

# **5QC – THE FIFTH QUALITY CONFERENCE FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN EUROPE**

## **1. IDENTIFICATION**

Title of the case:

Effective Improvement as a result of CAF Self-Assessment at Europol.

Name of the organisation:

Europol.

Name of the person in charge:

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Level:

European Union.

Sector:

Justice and Home Affairs / Law Enforcement.

Background:

Europol is a European Union Law Enforcement Organisation which aims at improving the effectiveness and co-operation of the competent authorities in the Member States (MS) in preventing and combating terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international organised crime.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

Europol has carried out an organisational wide self-assessment in the first half of 2008. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) model was used for this purpose. Currently solutions are being developed to implement the prioritised actions identified for improvement.

As an international public organisation serving the Member States of the EU, Europol is operating in a particular context. Without changing the compulsory elements of the CAF tool, some customisation was therefore necessary to implement the assessment. Listed below are the main influencing factors within this context.

Europol contextual factors:

- Europol is a multi-cultural organisation, with 35 nationalities represented under one roof;
- The organisation is situated in The Hague (The Netherlands) and has around 600 officials; approximately 500 are contractual Europol staff whilst the remainder are seconded liaison officers representing the interests of their home country;
- The majority of the personnel comes from a law enforcement environment, such as police, gendarmerie, customs, state security, etc., whilst a minority of personnel come from a private sector background;
- Europol as an organisation is accountable to a Management Board, composed of senior representatives of the twenty-seven MS with the European Commission as an observer. Three specific control organs supervise the daily management of the organisation: the

financial controller, the joint audit committee and the joint supervisory body (data protection matters);

- The organisation is composed of three departments and around twenty units;
- Europol became operational in 1999 and has grown from a product focussed to a more process and result oriented organisation; the management decision to undertake the self-assessment itself demonstrates this progress in organisational maturity.

To implement the self-assessment, the standard CAF steps were followed, adapted to the Europol context. Below a brief overview is provided of the self-assessment activities:

<b>When</b>	<b>What</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Jan 08	Project Organisation and Planning	A new project was set up to perform the self-assessment.
	Communication	The project was communicated internally and externally via various channels.
	Composition of the self-assessment groups	Three independent groups of twelve volunteers were established to carry out the assessments; Europol staff and liaison officers were invited to participate.
Feb 08	Training	All assessors and project members (forty in total) were trained by EIPA for two days.
	Information session	All assessors were informed during a half-day session about the strategic context that Europol is working in.
	Assessment itself	The assessment was carried out over three weeks by means of individual preparations, interviews and several consensus meetings.
Mar 08	Consolidation meeting	During a one day meeting, the three self-assessment groups met to ‘merge’ the findings into one consolidated report; the resulting 75 page document included more than 200 recommendations for improvement.
	Presentation of findings	The report was presented internally and externally.

### **3. IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS**

Since March 2008 the findings of the self-assessment have been used to mitigate the key organisational weaknesses identified. It is described below how Europol is implementing the agreed actions for improvement.

#### **3.1 Plan**

##### **Communication and acceptance**

Effective communication is a consistent theme required to guarantee a sufficient level of transparency, awareness, acceptance and involvement of management and employees. To achieve this, a specific communication plan was developed to reach all stake holders. For all internal and external parties interested in the follow up of the self-assessment report a description of the communication messages, the means (e.g. e-mail, workshops, website,

video-conferencing, meetings, flyers, etc.) and the frequency of communication is defined in the plan.

### **Prioritisation**

Following presentation of the self-assessment findings to Europol's internal and external stake holders and its acceptance by management, the long list of areas for improvement and linked recommendations had to be prioritised. This was done during a one day external seminar in April with the involvement of the Europol Directorate, the project team and representatives of the three self-assessment groups. The day was facilitated by two CAF experts from EIPA. As an outcome of the seminar, ten key actions for improvement were identified, together with nine so called quick wins.

### **Quick wins**

The nine quick wins are defined at Europol as ways to improve actual or perceived performance problems within a short time period, three months, and with relatively little effort. One of the advantages of implementing quick wins is that these fast and visible improvement results maintain the dynamics of the self-assessment activities. To date, seven of the nine quick wins have been implemented.

### **Mandate**

The first important step in the implementation of the improvement actions was the Europol Directorate mandating the project team to initiate a programme. Agreement was reached on what the programme is required to achieve: 'to have the ten actions for improvement implemented by the end of 2009'.

### **Programme approach**

To implement the ten key prioritised actions for improvement the organisation has chosen to follow a structured approach and to apply in-house programme management standards. A programme board was established consisting of a programme owner, senior users and suppliers; in addition a programme executive and manager as well as ten project managers were appointed to follow the classical programme and project phases: start up, initiation and planning, go no go moments, execution, closure and hand over and reporting, monitoring, evaluation and adjusting where needed. The ten projects are cross-organisational and involve all categories of staff.

In order to make sure that the programme and projects plans are developed and implemented in line with the outcome of the self-assessment, a programme assurance team was created. The six volunteers in this team participated themselves in the assessments and represent the organisation to ensure that the solutions in the ten projects effectively overcome the problems identified. The assurance team has access to all programme information and is invited to all meetings.

### **Action plans: project definitions**

The first concrete activity for the project managers was the development of the project definition documents. This includes the definition of the project organisation, objective,

scope, problem statement, stake holders, benefits, risks, critical success factors, interdependencies with other projects and initiatives, key performance indicators, products to be delivered (i.e. the solutions to overcome the problems identified and their root causes), timing and quality aspects. A launch event took place in May for programme and project personnel to agree on planning and working procedures.

Making the project goals attainable and realistic turned out to be a challenging task and was achieved by prioritising deliverables in accordance with the self-assessment findings. From them, the project teams, stakeholders and sponsors were able to discuss each objective. Risks and benefits were discussed in order to understand any threats to the project. Carrying this out promoted a unified way of working.

The ten project plans were then discussed at programme and management board levels. Adjustments were made where requested before a green light was given to implement the proposed actions. Communication took place in a coordinated way: at programme management level information was provided to internal and external parties on general aspects, while project managers targeted their specific stake holders with additional information. Europol's Press and Communication Office has been involved in all these activities and is facilitating horizontal working.

In order not to jump to fast to conclusions, nearly three months were used to develop the programme and to find the best solutions to improve the organisational performance in the areas identified. This allowed a more in depth analysis of the self-assessment diagnosis, i.e. a clear understanding of the causes and root causes of the problems highlighted. Open communication at this point was critical to maintaining expectations.

### **Success factors**

The following requirements were identified by the programme and project teams as essential when planning and implementing the programme:

- active sponsorship by top management;
- all improvement actions should be result, rather than action oriented;
- integrated and horizontal approach, including the identification of relationships with existing strategies and initiatives;
- innovative approach, in addition to already available solutions;
- compliance with the findings of the self-assessment;
- competent project personnel;
- clear roles and responsibilities;
- realistic planning.

### **3.2 Implementation**

This will be the longest phase, around one year, of the project management lifecycle, where most resources are applied. In this phase of project execution and control, all the plans, schedules, procedures and templates that were prepared and anticipated during the planning phase are utilised.

Next to communication, delegation and cooperation will also be vital in this phase.

With regard to delegation, the project plans are developed so that working with small teams supports a flexible and effective approach. This is done by empowering project or team leaders to manage tasks within their areas of expertise and work closely keeping communication open. A combination of formal and informal meetings facilitates this.

With regard to cooperation, the different project teams are composed of internal and external colleagues. The project teams and their members therefore will need to actively communicate with each other so that each dependency is clearly understood and managed. Regular information sessions to discuss issues and progress are necessary.

### **3.3 Check and Adjust**

A reporting mechanism has been established for the ten projects and nine quick wins. This includes measures to follow up as to whether the planned activities are taking place (productivity), evaluation if results are achieved (effectiveness) and if the best method is being followed to obtain these results (efficiency). Reports are sent on a monthly basis to the programme manager. The programme board manages by exception, monitors via global progress reports and controls through a number of decision points such as authorising the start of new project stages, providing ad hoc direction when needed and closing projects once completed.

### **3.4 Project closure**

Every project will end on the hand over of its products made to their relevant business owners. This guarantees that the project results are integrated into existing business processes in a sustainable way.

At the beginning of 2010, a second self-assessment process will be held at Europol and the results of it will be used for a new improvement programme.

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