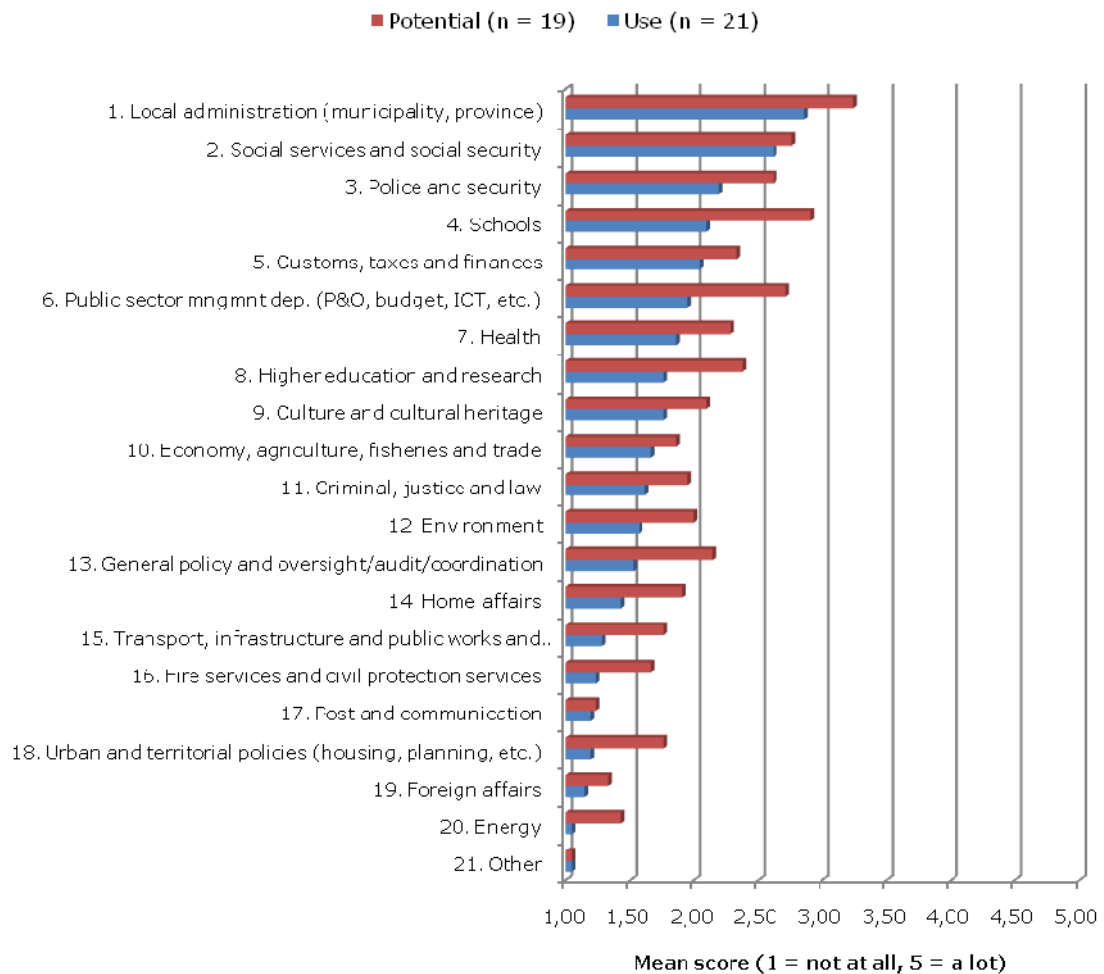


## Background of the CAF study 2011

<b>Period</b>	March – April 2011
<b>Realised by</b>	Realised by the European CAF Resource Centre at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), upon the demand of the CAF Expert Group of the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN), and with the support of the Polish Presidency of the EU.
<b>Motivation</b>	This study was conducted 11 years after the launch of the first version of the CAF and 5 years after the launch of the improved CAF 2006 version. During those 11 years, the CAF community has grown from 288 registered CAF users in the CAF database in 2005, to over 2066 users in 2010, and to 2382 registered organisations today (7 September 2011). The CAF, the total quality model for the public sector that was born and raised in Europe, has also grown beyond European borders. The model is now used by organisations from 31 EU countries (Member States and candidate countries), 12 countries beyond the European Union and 9 EU institutions.
<b>Purpose</b>	The purpose of this study is three-fold: (a) to collect information on the use of CAF and the dissemination and support in the Member States; (b) to analyse whether there is a need to improve the CAF model itself; (c) to look for new opportunities to further spread its use.
<b>Methodology</b>	Two questionnaires were developed: one for CAF national correspondents – the representatives of the countries – and one for the CAF users. Both questionnaires incorporated the three abovementioned research questions. The questionnaires were developed and tested with the assistance of the CAF Expert Group and a pilot group of CAF users.
<b>Response</b>	A total of 21 CAF national correspondents completed the survey, representing Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. The CAF user survey was completed by 407 CAF users from 27 different countries.

## Summary of the findings

<b>a) The use and potential use of CAF</b>	Most organisations using the CAF are from the sectors of ‘local administrations’, ‘social services and social security’, ‘police and security’, ‘schools’, and ‘customs, taxes and finances’ (see graph 1). These are also the sectors where most organisations have expressed the intention to use the CAF in the future (potential). Other sectors with potential to grow are the sectors of ‘health’, ‘higher education and research’, ‘culture and cultural heritage’, and ‘general policy and oversight’. Future dissemination strategies could focus on the sectors with fewer CAF users and thus fewer ambassadors, e.g. events for specific sectors.
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**Graph 1** Use and potential of the CAF per sector

**b) Impact in the Member States**

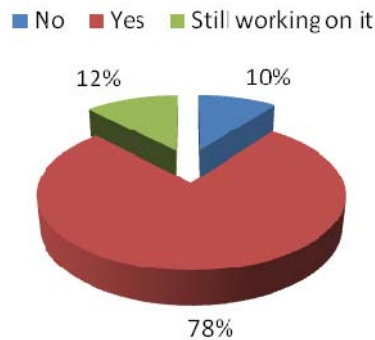
The sustainable growth of the CAF users and the potentialities for the further spreading as expressed by the national CAF correspondents, confirm that the TQM culture remains attractive for the public sector in Europe, and it does have a future. Even in times of budgetary restrictions and austerity, the involvement of the civil servants in the improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of their organisation through the use of an excellence model such as CAF, constitutes a way out of defeatism and lethargy. The holistic approach of organisational development, taking into account all stakeholders' needs, including the authorities, citizens/customers, partners and the people working in the organisation, leads to better results, and contributes in this way to strengthening the legitimacy of the public sector. However, the study also shows that there is still a lot of work to be done to reach the whole of the public sector in the EU with these concepts. The change of culture towards TQM remains limited in relation to the entire public sector. Even in those countries where the impact of CAF was estimated to be important, the success depends directly on the total number of CAF users and thus on the engagement of the political authority to foresee the necessary resources for

the promotion and support of CAF. As important as this was in the launching period of CAF, it continues to be so now and will also be in the future. Therefore, the need to approach the political authorities so that at least they sponsor total quality in their administrations remains of the highest priority.

**C) Impact in the organisations** The most important reasons why organisations use CAF are all internal drivers (see table below). Identifying strengths and areas for improvement has the upper hand; suffering financial stress is the least important driver. These are exactly the same findings as in 2005. Organisations want to use CAF in the first place for themselves, and to improve their organisations, which is exactly the purpose of a self-assessment tool.

<b>Table 1: Reasons for using the CAF</b>	<b>Important or very important</b>
The organisation wanted to identify strengths and areas for improvement (Int)	96,2%
To increase the performance of the organisation (Int)	89,6%
Intention to involve staff in managing the organisation and to motivate them (Int)	84,7%
Increased sensitivity of staff to quality (Int)	83,2%
Because the top management wanted it (Int)	79,7%
For bench learning reasons (Int)	59,9%
Because it is free (Ext)	56,3%
Because other administrations in the national or European context also used it (Ext)	41,7%
Explicit demand from those politically responsible for the organisation to start an improvement action (Ext)	36,2%
Explicit citizen or customer demands for improvement (Ext)	35,4%
Because we want to apply for the CAF label (Ext)	34,3%
Participation in a national/regional/local innovation programme/project (Ext)	25,3%
CAF as a competitive advantage. To attract customers in a competitive context e.g. schools, hospitals, ... (Ext)	22,9%
Participation in a national quality award or conference (Ext)	22,5%
Because the organisation is suffering financial stress (Ext)	15,7%

Out of 379 organisations, 294 (78%) have developed an improvement plan or have integrated improvement actions in the management plan of the organisation based on the self-assessment with the CAF. Of those who do not yet have an improvement plan, 46 organisations (12%) are still working on it and 39 organisations (10%) have not developed one at all.



**Graph 2: Improvement plan developed or not**

More than 60% of the organisations declare that the improvement actions have a large or very large impact on the functioning and results of the organisations.

For the first time, this study tried to measure the impact of the use of CAF on the culture of Excellence in the applying organisations. Firstly, in the organisations using CAF, 45% of the employees are affected by the TQM culture. Secondly, the implementation of the CAF has a positive effect on the TQM maturity level of the organisation. In some areas the impact is relatively high, e.g. on key processes, stakeholders and citizens orientation; however, a lot of work still remains to be done on real involvement of the citizen/customer and the employees. The mentality is changing but the four dimensions of real citizens' involvement (e.g. co-design, co-decision, co-production and co-evaluation) are only very partially present in the participating organisations.

#### **d) Lessons learned**

A total of 407 public organisations from 27 different countries invested their precious time in answering the comprehensive and demanding survey, showing in this way their dedication to the model. The high number of respondents from the "new" Member States such as Hungary, Poland and Slovenia – States that were not involved in the creation of CAF – shows that the CAF has achieved a real breakthrough in these countries. The answers illustrate that the CAF is used as it is intended to be: a holistic instrument, used by most of the organisations on their own initiative to strengthen their functioning. They want to keep the model simple, also in the scoring system, although 23,5% had already used the fine-tuned panel. Internal communication has been improved since 2005, but communication on quality issues towards external stakeholders is very limited. The major obstacles for the use of CAF did not lie in the model itself but in the modalities of implementation. Many organisations though seem to struggle with the improvement plan. How to prioritise actions, include them in the normal strategic and operational planning and monitoring the execution, is for many still the subject of a learning process. This confirms the need for more guidelines on this issue. One can discuss whether 40% limited to no impact of an action plan coming from a CAF self-assessment is a good or a bad result, but we consider this as an opportunity for progress.

Finally, table 2 summarises the top 15 aspects that CAF users would do differently in any future CAF implementation.

<b>Table 2: Lessons learned for a future CAF application</b>		<b>Percentage of organisations</b>
A)	More data collection (facts on results, etc.) to support the assessment	43,7%
B)	Greater involvement of the employees	37,0%
C)	More time for discussions within the SA group	36,7%
D)	More internal communication of the purpose	36,7%
E)	More (or better) preparation and explanation	35,4%
F)	A stronger involvement of key persons	29,7%
G)	Make sure that other priorities and activities do not get in the way	28,2%
H)	Different composition of the SA group	26,6%
I)	Stronger management involvement	22,5%
J)	More careful selection of the right moment for SA	21,5%
K)	More external communication	18,0%
L)	More (or better) external assistance	17,1%
M)	We don't want to change anything next time	8,9%
N)	Change of method in reaching consensus in the group	6,6%
O)	Involvement of trade union employees/representatives	5,7%
P)	Other	2,5%

## Implications for the future of the CAF

### General conclusion

The average satisfaction level on the use of CAF of 6,7/10 reflects that the users of CAF are satisfied. It should also be stressed that 86% of them want to use the model again in the future, which is maybe the most important indicator of the users' satisfaction. Nevertheless, there is also enough information coming from this study which should prevent the CAF community from becoming too self-satisfied. Challenges lie before us and it will be up to the CAF Expert Group to face them in an appropriate way in order to make the model even stronger and more sustainable for the future.

The national correspondents advanced more proposals for improvement of the model than the CAF Users themselves. But even amongst the correspondents, they are of the strong opinion that some energy should be spent in rewriting the model. Sustainability, transparency and ethics should be put forward more as well as the principles of excellence in corporate social responsibility, partnerships and innovation, and creativity. Improvements to the wording of the model and the selection of the examples can be made, guidelines on improvement planning and implementation can be further developed and a new attempt to stimulate bench learning with CAF can be undertaken. During the coming months, the CAF Expert Group has to reflect carefully upon possible improvements to the CAF 2006, keeping in mind that for the sustainability of the model, the users of the CAF 2006 must easily be able to find their way around the CAF 2012.

**Five possible implications for the future:**

Five possible areas for improvement of the CAF 2006 are:

In a first phase:

1. Maintain current structure, general framework and philosophy
2. More emphasis on the principles of excellence
3. Clarify the sub-criteria (language, concepts, etc.)
4. Improve the examples

In a subsequent phase:

5. Improve the guidelines for the self-assessment, the improvement plan and the follow up and monitoring.

## Further Reading

**Research report**

Staes, P., N. Thijs, A. Stoffels & S. Geldof, (2011), *Five Years of CAF 2006: From Adolescence to Maturity – What Next?*, Maastricht: EIPA.

Available at [www.eip.eu/caf](http://www.eip.eu/caf) submenu 'Publications', and on [new.eupan.eu](http://new.eupan.eu)

**Previous studies**

- EIPA, (2003), *Study on the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) in European Public Administrations*, Maastricht: EIPA.

- EIPA, (2005), *Study on the use of the Common Assessment Framework in European Public Administrations & 2nd European CAF event*, Maastricht: EIPA.

Both research reports are available at [www.eip.eu/caf](http://www.eip.eu/caf) submenu 'Publications'.