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Public Sector Innovation

Case Study on the Spanish AEVAL Quality Labels

Framework Service Contract 151364-2009 Ao8-BE - Specific Contract "Lessons from ten years of innovation policies and of public sector innovations in Europe"



The Spanish AEVAL Quality Labels

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Introduction

Today, the public sector has to innovate itself if it wants to raise its efficiency, to provide solutions for societal challenges and to meet the increasing demands of businesses and citizens in a rapidly changing and technologically evolving environment.

With the objective to deepen knowledge and understanding of public sector innovations, 6 case studies will present a specific case in the most inspirational manner evidenced in Europe or in third countries keeping in mind its replicability to other EU Member States.

The public sector includes all organisations in the field of the public administration, irrespective of their funding source and the legal form of the supplier. The type of innovation can be a product, a process, an organisational innovation, or an innovation on communication.

For the purposed of the case studies, public sector innovation is defined as the following:

- *Product innovation*: the introduction of goods or services that are new or significantly improved with respect to its characteristics or intended uses. This includes significant improvements in technical specifications, components and materials, incorporated software, user friendliness or other functional characteristics.
- *Process innovation*: the implementation of a new or significantly improved production or delivery method. This includes significant changes in techniques, equipment and/or software.
- *Organisational innovation*: the implementation of a new organisational method in the public service's practices, workplace organisation or external relations.

This definition encompasses new innovations as well as the adoption or diffusion of innovations (innovations developed elsewhere). The innovation can directly or indirectly affect the public administration itself, other parts of the sector or a dedicated public sector (such as health, transport, security), and/or the private sector in general or a dedicated group within the private sector (e.g., SMEs, the self-employed, a NACE sector) and/or end users such as citizens.

1. Short summary of the case

The AEVAL Quality labels are quality certification labels awarded to Spanish public administrations by the National Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and Quality of Services (AEVAL) based on continuous management improvements towards excellence in public administration. The quality certifications are granted by AEVAL based on three different quality assessment models. They are designed to provide the maximum flexibility to the administrations to choose the methods that correspond to their needs, following a '*path towards excellence*'. Ultimately, the goal of quality certifications is to incentivise the public bodies to offer services of increasing quality to the citizens and promote performance and quality management systems within the administration. At the same time, the quality labels are a means to build trust in the government and its efforts towards good value for money.

The quality labels constitute an innovation in the Spanish public sector, as there was no prior reference to evaluations in public administrations before 2006. Their introduction required the strengthening of management systems and the use of indicators for measuring the quality of services provided by public organisations. Moreover, the system considers measurement and impact on the users and results/outcomes. These excellence models have increased the efficiency and daily functioning of public administrations by allowing intelligent leadership, active involvement of civil servants, continuous follow-up of policies and actions developed, and thus generating sustainable improvements over time.

A total of 141 public administrations have received an AEVAL quality label in the period 2006-2011. On average, 23 public administrations are granted a quality label every year. Moreover, the relative importance of the labels granting the highest levels of excellence has increased over the years, passing from about 20% of all granted in 2006 to 30% in 2011, showing a positive trend in improving the quality of the services offered by public administrations.

2. Aspects of innovation

The AEVAL Quality labels are quality certification labels extended to Spanish public administrations by the National Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policies and Quality of Services (AEVAL). The labels are granted in the scope of the sub-programme for the '*Recognition of Excellence*' of the '*Recognition Programme*.' The latter is one of the six programmes in place within the *General Framework for Quality Improvement* in Spanish public administrations following the Royal Decree 951/2005. The *Recognition Programme* aims to improve the quality and innovation in the public sector, whereas the *Recognition of Excellence* sub-programme involves the certification of public administrations based on different quality management models that culminates in the granting of a label according to their level of excellence (AEVAL, 2012). Two parts are involved in the certification process, the administration that is being certified, and the AEVAL acting as a certifying body.

The AEVAL Quality labels are granted following compliance with three different models of excellence, which allow for a staged improvement of quality, as well as a transparent recognition of performers (Parrado, 2012, AEVAL, 2009):

- **The EFQM Excellence model**, of the European Foundation for Quality Management. This model is aimed at public administrations that have achieved a certain level of organisational maturity. Based on a systemic diagnostic of all areas of an organisation, it allows creating an action plan that facilitates benchmarking

with other organisations. The EFQM model is the most used in Spanish public administrations (Hidalgo, 2012).

- **The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**, of the Innovative Public Services Group of EUPAN. This model is a self-assessment tool explicitly conceived for public administrations that incorporates elements of the EFQM model with other excellence models. It is simple and compatible with other models used in different EU countries allowing thus comparability. In practice, the CAF model is not very used in Spanish public administrations (Parrado, 2012).
- **The Evaluation, Learning and Improvement model (EVAM)**, of the former Spanish Ministry of Public Administration and currently of AEVAL. This model follows an easy methodology that allows knowing, through an independent or assisted self-assessment, the quality level of the public administrations in terms of management and results. The EVAM model was first designed only as a tool of assisted self-assessment (Hidalgo, 2012), and, after its review, it is currently conceived as a model of ‘*initiation*’ for those administrations that have not implemented any other assessment models. It is a tool for diagnosis of minimum requirements with respect to quality. Thus, most of the organisations start with the EVAM model (Palomares, 2012).

All excellence models provide a **framework for the evaluation of quality in public administrations**. The three of them are structured around a set of criteria that define the aspects to consider in analysing the activities of an administration (leadership, planning and strategy, human resources management, alliances and processes), as well as the results of these activities (results towards clients, society in general, and key outcomes in terms of organisational performance) (FEMP, 2011).

Applications for obtaining a quality label can only be submitted by those public administrations that have implemented at least one self-assessment to the whole organisation based on the EFQM, CAF or EVAM models. Depending on the model used, three different types of quality labels are granted, divided in different levels of excellence as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Types of AEVAL Quality labels and levels of excellence

Type of Quality label	Level of excellence
AEVAL Label based on the EFQM excellence model	Recognised for Excellence 5 stars (+500 points)
	Recognised for Excellence 4 stars (400-499 points)
	Recognised for Excellence 3 stars (300-399 points)
	Committed to Excellence (between 200-299 points)



200-299



300-399



400-499



+500

Type of Quality label	Level of excellence
AEVAL Label based on the CAF excellence model	More than 500 points
	Between 300-499 points
AEVAL Label based on the EVAM excellence model	More than 300 points
	Between 200-299 points

EVAM 200-299



EVAM 300-399



Source: (AEVAL, 2009, Palomares, 2012)

The labels are valid for three years, and most of the administrations holding one use them also as marketing materials in their external communications and websites. In this sense, the AEVAL quality labels are the final ‘result’ of a process regarding the ‘acknowledgement of a level of excellence in public administration’. It is the ultimate recognition of a quality process following an ‘incremental’ model. The model starts with a bottom-up initiative by the administration itself, followed by the application of evaluation methodologies. It then continues with requesting and granting a certification, and in some cases finishes with the public recognition of the administration through an Excellence Award (Palomares, 2012).

There are also financial incentives based on performance and linked to the levels of excellence obtained. Since 2006, about €800k are released by the Spanish Central government every year, which are distributed among the best 10 organisations belonging to this level of administration that had been granted a certification based on article 31 of the Royal Decree 951/2005 (BOE, 2005). These incentives are then distributed to the civil servants in the form of performance bonuses. A given public administration can receive these incentives only every three years.

The AEVAL quality labels are innovative in the Spanish context because before the implementation of the *General Framework for Quality Improvement*, public administrations were not used to evaluations (Parrado, 2012). Moreover, these are a concrete application of the *Recognition Programme* (Palomares, 2012). Obtaining a quality label requires a strong management system as a condition for measuring quality and progress through specific indicators. This is a big challenge in itself for any public administration, especially given the political environment and the need to satisfy conflicting stakeholder demands. It also requires a strong organisational structure for its implementation. Generally, public administrations differ greatly in terms of quality and excellence, especially at local and autonomous levels. The quality labels give the maximum flexibility to the administrations to choose the methods that correspond to their needs (Parrado, 2012, Hidalgo, 2012).

The success of the AEVAL quality labels lies in the fact that **institutions and public organisations become a reference of quality and excellence**, through the application of methodologies for doing things better, which has resulted in substantial changes at the level of management. The evaluation models include the measurement of impact on the users and of results/outcomes of the organisation, which is also positive (Parrado, 2012). This way, the labels are a signal of the provision of better services, and better public administrations. Being certified across time shows also a trajectory of success and improvement, which allows administrations to compare to each other. At internal level, the administrations increase their sense of identity with their employees, which in turn increase their sense of pride and participation. Civil servants feel more identified within their work place (Palomares, 2012).

The implementation of the models of excellence usually starts by the identification of ‘leaders’ in the public administration. In most cases they are strongly supported by high levels of management that see the need of doing things better, and the urge of introducing radical changes in the way the administration works. In many cases not only quality departments implement the excellence models but also other departments that identify opportunities for improvement and innovation. Even though the financial incentives granted on the basis of performance are not the main objective of becoming excellent, they constitute important drivers. The active participation of civil servants within the quality assessments of administration is also a very important success factor. Being mostly a bottom-up initiative, the process starts and progresses thanks to the servants, which are ultimately responsible for the success of the implementation. In many cases, teams are relatively small, implementing changes with a lot of effort and dedication. In some cases, interest groups are also involved (Palomares, 2012).

3. How it started

Self-assessment and evaluation practices have their roots in the process of administrative modernisation of the late 1980s, as a consequence of the recommendations of the OECD, on its '*Administration as service, the public as client*' report (OECD, 1987). In 1992-1994, the *Plan for the Modernisation of the Public Administration* was implemented with the double objective of increasing the internal efficiency of the public administration and the quality of public services. The plan was integrated through 204 projects across all Ministries, and introduced for the first time the idea of management by objectives, as well as other elements of management culture in the national public administration. These initiatives were formalised with a legal framework via the Royal Decree 951/2005, which is the general framework supporting quality in public administrations, currently composed of 6 programmes. Since the decree, the current Ministry of Finance and Public Administration (previously the Ministry of Public Administration) has developed a Quality Plan for the national administration, where the evaluation of public organisations is a key element allowing them to pursue excellence through management. Thus, the main incentive for the implementation of excellence models and self-assessments is the continuous analysis by the administrations themselves of their processes and management results in order to identify strengths, weaknesses, and establish improvement plans. The most practical and initial aim was to respond to users' complaints and create a self-assessment system (Parrado, 2012).

The AEVAL itself was also an important driver for the implementation of the quality labels. In place since 2007, one of AEVAL's objectives is to elaborate and propose methodologies, undertake accreditation activities and certification, and promote the implementation of information systems and indicators supporting evaluation and quality management. AEVAL does not follow a 'classic' vision of a public administration (Palomares, 2012), but adopted an innovative approach to promoting quality in the provision of public services in the Spanish public sector. It has a real capacity to support quality, and in fact it is the organisation in charge of supporting the evaluation culture in the country, notably through training and cooperation/collaboration between different administrations (MAP, 2004).

With the objective of expanding the evaluation culture and self-assessments in the Spanish public administrations, the AEVAL designed the EVAM excellence model in 2007, based on the EFQM and CAF models. Because it was a creation of the AEVAL by itself, the agency had more flexibility and opportunities of adapting the model to the Spanish needs. Pilot tests were run in several public administrations with the cooperation of external partners, and two series of evaluation guidelines were produced. The drivers for creating this 'initiation' model included the good knowledge of the normative environment by the AEVAL (i.e. ISO 9001 standard), and the agency's willingness to manage good practices and achieving further orientation to project management (Hidalgo, 2012). As a complement, the three models – EFQM, CAF and EVAM – provide full flexibility to all Spanish administrations to pursue excellence, acknowledging that the '*one-size-fits-all*' is not a good approach given the heterogeneity existing across administrative levels.

AEVAL's support mechanisms are now part of its current practice and are generally launched at the request of the organisations that wish to introduce or improve their service quality. For example, the General Treasury of the Social Security Services (TGSS) received technical assistance from AEVAL for elaborating Excellency Reports in 2011, while the National Institute for Work Safety and Hygiene received a training course for using the EVAM self-assessment. AEVAL also provided training to the Castilla y Leon Defence Delegation of the Ministry of Defence in adopting the EFQM reporting system in 2012. AEVAL clearly differentiates between its advisory activities and the certification activities. The certifications consist in external evaluations that validate the results obtained by the administrations through self-assessments in their strive towards achieving excellence.

4. Obstacles and solutions

The initiative has not been exempt of obstacles during its implementation. The most important, together with their implemented solutions, are:

- *Technical capacities are required.* Implementing any model of excellence requires the availability of technical capacities and competencies in the administrations (Parrado, 2012). This is however not always the case. For instance, the implementation of the EVAM model was challenging, as it was a pioneer of its type in the market, and it required a lot of special procedures, as well as gathering and validating the opinion of different actors (Hidalgo, 2012). AEVAL's work and technical capacity has been extremely important in encouraging organisations to implement excellence models. Even in the cases where politicians have given weaker impetus and support to the initiative, AEVAL's technical team has pushed strongly for its implementation (Parrado, 2012). The following figure presents AEVAL's main performance indicators in relation to evaluations, consulting activities, training and studies, and quality of services.

Figure 2 AEVAL's performance indicators in relation to management, training and quality of services

Indicator	2009	2010
Number of performed consulting services, training and studies	11	4
Quality of services improvement index	82.7%	94.5%
Number of methodologies and working guides published	7	10
Training courses performed	20	20
Number of administrations demanding training and technical assistance	15	15
Level of satisfaction of administrations receiving AEVAL's services	10	7

Source: (AEVAL, 2010b, AEVAL, 2011b)

- *Financial costs related to the implementation, notably in times of economic crisis.* Implementing excellence models, notably those granting the highest levels of excellence, such as the EFQM model, is in general costly for the administration. Several administrations do not have the financial resources to implement them, and some experts even estimate that if it were not for the lack of financial resources the scope of the AEVAL quality labels would be larger to date (Parrado, 2012). Moreover, the economic crisis has forced administrations to cut on their budgets and resources, and self-assessment practices have suffered accordingly. One response for overcoming the cost problem is the introduction of the EVAM model, less costly than the EFQM, but that has the constraint of being inappropriate for administrations that are in an advanced stage of quality management or that have achieved already important progress with regards to self-evaluation. However, EVAM has allowed those administrations with low levels of capabilities to become active in self-evaluations, and thus enhancing training, cost reductions, time savings and further improvements in the mid-term (Hidalgo, 2012).
- *Internal resistance and barriers.* One of the main obstacles to excellence models and self-assessment methods is that, generally, the units that understand their benefits are 'horizontal' to the administration itself. Public administrations sometimes lack orientation, or see the implementation of the model as something too complex (Hidalgo, 2012). Moreover, resistance and commitment towards quality varies according to the three different levels of government in Spain. At national level, public administrations seem to be more proactive to quality, and this is the case even more in specific instances of the administration (i.e. Social Security, Ministry of Defence, National Fiscal Agency). In general, those public entities that work closer to final users have more propensity to innovate

(Palomares, 2012). Hence, commitment from the top levels of management, and strong political support towards excellence are important requirements.

- *Achieving critical mass.* Even though there is clear evidence of increased excellence in the Spanish public administration (see Section 5), some of the excellence models are not widely known or used. The CAF model is currently not really used in the Spanish administration, whereas the EVAM model is not well known at national level and rather used at local level. Some experts consider that methods and techniques that remain more horizontal and open –such as the EFQM model- are the best way to go (Parrado, 2012). However, having this openness in choice of models is also considered a driver of the initiative, as it gives flexibility to the administrations.

5. Lessons learnt

Self-assessments, as a pre-requisite of acquiring a quality label, have suffered in the last years from budget cuts and the shift in priorities due to the financial crisis. The absolute numbers have gradually decreased since 2008, when 206 self-evaluations were performed (AEVAL, 2010a). In contrast, in 2010, a total of 62 self-evaluations were undertaken at the national level based on the different excellence models. Almost all of them (61) used the EFQM model. The most active Ministries were the Ministry of Labour and Immigration (28 evaluations) and the Ministry of Defence (13). These self-assessments gave rise to a total of 3,779 potential improvements in 2010, out of which 149 (3.9%) were implemented in the same year (AEVAL, 2012), compared to 12% of all being implemented in 2008 (AEVAL, 2010a)..

A total of 141 public administrations have received an AEVAL quality label in the period 2006-2011 (see Figure 3). Even though the absolute number of labels granted dropped in 2011 (once again arguably as a consequence of austerity measures implemented in public administrations) the relative importance of silver and gold labels granted has increased over the years, showing a positive trend in the path towards excellence.(Palomares, 2012).

Figure 3 AEVAL quality labels by model and level of excellence achieved, 2006-2011

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
EFQM Model							
Gold, or number of points obtained higher than 500	1		1		2	2	6
Silver, or between 400-499 points	5		1	3	9	5	23
Bronze, or between 300-399 points		3	5	2	6	3	19
Between 200-299 points	24	6	14	10	19	10	83
EVAM Model							
More than 300 points			1				1
Between 200-299 points			2	2	2	3	9
Total	30	9	24	17	38	23	141

Source: (AEVAL, 2012) and

http://www.aeval.es/es/productos_y_servicios/reconocimiento/certificacion_excelencia/organizaciones_certificadas/



The public administrations that have received the highest levels of excellence (i.e. Gold AEVAL label based on the EFQM model) are:

- the Provincial Directorate of the General Treasury for Social Security in Valencia;
- the Autonomous Organisation for Tax collection and management of the Province of Salamanca (REGTSA);
- the Transport Company of the City of Malaga;
- the Training Centre of the Division of Training and Development of the National Police Force;

- the School of Public Administration in La Rioja;
- and the Provincial Directorate of the General Treasury of Social Security (TGSS) in Valladolid.

Figure 4 shows a snapshot of different organisations of the social security system adopting the EFQM excellence model. Two of the organisations from Valladolid adopted the model early in 2006 and 2007. Based on the second validation by the AEVAL, there is a visible improvement in the quality of their services. This is certified by the fact that each of the two organisations advanced to an upper level of excellence, showing continuous improvement in service quality. In addition, TGSS Valladolid was awarded financial incentives as well in 2006 and in 2011 for the organisation's performance, as well as a Prize for Quality and Innovation in Public Management in 2007.

Figure 4 Introducing quality management in the social security system

Organisation	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
TGSS Valladolid	EFQM 400-500					EFQM +500
TGSS Zamora			EFQM 200-299			
TGSS Leon					EFQM 400-499	
TGSS Salamanca					EFQM 200-299	
INSS Zamora		EFQM 300-399				EFQM 400-499
INSS Valladolid				EFQM 400-499		
INSS Avila					EFQM 200-299	
INSS Palencia						EFQM 300-399

Source: (Palomares, 2012).

*TGSS: General Treasury of the Social Security

*INSS: National Institute of Social Security

Even though there is a general consensus among experts that concrete results are hard to identify and attribute directly to the initiative, most of the effects of these quality certification practices have been seen in the larger administrations, and in particular their internal processes. These excellence models have increased the efficiency and daily functioning of public administrations by allowing intelligent leadership, active involvement of civil servants, continuous follow-up of policies and actions developed, and thus generating sustainable improvements over time, as shown in Figure 4. The examples also indicate that results take time to appear, which is why more evidence needs to be collected about the impact of AEVAL'S excellence models initiative on the performance of the organisations adopting them.

Moreover, there is also a positive effect in the perception of citizens in relation to the quality of public services. As it was argued before, the most innovative administrations, implementing systematically excellence models, are those that have a direct contact with final users. Quality labels are assets towards final users. The label is a proof of a high level of commitment in the administration.

Local administrations have also applied in particular the EVAM excellence model in performance improvement projects, expanding thus the methodological scope of the quality labels, as was the case in the Torrent municipality through the *'Torrent Innova*

2013 – *Quality and Modernisation Plan*’ based upon the structure of this model (Hidalgo, 2012).

From the evidence collected, this case study shows that:

- The *General Framework for Quality Improvement* as established in the Royal Decree 951/2005 has had positive effects in promoting excellence in the Spanish public administration and is a source of public sector innovation. Starting as a top-down initiative, it has been progressively adopted bottom-up in public administrations, notably at national level, but also at local levels, where a culture on quality did not really exist before its implementation.
- The AEVAL quality labels give full flexibility to Spanish administrations to pursue their ‘*path towards excellence*’. The initiative has the capacity of allowing comparisons between different public administrations, as well as promoting the use of different assessment methodologies, and the monitoring of quality increases in the administration. The initiative allows to attach a level of ‘value’ to the different administrations, as well as to provide comparisons across time of the level of excellence achieved.
- Even though, the implementation of the initiative has suffered in the last years from shifted priorities due to the economic crisis, there is evidence of increased excellence in the administrations that have received a quality certification label in the period 2006-2011. At this stage, most of the identified benefits and impacts are internal to the administration, having as the most important driver the public servants themselves, supported in most cases by the high levels of management.

Appendix A Experts taking part of this study

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