

The Agency for the Quality of the Environment - AQUE -

A PRACTICAL CASE TO LEARN TO APPLY THE
COMMON ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (CAF)

Jean-Marc DOCHOT
0477/32.98.79

Patrick STAES
0477/21.18.54

Introduction

This is the story of the creation of a new administration dedicated to environmental protection in a fictitious European country called Middleland.

The Agency for the Quality of the Environment (AQUE): Its Creation

At the time of the coalition discussions that preceded the establishment of the current government (last year) of Middleland, it was decided to firmly tackle the problem of the quality of the environment and to create a new, central public body: **the agency for the quality of the environment (AQUE)**. Though environmental problems fell within the competence of the regional and local authorities, they too were aware that the extent of the environmental problems exceeded their regional or local capacity to solve them. It was therefore quickly agreed to entrust this new administration to the responsibility of the Prime Minister, for two reasons:

- It involved coordinating competences still spread over three levels of authority in Middleland (central, regional and local). It was better that this agency should come under the supreme political authority of the country to prevent it from being dealt with by a minister who was only indirectly concerned or from being a matter for various political powers.
- The Prime Minister considered the quality of the environment an important issue and wished to personally guarantee that AQUE had all the possibilities to carry out its mission.

From a number of candidates, the Council of Ministers quickly selected Lucien EDEN as Director-General of AQUE. His qualities as a manager and his expertise in environmental matters immediately appealed to the ministers and unanimity was reached almost immediately.

He was granted a budget of EUR 25 million to fulfil the **mandate of AQUE** as described as follows by the Council of Ministers:

"To improve the quality of citizens' life while assuring the quality of the air, water and soil in Middleland."

AQUE's role and mandate were defined as follows:

- 1. COORDINATION** of the actions of central, regional and local authorities regarding the environment while considering international initiatives and directives. To perform this task, AQUE may contact political and administrative leaders at all levels of government (central, regional and local).
- 2. ADVICE:** To develop and propose new ideas to the various political and administrative levels. Within this framework, to establish partnerships with universities, expert centres of national and international organisations dedicated to environmental issues.
- 3. SUPPORT** for initiatives of private and non-governmental organisations and of official authorities at central, regional and local level. This support can take the practical form

of subsidies for projects that meet a number of conditions or of expertise provided by AQUE.

4. PROVISION OF INFORMATION and AWARENESS RAISING among all official authorities, organisations and citizens regarding problems that concern the quality of the environment. Within this framework the agency can take all initiatives it considers necessary.

5. DESIGN AND REALISATION of projects to improve the quality of the environment on a national scale

Instructions

Below, some parts of the agency's story are presented in chronological order. We ask you to:

Phase 1:

1. **identify the criteria mentioned as C and D.**
2. **for each paragraph (all paragraphs are numbered): identify the sub-criterion**

Phase 2:

- 2.1. **identify strengths and weaknesses** regarding each sub-criterion
- 2.2. **give a score** to each sub-criterion

Phase 3:

- 3.1. **propose an action to improve** the management in the field of the sub-criterion
- 3.2. **draft a prioritised action plan**

You will find attached a template (p.8) to help you!

Working method

1. Make 4 discussion groups.
2. Appoint a chairman and a secretary. The chairman leads the discussion, keeps the time and presents the results in the plenary session. The secretary takes note.

1. Criterion A

1.1. The Board of Management went on a residential weekend on the coast for a strategic reflection process that should lead to a four-year strategic plan for AQUE. Rich and intensive discussions were held and on Sunday evening a strategic plan had been developed. Each participant had contributed to it and was ready to introduce it to his/her unit. On Monday, the directors, who were still very tired, organised a big meeting for all staff members to present the strategic plan. Although the plan was generally approved, some said they regretted the lack of staff involvement in the development of the plan. The Board of Management admitted this was true, but each director committed him/herself to launching a dialogue when the strategic plan would be implemented at unit level

After 4 years.....

1.2. It was time to stand back and reflect before the hard work was to continue. The DG summoned the Board of Management and the staff responsible for HRM and organisational development in order to re-examine the strategic plan in the light of the results obtained and the difficulties encountered and in relation to the tasks defined at the time of the previous government. It seemed that most actions undertaken were especially targeted at cleaning the atmosphere and very few had been developed for cleaning the water or soil. Moreover, those in charge of these actions and of changing mentalities were mainly private individuals and polluting, heavy industries (of which there were no longer so many in the country). A cause-and-effect diagram was drawn up regarding the three elements to be cleaned. For instance, in this way it was possible to identify as soil pollution factors fertilisers and pesticides, which moreover also polluted the ground water used for the country's water supply. Those responsible were farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture, which permitted the use of these products, and the agro-food firms providing them; moreover there was a lack of information about the use of alternative, harmless products.

2. Criterion B

2.1. The processes were re-examined and described in detail so as to keep as much as possible to the strategic objectives of the unit.

After 2 years.....

2.2. A new survey among the citizens was arranged in order to assess their reactions to the projects and to, consequently, refine the design. Rather than distributing questionnaires to a random sample of the population, panels were set up in cities and municipalities with the assistance of the unit in charge of the coordination. To this end, collaborators contacted the environmental departments of cities and other municipalities. The projects submitted to them concerned the following matters: substitute fuel, nuclear power stations, wind turbines, free public transport, car pooling, park-and-ride facilities, bicycles, "clean house" label, and waste processing and recycling centres. Panels were also set up that included representatives from industry in order to jointly find the fairest solutions or even to create partnerships to "collectivise" waste processing and thus bring about economies of scale. A great deal of information was collected. The "clean house" label project was a success as was the free public transport project. Acceptance of the park-and-ride project would be greater if there were free shuttles to

the town centre. The waste treatment centres always suffered from the NIMBY syndrome¹ and it was really difficult to find a consensual solution. The wind turbines were installed in places where they did not pollute the landscape. The cost of substitute fuel could be significantly reduced if people were really encouraged to use it.

3. Criterion C

After 3 years.....

3.1. The time of evaluation was there. The government was getting impatient, the elections were approaching and the state of affairs had to be assessed. The Prime Minister regularly called Lucien Eden, the DG. Mr Eden put his directors under pressure to update their scorecard and speed up the projects. Achievements included the following:

- The launch of the "clean house" label with a bonus as incentive. A total of 12,000 requests had been made and 4,000 bonuses had been paid. The problem lay in the control in the field, which required intensification of partnerships with regions and cities.
- The agreements with public transport companies had been concluded quickly and public transport was now free for workers.
- The park-and-ride projects had been launched in 6 of the 10 larger cities of the country, accompanied by a shuttle system in the form of electric minibuses to and from the city centre.
- The matter of waste incineration centres had not been solved between the citizens and administration. A political agreement on the establishment of these centres would be necessary.
- On the other hand, plastic and metal recycling centres could be established because they not only created jobs but also added value in the form of new products.
- A field of 50 wind turbines was created, respecting the landscape. It managed to provide an appreciable part of households on the coast with electricity. A second field of about 20 wind turbines was established in the southern region. The project was quite considerable at the start, but coordination problems with local authorities had reduced the size of the project.
- The price of substitute fuel was reduced by EUR 0.20 compared to normal unleaded petrol.

3.2. The agency's annual budget had been slightly overspent because the success of the bonuses for the "clean house" label had quickly exhausted the budget reserved for this. It would be difficult to continue these payments. Lucien Eden was obliged to submit an exceptional budget request to the Prime Minister, who gave in seeing that the elections approaching. Still, on the whole, he was rather content with the results of the agency over the past 3 years.

¹Not in my backyard

4. Criterion D

4.1. The Council of Ministers had let Lucien Eden select his management team. The 120 staff members had to be selected in a special way. The Council had decided to apply the regulations on mobility to recruit the staff of the agency. The various authorities (central, regional and local) had been consulted about the creation of the agency and about the possibility, or even of the obligation, to second candidates to create the agency. Each authority had staff dealing with environmental problems and therefore the lists of candidates could, without too many difficulties, be made up of specialists in various disciplines. The Director-General asked Robert Relax, the director of Human Resources, to organise the selection procedure internally in collaboration with each director. He organised bilateral meetings with each director to identify the needs for competences for each key process. Using a summary of these meetings he could develop a comprehensive staff plan, in line with the organisation's key processes that the DG had developed with his directors on the basis of the tasks defined by the Council of Ministers.

After 4 years.....

4.2. It was agreed to hold an evaluation discussion with each staff member. The introduction of this type of discussion had to be carefully prepared. If perceived badly, this might affect the good working conditions developed over the past 4 years. The DHR, with the agreement of the DG, entrusted the communications department with the responsibility of presenting these discussions in a positive way. No marks would be given as the intention was to enable each collaborator to improve his/her performance. A discussion plan was developed within the DHR's unit on the basis of specific guidelines. The aim was to look at the past years and at the possible causes of problems in the performance of the tasks, and to establish how these problems could be remedied so as to reach the individual objectives to be derived from the operational plan. The discussion also had to concentrate on the development of staff skills and how to develop them through training or through mobility within the agency. Close attention would be paid to problematic cases, of which fortunately there were only few. If no internal solution could be found or appeared ineffective, external mobility or return to the department of origin would be envisaged.

5. Criterion E

After 3 years.....

5.1. Robert Relax considered that the time had come to launch a survey on people's satisfaction. The results were quite encouraging. Only the excessive workload sometimes caused complaints as did the lack of encouragement on the part of the unit and especially the DG.

5.2. Moreover, absenteeism had been at the level of the national average, 10 people had left the agency and no strikes had taken place.

CRITERION C :			
Sub-criteria	Strengths	Areas of improvement	Score / 5

CRITERION D :			
Sub-criteria	Strengths	Areas of improvement	Score / 5

Action proposed	Sub-criterion concerned
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Select 3 actions for the action plan covering one year

Prioritised action plan	Group 1	Group 2	Group3	Group 4
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				