TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN EUROPE

MECHANISMS FOR EVALUATING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS AND PUBLIC POLICIES

Table Of Contents

Introduction

States have undergone several metamorphoses in the past century, and, inevitably, so have public administrations. As conceptions of public sphere, common interest, public good etc became too complex to decipher in the ever more multi-cultural societies that form contemporary state structures, notions of good governance, accountability, transparency and efficiency become prevalent. Public Administration is less identified with the execution of policies and strategies aiming at the common good, and more with offering select and quality services to citizens. The New Public Management thesis that has largely influenced every major administrative reform in the last part of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century introduces private sector, market inspired notions in performance assessment and goal-setting for public administration.

This study reviews the basic features of public management theory, focusing predominantly with the New Public Management doctrine.

It reviews the concerted efforts of the European Commission, and of other EU affiliated bodies in setting clear and appropriate standards for public administrations, and in proposing transparent and credible evaluation mechanisms. Besides, public administration in the EU operates on multiple levels, the EU level, the nation-state one, the regional and the local. The impact of the EU standard-setting exercises cannot be overestimated.

The study further revisits the basic parameters and features of the UK public administration, that is the administration of the country where New Public Management found its first fertile ground to set roots and produce results. It concludes by reflecting of the state of affairs in the Greek public administration, a country that has been at the focus of international attention lately, and not for good reasons. A country that has recognised the incapacity of its public administration as one of the prime factors to its present fiscal crisis, and that is committed, politically but also legally under the MoUs it has

signed with its creditors, to rapidly, even if violently, modernizing its administration.

1. Public Management in Public Administration

Even since the 1970s, the notion of public management has gradually replaced the traditional conceptions of public administration. This notion was first promoted during the Reagan Presidency in the USA, and systematized further in the Thatcher era in the UK. The basic premise of the notion of public management is that the fundamental role of Public Administration is to provide services; the exercise of public power through authoritarian methods and coercive controls was no longer the prime feature of Public Administration bodies. Public management puts forward the thesis that the role and the actions of Public Administration are assessed predominantly with qualitative terms, and with a view to satisfying peoples' needs.

1.1. The New Public Management (NPM)

The NPM is a relatively new conception, reflecting on the manner in which the public sector is administered. It engulfs global trends, such as the gradual 'privatisation' of the public sphere, the adoption of principles and values of the private sector, the delegation of the exercise of public powers and competences to private law entities and international organisations, the public-private partnerships schemes etc. It is premised on two basic dogmas: i) shortening the gap between private and public sector, and ii) changing the orientation of public sector bodies from focusing on compliance with operational procedures to an output, result-driven modus operandi[1].

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[1] See C. Hood, *The Limits of Administration* (J. Wiley & Sons, 1976), *The Tools of Government* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), *The Art of the State: Culture, Rhetoric and Public Management* (OUP, 1998); Also his "The New Public Management in the 1980s: Variations on a theme" Accounting, Organisations and Society vol 20 no 2/3, 1995.

Over the past few decades, central government and administration have been reduced in size and scope of competences to their "hard core"; new, independent authorities and private law organisations and institutions, have assumed the place of public administration and purport to provide the services previously offered by the traditional public administration. Outsourcing of functions and actions, privatisation, and public-private joint ventures play a central role in this new construction.

NPM is understood as a new globally applicable model of modern public administration, intrinsic in what has been termed "entrepreneurial government"[2]. The global applicability of NPM is often viewed in parallel with the "internationalisation" or "globalisation" of public administration and public law[3]. Indeed, the OECD has supported the adoption of NPM principles and methodology to all its members[4].

Yet, the global character of the NPM is not acknowledged without any reservation. It is argued, for instance, that as administrative structures become more complicated, intertwined with supra-national and international ones, a plethora of different models of management could and should be applied, to reflect this complexity and interrelation and ensure the functionality and efficiency of public administration on the whole, whether at supra-national, international, national and even regional and local level[5]. Elements of the social and political culture of the "administered area" (whether the EU, the states that are members to it, regions and localities within these states) and its peoples account for different conceptions and applications of management models in the public sector[6].

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[2] T. Osborne & D. Geaber, *Reinventing Government How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Spirit* (A. Wesley, 1992).

[3] P. Aucoin, *Politics and Management of Restraint in Government* (Inst. For Research, 1990).

[4] OECD, *Governance in Transition. Public Management Reforms in OECD Countries & Issues and Developments in Public Management*, 1995. Already, the OECD is looking beyond New Public Management, see *Public Administration after "New Public Management"*, 2010.

[5] Hood, ibid.

[6] E. Ferlie, A Pettigrew, L. Ashburner & L. Fitzgerald, *The New Public Management in Action* (OUP, 1996).

NPM has undoubtedly affected most of the recent and running programmes aiming at reforming and modernising national and local public administrations. Public Administration is redesigned with a meta-bureaucratic view to becoming results-oriented, and to satisfying the recipient of its services, the citizen, with whom NPM establishes a supplier-customer relation[7].

1.2. Quality Control

Most public organisations and bodies lack the flexibility, procedural and strategic, of private law entities. Further, strategic aims, framework policies and priorities are decided at a political level, outside the administration, without due account of the needs of the administration, or its capacities. In addition, public administration organisations and bodies often operate under tight fiscal rules and considerations, lacking thus the necessary means to achieve their objectives. Moreover, the 'inflexible', in most cases, employment framework in the public sector leave very little space for initiatives aiming at increasing 'productivity', efficiency through the establishment of additional motivating factors, incentives etc.

Notwithstanding the above, quality models developed to serve the needs of the private sector have been largely adopted also in public administration[8]. The ISO quality standards are the same for both private and public law entities. The same applies to the excellence model of the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM): while it has established separate awards for the public sector organisations, the quality assessment framework is the same as for private law entities. Such European Awards have been the inspiration of initiatives to design a Pan-European quality model and

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[7] T. Doherty & T. Horne, *Managing Public Services – Implementing Changes: A thoughtful Approach to the Practice of Management* (Routledge, 2001).
[8] See the seminal and inspiring work of W. E. Deming, Quality, Productivity and Competitive Position (MIT Press, 1982).

evaluation framework for the public administration, like the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)[9].

2. Setting Standards in Evaluating

The notion of evaluating public policies and programmes, administrative performance, and individuals, whether politicians or administrative staff, has greatly informed debates and initiatives at reforming and improving administrations world-wide. Evaluation is the last element and stage of any administrative and political action, following planning and implementing.

Typically, evaluation is two-fold: internal, by the organisation, body, department etc of the public sector itself, with a view to assessing the extent to which the results achieved by an action come close to –or assist in reaching- the original goals; the external, conducted by stakeholders (ranging from peers, associates of the organisation, citizens, the recipients of the services, experts etc), with a view to assessing the extent to which the performance of the administration, the policies adopted, the actions taken etc reflect their needs and priorities.

2.1. EU Standards

The European Commission has been the key player within the EU in setting the ground frameworks for both evaluation principles and methodologies and mechanisms. Progressively through time, such principles, methodologies and mechanisms are being adopted by member states, and quite often adapted to the particularities of national administrative structures, not always with great success.

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[9] The CAF is presented at later stages of the study.

Indeed, as EC inspired and originating programmes developed and evolved through time, so did evaluation standards. Several reports and working documents have been produced by the Commission, defining, explaining and developing evaluation mechanisms. And while the Commission insists that the guidelines and working papers it produces should be treated as such, i.e. general guidelines[10], it is undoubted that their impact is much greater in national administrative reforms of the last decades.

A major shift, for instance, in evaluating policies and actions was driven by an initiative of the EU, stipulated in its 2006 Council Regulation no 1083: a shift from mid-term evaluations to on-going ones.

This shift was informed by past experience put to good use by the Commission. In its mid-term evaluation report on the Structural Funds for the period 2000-2006[11], the Commission, while recognising a significant improvement in the evaluation capacities and sophistication of mechanisms of a number of member states, it also highlighted shortcomings relating both to the inefficiency of national administrations, but also to the effectiveness of mid-term reports as such. Hence, it was noted that setting standards for mid-term evaluation commonly applied by all member states was ineffective, not only because the progress of a programme varied between member states – which resulted in producing evaluations at a very early stage of the implementation of a policy- but also because the requirements of these mid-term reports were quite broad, encompassing an assortment of distinct issues and considerations, both strategic and operational, which produced insufficient results, lacking in-depth analyses, targets, orientation. The Commission responded fast to reviewing the weaknesses by narrowing the evaluation scope, highlighting focus areas, where evaluation should

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[10] "*Member State authorities are encouraged to use* [the Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods for the Programming Period 2007-2013, published in 2007] *flexibly, adapting the guidance to their own specific needs*". EC DGs Regional Policy & Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, The New Programming Period 2007-2013. The Indicative Guidelines on Evaluation Methods. Evaluation During the Programming Period, working document no 5, 2007.
[11] EC, The Mid Term Evaluation of Structural Fund Interventions: Summary Report of the Activities in the Member States.

concentrate, and allowing for much more flexibility to member states in identifying evaluation needs and selecting evaluation mechanisms. The impact of the Commission review of evaluation methodologies was immediately felt. Member states brought forward heir specific national evaluation needs, while some even launched their own, complementary, evaluations on policy areas and objectives of strategic importance to them; new member states also started evaluations on the implementation of Structural Funds while even countries rigorously, and produced reports, while not required to.

In sum, evaluation standards, mechanisms, methodologies produced by the EC at the EU level have proven more successful and effective when, in compliance with the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity, they allow for more flexible implementation by member states. Member states, when given the option of adapting evaluations to their specific needs and priorities, are much more effective, and willing to produce credible, in-depth and targeted evaluations. For its part, the Commission restricts undertaking evaluations where such evaluations by the Commission are more effective than undertaken by member states, in line with the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity. By the same token, the Commission also limits its requests for evaluation reports and evidence, only when changes and major departures from the objectives and targets are reported on financial aspects, policy priorities, and implementation processes.

The EC-developed classification of evaluation processes serves as a useful methodological tool in reviewing and assessing them, as well as in identifying the possible shortcomings.

With respect to their primary function, the EC distinguishes between evaluations of a strategic nature[12], and those of an operational nature[13].

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[12] "In order to examine the evolution of a programme or group of programmes in relation to Community and national priorities", ibid.
[13] "In order to support the monitoring of a programme", ibid.

With respect to their timing, the EC identifies three (3) types of evaluations: before (ex ante), during and after (ex post) the implementation of a policy, a programme, an action[14].

Ex-ante evaluation takes place at the beginning of the cycle before a programme has been adopted. This form of evaluation helps to ensure that the programme is as relevant and coherent as possible. Its conclusions are intended to be integrated into the programme when decisions are taken.

Ex ante evaluation focuses primarily on an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses and potential of the Member State, region or sector concerned. It provides the relevant authorities with a prior judgement on whether development issues have been diagnosed correctly, whether the strategy and objectives proposed are relevant, whether there is incoherence in relation to Community policies and guidelines, whether the expected impacts are realistic, and so on. It also provides the required foundations for monitoring and for future evaluations, by ensuring that there are explicit and, where possible, quantified objectives. It helps to specify selection criteria for the selection of projects and to ensure that Community priorities are respected. Finally, it helps to ensure the transparency of decisions by allowing for a clear explanation of choices made and their expected effects.

Ex ante evaluations are performed at the time when public authorities are involved in discussions and negotiations on the future programme. They are therefore subjected to strong constraints: pressure of deadlines, vague formalisation of the proposed programme to be evaluated, amendments to this proposal while the work is underway, demands for confidentiality, etc. The evaluation team must therefore be able to intervene flexibly and rapidly and be able to apply techniques for analysing needs and simulating socio-economic effects.

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[14] Council Reg. 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, art. 47[2] (OJ L 210, 31.07.2006, pp. 25-78).

Ex post evaluation recapitulates and assesses the entire programme, particularly its impacts. Its aim is to account for the use of resources and to report on the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions and the extent to which expected effects were achieved. It focuses on factors of success or failure, and on the sustainability of results and impacts. It tries to draw conclusions that can be generalised and applied to other programmes or regions.

Ideally, the results of this evaluation should be available when the next programme is planned. However, for the impacts to have been produced, ex post evaluation would have to be performed two to three years after the end of the programming period. While waiting for this period to pass, a provisional review is often requested shortly before the end of the programming cycle, in liaison with the ex ante evaluation of the following cycle. Impact analysis is always a large-scale exercise if performed systematically.

While for both ex post and ex ante evaluations methodologies and mechanisms have developed throughout the years, and have been largely consolidated and settled in most member states, evaluations during the implementation of a policy are the fresh dish on the menu. On-going evaluations are not fixed exercises, but a continuous process, taking the form of a series of exercises. Such evaluations are expected to follow more closely the implementation of a policy, and thus to identify more clearly and quickly the effects that the policy has, the results produced, the progress towards the broader and long-term objectives achieved, as well as the weaknesses of either the programme itself or the implementation strategy adopted.

The concept of ongoing evaluation is extremely flexible. By leaving it entirely to the discretion of the programme authorities to decide what should be evaluated and when, evaluation should become more of a management tool to help the performance of the programme. Programme authorities can, of course, decide to undertake mid term evaluations of entire programmes, as

outlined above. However, given that entire programmes need no longer to be evaluated at fixed points in time, there is also an opportunity to carry out in-depth evaluations of particular areas of intervention, perhaps using more complex and rigorous methods. An ongoing programme of evaluation should support public authorities to find out "what works" in their programmes and what doesn't and to take remedial action where necessary.

The key evaluation issues in an on-going process have been identified by the Commission. In fact, the Commission suggests their adoption by national administration and managing authorities, and their adaptation to national specific needs, and nature of policy and action under evaluation. They are:

- the relevance and adequacy of a policy vis-à-vis objectives and targets to be met, as well as the general environment (social, entrepreneurial, financial etc) within which such policies are implemented,

- the consistency and coherence of policies and actions, focusing on the relationship of the different actions and policies, their complementarities, and their contribution and concentration to achieving the primary objectives of the framework policy in a specific area,

- the effectiveness of the implemented policies, involving an analysis of their outputs, results and impacts,

- the efficiency of the implemented policies, comparing processes and effects to means and available resources, the cost of the implementation of a policy or act in relation to the expected effects.

In addition to these key issues, that should inform evaluations in member states, the Commission also recommends specific mechanisms and institutional settings:

- the establishment of an evaluation plan, whose main purpose would be to offer an overall framework for on-going evaluation, define the co-ordination arrangements for the evaluation process, such as the

relation between monitoring and evaluation, as well as the regularity of such exercises. An evaluation plan should, ideally, outline responsibilities for evaluation, the budget, an indicative list of evaluations to be carried out (which can be reviewed and updated periodically), the mechanisms for designing and managing evaluations (tendering, steering groups, etc.), and arrangements for using evaluations (dissemination, responding to recommendations, monitoring the implementation of agreed recommendations, etc.). Evaluations plans can be established nationally or at the level of an individual programme (either regional or sectoral).

- the establishment of steering groups that would draw up the evaluation plans, involving and mobilising various stakeholders (spanning from the administration –central and decentralised- to civil society groups),

- the strengthening of the role of managing bodies/authorities. Such bodies could complement steering groups in deciding and drafting evaluation plans, and in ensuring the existence of –and, where necessary, the adoption of reforms for improving- the appropriate administrative and regulatory frameworks for the successful implementation of a policy; they should also play a pivotal role in the monitoring process, by ensuring the timely collection of data and indicators, their consistency and methodological soundness, as well as their rational analysis.

In general, the Commission clearly supports the mechanism of using (and employing) external experts and players to lead evaluations of policies and their implementation success, i.e. agents not from within the managing and/or administrative authority charged with the actual implementation of a policy, in order to enhance transparency, independence and objectivity in evaluations. In fact, Regulation 1083/2006 identified four main principles underpinning on-going evaluations:

- Proportionality. The number and scope of evaluations should be proportional to the scale, the resources, the importance of the policy programme and/or the risk factor in its implementation,

- Independence. Evaluations should be carried out by experts or bodies (preferably external) that are functionally independent of the public authorities charged with the implementation of a specific policy under evaluation,

- Consultation. It is of seminal importance for the efficiency and effectiveness of any evaluation plan to involve as many stakeholders as possible. Drafting a plan on a piece of paper can easily ignore realities and particularities of the administrative and/or social setting of a specific place, and stakeholders may offer invaluable insights into such issues,

- Transparency. The involvement of as many, and as various stakeholders is a basic condition for the transparency of evaluations. Good administrative practice requires that evaluation priorities, plans, methodologies, as well as reports and results be placed on the internet, and be easily and freely accessible by every possible interested party.

2.2. Evaluation Platforms and Institutions

Central in developing EU standards in evaluating, and in offering guidelines to public authorities (decision-makers and practitioners) has been the establishment of an online resource platform, EVALSED[15]. The aim of this platform was, and remains –although the platform has not been updated since late 2009- to promote exchange of experience and good practice among member states in the area of evaluation of cohesion policy.

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[15] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/index_en.htm. Evalsed had its origins in the MEANS programme (Means for Evaluating Actions of a Structural Nature) which started in. In 2004, MEANS was transformed and developed into a website – Evalsed (Evaluation of Socio-Economic Development). Evalsed was further developed in 2007, 2008 and, most recently, in 2009.

A simple, quantitative, assessment of the evaluations contained in the EVALSED platform, updated until 2009, leads to some interesting assertions:

- The vast majority of evaluation reports published on EVALSED were drafted by national authorities of the central and northern European member states. The Southern member states are impressively underrepresented, while new member states Romania and Bulgaria are faring much better than old, even founding, member states.

- More than 2/3 of the reports made available on the EVALSED platform were on on-going evaluations, while the remaining concerned ex post evaluations.

The following "Golden Rules" of evaluation capacity have been proposed by EVALSED:

1. Evaluation is most useful and used when it is embedded as a function in supportive administrative and institutional systems that seek also to include civil society stakeholders. This is what is meant by evaluation capacity.

2. Evaluation capacity can develop organically over time but in most national and international settings it needs to be planned for, consciously introduced and appropriately resourced.

3. The principle of independence and impartiality is an essential principle to build in to evaluation functions given the vested interests that are likely to seek to influence the conduct of evaluations and their conclusions.

4. Evaluation capability consists of elements at individual, organisational, inter-organisational and societal levels that should reinforce each other. Evaluation capacity should be designed as a system.

5. Evaluative activity needs to be coordinated across administrations to ensure coherence and provide a basis for skills development and

professionalisation. At the same time there must be sufficient flexibility in the procedures and approach to adapt to the specificities of policies, programmes and territories.

6. Evaluation capacity may begin by focusing on particular programmes, e.g., those funded by the EU or those taking place at a particular tier of government (e.g., central government departments) but should be designed so that evaluative activity can be extended for example to include nationally funded programmes or regional as well as central government activity.

7. Evaluation should be configured to meet real decision-making and management needs that will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public action and yield concrete benefits for citizens and stakeholders. Whilst evaluation will inevitably be useful to fulfil external accountability needs, it should never be primarily regarded as an external obligation.

8. The inclusion of civil society and the encouragement of participation in evaluation, whether through consultation or direct representation will encourage different interests (e.g., community representatives, professional groups and the private sector) to demand and use evaluation, thus strengthening accountability, increasing transparency and reinforcing social capital.

9. Evaluation capacity must include attention to the supply side, promoting a skilled and professional community of practitioners and the institutions, networks and markets that will ensure that evaluation assignments are bid for and delivered to a high standard.

10. Among the key underpinnings of a professional evaluation community are education and training for evaluators and quality standards and ethical codes agreed and shared among the commissioners and practitioners of evaluation including academics and consultants. These supply-side qualities are often best

developed through national evaluation societies with open memberships and a commitment to high standards.

Similarly, EVALSED has also produces the "Golden Rules" of evaluation mechanisms, methods and techniques:

1. Choosing methods and techniques follows directly from the kind of questions one wants to ask and these questions are part of an extensive design exercise that includes consulting stakeholders and assessing programmes characteristics. Choosing methods and techniques first and trying to make them fit with questions for which they have not been specifically chosen will always create problems. The techniques chosen need to reflect the purpose and focus of the evaluation.

2. Most techniques have strengths and weaknesses; these need to be recognised and where possible different techniques need to be applied together to strengthen the analysis and make the evaluation results and conclusions more reliable.

3. Because of the distinctive character of socio-economic development: bottom-up, using different combinations of interventions and tailored to territorial and sectoral needs, it is difficult to measure and compare outcomes across socio-economic development programme settings. This doesn't mean that measurement, quantification and statistics are not relevant. They can be powerful tools when comparisons are at the level of the particular development programme and do not attempt to compare non comparable settings.

4. Qualitative methods and techniques are well suited to socio-economic development because of the subtlety and holistic nature of what is being attempted and because of the differences in contexts which need to be described in qualitative ways. The participatory nature of local development building on the potential and ambitions

of local stakeholders and citizens is especially suitable for both qualitative methods and participatory methods.

5. Thematic priorities which are very common in European programmes pose real difficulties for evaluators. Because policy makers want to understand how far their policies are successful as a whole, there is often pressure to aggregate results and find a common way of describing or even measuring what is happening. This often cannot be done. Sometimes only qualitative descriptions will work. Take care not to add up apple and pears.

6. There is often a tension between choosing evaluators who know a lot about a particular policy area and those whose evaluation skills are more generic. Ideally in an evaluation team one tries to span both of these sets of knowledge and experience. Commissioners need to be aware of the dangers of contracting evaluators who have lived most of their professional lives working in one specialised area and using a limited set of methods and techniques. This is another argument for looking at the balance of skills in the evaluation team.

7. It is important to distinguish between methods and techniques for gathering data, for analysing data and for informing evaluative judgments. This distinction is not always made partly because those who undertake evaluations may be more preoccupied with one stage of the process rather than another. As in all things there needs to be a balance. It is no good investing in sophisticated methods to gather data but to be relatively simplistic in the way data is analysed.

8. Data is never pure or naturally occurring, it needs to be produced. Because of this evaluators need to know from where their data comes and what decisions have made in the course of their production. At the end of the day the strength of the arguments and

conclusions that can be drawn depend on the strengths and characteristics of the data being used.

9. One important aspect in evaluating data follows from the way they have been accessed and how access has been negotiated. In socio-economic development programmes in particular there are a host of problems to be resolved. Different partners have to be willing to share information, excluded groups often distrust evaluation as one further example of official behaviour and need to be brought on board, and all stakeholders need to be convinced that they are going to get something out of an evaluation before they give access with any enthusiasm to any information they hold. Investing in these kinds negotiation processes will make a difference to quality and evaluation as a whole.

10. The quantitative/qualitative divide is overstated. Data are often more of a continuum, beginning life as qualitative and once analysed becoming quantitative. Weaker forms of quantitative data (e.g., categorisations or ranking) are close to qualitative data. What is needed when evaluating socio-economic development programmes is qualitative data able to capture subtleties, people's experience and judgements and quantitative data to provide overviews, for example to aggregate results of an intervention and provide a comparative perspective.

11. Well conceived indicators and monitoring systems are a powerful adjunct to evaluation. Very often evaluators depend on monitoring systems which are indicator based. If these are not put in place early in the programme design cycle it may be too late to create such systems later on.

12. Over elaborate indicator systems may be counter productive. Whilst there is a temptation in multi-sectoral and multi-objective

programmes to measure everything, this should be resisted. This can be costly and the results difficult to use.

13. Indicators are often used for management and accountability purposes. It can be difficult to reuse indicators that have been exclusively developed for such purposes as part of an evaluation. There can be too much pressure to shape information in positive ways or at the very least make sure that bad news does not come through. On the other hand, within a well-developed performance management culture these kinds of indicators can help improve programme content and management.

Further to the EVALSED initiative, the INTERACT programme merits attention[16]. It is a programme funded by the EU and national authorities, managed by the Bratislava self-governing regional authority of the Slovak Republic (its 2nd phace, while th e1st phase of the programme was under the management of the Austrian Federal Chancellery), with local offices in Finland, Denmark, Austria, Spain and the Solak Republic. The INTERACT website offers usefoul information about national rules, EU legislation and "soft law" instruments on evaluation of policies, as well as practical guidelines and handbooks for stakeholders.

Additionally, member states have, since 1981, been supporting the work of the Eropean Instiute of Public Administration[17]. Representatives from public administrations of all member states, and associate members as well, form part of the Institute's Board of Directors. The Institute itself is funded through the EU budget. Interesting work has been done by the Institute also in the area of evaluation and assessment of administrative structures, procedures and actions, and the implementation of policies, as well as on the Common Assessment Framework.

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[16] www.interact-eu.net.
[17] http://www.eipa.eu

2.3. The CAF

The Common Assessment Framework (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. A CAF Resource Centre (CAF RC) was created at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht following the decision of the Directors General in charge of public service. It works in close cooperation with the network of CAF national correspondents.

The CAF is an easy-to-use, free tool to assist public-sector organisations across Europe 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[18], and by the Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in particular. It is especially designed for public-sector organisations, taking into account their characteristics.

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

The CAF has four main purposes:

- To introduce public administrations to the principles of TQM and gradually guide them, through the use and understanding of self-assessment, from the current "Plan-Do" sequence of activities to a full fledged "Plan-Do-Check-Act (PCDA)" cycle;

- To facilitate the self-assessment of a public organisation in order to arrive at a diagnosis and improvement actions;

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[18] On Total Quality Management, see A. V. Feigenbaum, Total Quality Control (McGraw-Hill, 1983); J. S. Oakland, Total Quality Management (Butterworth Heinemann, 1989); R. Grant, R. Shani & R. Krishnan, "TQM's Challenge to Management Theory and Practice" Sloan Management Review, vol 35, issue 2, 1994.

- To act as a bridge across the various models used in quality management;

- To facilitate bench learning between public-sector organisations.

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 organisation and the options for the future in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Over the past 10 years, more than 2000 public sector organisations all over Europe have used the model and the number of CAF Users is still growing. CAF applications are widespread, from China and Tunisia to central EU organisations, like the Commission, the Court of Audit and Europol[19]. In fact, in some EU countries, like the Czech Republic (at the central government level), the Slovak Republic (also at the central government level) and Romania, CAF application is compulsory[20].

3. Drawing Parallels? Two Very Distinct Examples

A few years ago, the present author was given the opportunity to study and assess the performance assessment system of the UK public administration[21].

In what follows, the study briefly reflects on the summary conclusions, and general impressions, drawn from the analysis of the UK public administration performance standards. The purpose is primarily to highligh the function of public administration in the country that first adopted and implemented NPM methods and mechanisms. Secondarity, the ensuing review of the performance standards in the Greek administration -currently under fierce

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[19] P Staes. N.Thijs, A. Stoffels, L. Heidler, *10 Years of CAF. More than 2000 CAF Users*, EIPAScope 2/2010.

[20] EU Luxembourg Presidency, Study on the use of the Common Assessment Framework in European Public Administrations, EIPA 2005.

[21] A. I. Pottakis, "Public Administration Standards in the UK" in K. Tsimaras (ed) *Comparative Study on Anti-corruption systems and Public Administration in the EU member states* (European Public Law Series vol XCVI, Esperia 2009).

criticism both from within the country and internationally, as identified as one of the prime factors for the Greece's fiscal crisis- will serve to distinguish best practices, and highlight the gap existing between quality services in different EU national administrations.

3.1. The Case of the UK Public Administration

International studies of standards in government show that, in general, the UK ranks highly for its lack of corruption, and for its regulation of public life. Sir Hayden Phillips, in his *Review of the Funding of Political Parties,* recently noted, that "when compared to other jurisdictions, the British political system, taken as a whole, has been remarkably free of abuse"[22]. In fact, Professor Dawn Oliver, summarizing the UK tradition of adherence to mechanisms for assessing performance and institutional design in the public administration based on principles rather than statutory arrangements, claimed, that "the existence or creation of watchdogs signals the collapse of a trust-based system and also a loss of belief in the trustworthiness of civil servants etc. If trust and trustworthiness have broken down, watchdogs may be able to counteract unethical selfish activity by those providing public services, but in doing so will generate even more mistrust and possibly unethical behaviour and legalism -focus on the latter rather than the spirit of the rules- if the person thinks they can get away with it"[23].

Outsourcing performance assessment exercises is a characteristic feature of the UK public administration system[24]. There are several reasons for using

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[22] *The Review of the Funding of Political Parties:An Interim Assessment*, October 2006, p 13.

[23] D Oliver, Evidence given before the HCPASC, Ethics and Standards: The Regulation of Conduct in Public Life (4th report, session 2006–07)**.**

[24] Reviews, which have recently reported include the *Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change;* The *Eddington Transport Study*, a joint HM Treasury and Department of Transport project; The *Leitch Review of Skills,* an external review which considered the skills profile the country should aim to achieve by 2020; The *Pensions Commission*, chaired by Lord Turner, established in 2002 to review the UK private pension system and long-term savings; The *Barker Review of Land Use Planning* considered how, in the context of globalisation, planning policy and procedures could better deliver economic growth and prosperity alongside other sustainable development goals; The *Wanless Review of Health Trends* was "the first ever evidence-based asessment of the long-term resource requirements for the NHS".

such commissions and reviews. Firstly, it is quite hard for a political party to toy with more difficult and dangerous issues and in some respects the virtue of arms-length task forces is that they can be criticised by ministers. The Pensions Commission, for example, was not afraid to explain the policy choices in stark terms. The Government was able to distance itself from any potential negative reaction to its findings. A potentially difficult political decision can become a consensus issue. Lastly, commissions can be procedures for creating wider thinking than is possible within the civil service who at the time are almost necessarily serving and supporting the existing ministerial line. However, they still tend to operate within the boundaries of the current political and economic contexts. Questions are also raised about the extent to which reviews and commissions are really independent from government. Government decides who sits on them, their structure and their remit. They often provide civil servants to support them. Who you choose to chair an inquiry can ultimately depend on the answer you wish to receive[25].

Some of the conclusions of the study of the UK public administration and its evaluation mechanisms, conducted by the present author, could be summarised in the following:

- Public Administration in the UK is not structured around clearly designed –with clear and understandable mandates, structures and modus operandi- institutions for the assessment of its performance and its compliance with the basic principles of good governance. On the contrary, there seems to be a plethora of overlapping institutions, with vague responsibilities and tasks, which, however, remarkably do not conflict among each other, and overall constitute a satisfactory network of complementing institutions.

- Contrarily, Public Administration in the UK is structured around the civil service, and most specifically on the civil servant. There appears to be a long-standing tradition of appointment by merit in the public

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[25] House of Commons Public Administration Committee, *Government by Inquiry*, (1st report, session 2004-05, HC 51).

sector, which downplays most of the concerns typical in other European countries, most notably the Southern European ones, like impartiality, independence from the political establishment and from interference by central government, integrity, efficiency, openness, transparency, accountability. Indeed, the civil servant him/herself is the first and best guarantor of compliance with the above-mentioned principles of good governance.

- The system is based upon the trust of the wider public in the value of the civil service, to such an extent that debates centre on whether legislation is required to regulate it, or it is best to maintain the present state, one that has served the UK public sector for many years, and has proven its track record.

- Assessment of departmental performance is either done internally, through special committees, or externally, through ad hoc groups and agencies.

- The overall overview of the performance of the system lies with the two basic instruments of the Crown, Parliament and the Cabinet. Parliament is by far the most important institution in this respect, the one that exercises, through its Committees in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, its scrutiny and assessment powers.

3.2. The Case of Greek Public Administration

In Greece, evaluation of administrative acts and of policies has only recently started to implement EU standards. Until relatively recently, public administration acts were assessed only in terms of their legality, either through judicial or administrative processes (taking either the form of internal inspections in the frame of disciplinary procedures, or of reporting by external independent authorities, like the General Inspector of Public Administration). It may be that the legal framework was already established,

and largely in line with developments in the EU, however, evaluation was scarce and unreliable.

The norm was the commissioning of internal evaluations, i.e. evaluations conducted from people within the administration, and very often the same department that has in fact drafted a policy or is charged with implementing an act.

Progressively, the monopoly of internal evaluations brought a strong sense of complacency in public servants individually and whole departments. Public administration, it was a common assumption, was ineffective, not just in providing the services it was supposed to, but also in implementing policies, and adopting the necessary acts. Yet, evaluation on the performance of public administration was not only scarce, but what was available was methodologically questionable, lacking independence and impartiality. Evaluation of actions and policies seemed far-fetched, when even evaluation of staff was largely avoided…Characteristically, in early 2007, the then Minister of Interior was forced to issue a circular addressed to the whole of the Public Administration[26] demanding that all sectors comply to the legislation of evaluation of staff and submit their reports, emphasising the legal ramifications for non-compliance[27].

3.2.a. Internal Evaluation – CAF in Greek Administration

Greece was a party to the CAF, since it was first launched in 2000. In fact, in accordance with circulars no ΔΙΠΑ/Φ. 1/6-4-2005 and ΔΙΠΑ/Φ.1/οικ. 6304/12-3-2007 issued by the Ministry of Interior, all services and branches of the Public Sector are under the obligation to report to the relevant department of the Ministry charged with monitoring the application of CAF on the application's results.

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[26] "To all the Ministries, General and Special Secretariats and all the Prefectures"
[27] Ministry of Interior, Public Administration and Decentralisation, Circular no ΔΙΔΑΔ/Φ.32.3/286/οικ.2071 of 24.01.2007.

It must be borne in mind, however, that the CAF is not designed with a view to evaluating the essence of the policies implemented by a public authority, but rather to assessing its functional capacity; nor does it concern itself with personnel evaluations.

3.2.b. External Evaluations

External evaluations, as already mentioned, are new and still quite scarce for public administration. An example on an ex ante evaluation of a policy was the "Ex Ante Evaluation Report on the Framework Programme Improving Administrative Capabilities of Public Administration 2007-2013"[28], commissioned by the Ministry of Interior and drafted in 2007 by a team of consultancy companies[29]. Another was the evaluation report of the external expert and peer group on the Hellenic Statistical Authority[30].

In both instances, the reports were appraising the functioning and efficiency of the bodies under review. It is the same bodies that have been heavily criticised throughout Europe, and firstly and mostly by official EU authorities as contributing to the present crisis in the country, due to their inefficiency. It is no wonder, in this respect, why even external evaluation reports are viewed with considerable scepticism by many in Greece in terms of their credibility and impartiality.

The prime existing example of external evaluation in Greek public administration is the evaluation of Universities.

Universities in Greece are public law entities, heavily dependent and regulated by the state, even though in principle autonomous and self-governing. Law 3374/2007 introduced, besides the execution of internal evaluations, the establishment of regular external peer evaluations.

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[28] "Έκθεση εκ των προτέρων αξιολόγησης του Επιχειρησιακού Προγράμματος Βελτίωση της Διοικητικής Ικανότητας της Δημόσιας Διοίκησης 2007-2013".
[29] Logotech SA & Prooptiki SA.
[30] Peer review on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice, 21.02.2008. http://www.statistics.gr/portal/page/portal/ESYE/BUCKET/General/PEER_REVIEW_EL_2007-EN.pdf

3.2.c. Internal & External Evaluation – Law 3374/2005

Law 3374/2005 on quality assurance in higher education introduced a system of comprehensive and continuous evaluation of Universities in Greece, including not only academic and administrative staff, but also academic programmes, administrative structures, activities etc. The system entails both internal evaluations, based on the principles and guidelines of the CAF, and external peer reviews, as complementary mechanisms, aiming not to compete with each other, but to supplement and confirm each other.

At the national level, the independent Authority on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, created by law 3374/2005, is charged with the overall coordination and support of evaluation procedures. At a University level, the Quality Assurance Unit assists the different departments in conducting evaluations, and coordinates evaluations of the University organisation.

In order to dismiss the possibility of different methodologies and targets in evaluation adopted by each University, the law sets the evaluation criteria and indicators for the four (4) areas under evaluation:

a. In terms of the quality of teaching: the effectiveness of the teaching staff, the quality of the teaching procedure, the organisation and implementation of the teaching work, the textbook quality, the means and available infrastructure, he use of new technologies, the ratio and cooperation between teachers and students, the level and actuality of knowledge taught, the relation of research and teaching, academic and student mobility,

b. In terms of the quality of research work: the promotion of research, publications, research infrastructures, research programmes, effectiveness of research work, originality of research produced, recognition of research by peer reviews, research synergies, awards and distinctions, the participation of students in research,

c. In terms of the quality of academic programmes: the degree to which the academic programme corresponds to the objectives of a department and the needs of society, the coherence and functionality of academic programmes, the examination system,

d. In terms of the quality of other services: the effectiveness of administrative services, student assistance plans and schemes, transparency and effectiveness in financial management, partnerships and co-operations with higher education institutes both within the country and abroad.

Internal evaluation forms the first stage in the overall assessment of Universities, as designed by law 3374/2005. It consists in the systematic recording and analysis of the academic work of a unit from the academic units themselves. Typical methodological tools used are interviews, questionnaires, group/public discussions among various participants in academic life (academics, administrative staff, students). Internal evaluations are concluded with the drafting of a report.

External evaluation comes after the completion of internal evaluation. In fact, the external evaluation committee, composed by five (5) and in no case less than three (3) independent evaluators, registered at and accredited by the Independent Authority on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, is selected and formed, for each external evaluation, only after the drafting and submission of the internal evaluation report. External Evaluators perform a type of peer review of the internal evaluation results, and draft their own report, in which they present their analyses, recommendations and suggestions. The specific unit under evaluation may submit comments to the external evaluation results presented in the report. The finalised report determines the future planning of the evaluated unit and/or University, its prioritisation of policies and actions, and eventually also its level of funding by the state.

Epilogue

In a recently published report, the OECD notes

Public administration has entered a new age. In the 1980s, "less" government was the prevailing idea; in the 1990s and early 21st century, "New Public Management" was the dominant theme. Today, public administration is moving in new directions. Reforms are focusing on the quality of services for citizens and businesses and on the efficiency of administration (the "back office" of government)[31]

It may be that New Public Management will soon be replaced by other doctrines on public administration. As challenges posed to administrations greatly reflect contemporary social, financial and political needs and priorities, the search for better services and more transparent, accountable and effective structures will be continuous. Quality assessments and evaluation processes will continue to play a central role in the designing of policies and administrative structures to implement them.

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[31] OECD, *Public Administration after "New Public Management"*, 2010.