

Effective Management Tools in Implementing Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Development

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Abstract

Public administration in Romania and the administrative capacity of the central and local government has undergone a significant progress since 2007. The development of the administrative capacity deals with a set of structural and process changes that allow governments to improve the formulation and implementation of policies in order to achieve enhanced results. Identifying, developing and using management tools for a proper implementation of an operational programme dedicated to consolidate a performing public administration it was a challenging task, taking into account the types of interventions within Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Development 2007 – 2013 and the continuous changes in the economic and social environment in Romania and Europe.

The aim of this article is to provide a short description of the approach used by the Managing Authority for OPACD within the performance management of the structural funds in Romania between 2008 and 2014. The paper offers a broad image of the way in which evaluations (ad-hoc, intermediate and performance) were used in different stages of OP implementation as a tool of management.

Key words: management, evaluation, methods, quality, public administration, European funds, managing authority.

JEL classification: H70, H83.

INTRODUCTION

The paper starts from the assumption that management decisions are supported by evaluation conclusions and recommendations. From the European Commission perspective, as mentioned in *Evalsed - The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development*, evaluation is not an end in itself. The contribution of evaluation is potentially greatest in innovative policy areas where achieving success cannot be taken for granted and where implementation is not always straightforward. There is a need for sophisticated management and planning. When properly applied, evaluation can help make manageable some of the unavoidable uncertainties of complex situations. Choosing goals and measures, designing programmes and policies, implementing and sustaining a development dynamic,

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all require analysis, anticipation, establishing feedback systems and mobilising different institutions, agencies and population groups. (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/guide_evalsed.pdf).

The word *evaluation* is used in the policy and programming cycles.

There are three different time cycles that are important for those involved in evaluation. First, the evaluation cycle that occurs at different moments and at different stages within a second cycle, then the programme cycle which it generates demand for these different evaluation moments. There is also a third cycle, the policy cycle which both shapes and influences programmes and inevitably also, evaluation requirements. Normally, the policy cycle is longer than the programme cycle. (European Commission, Evalsed, September 2013)

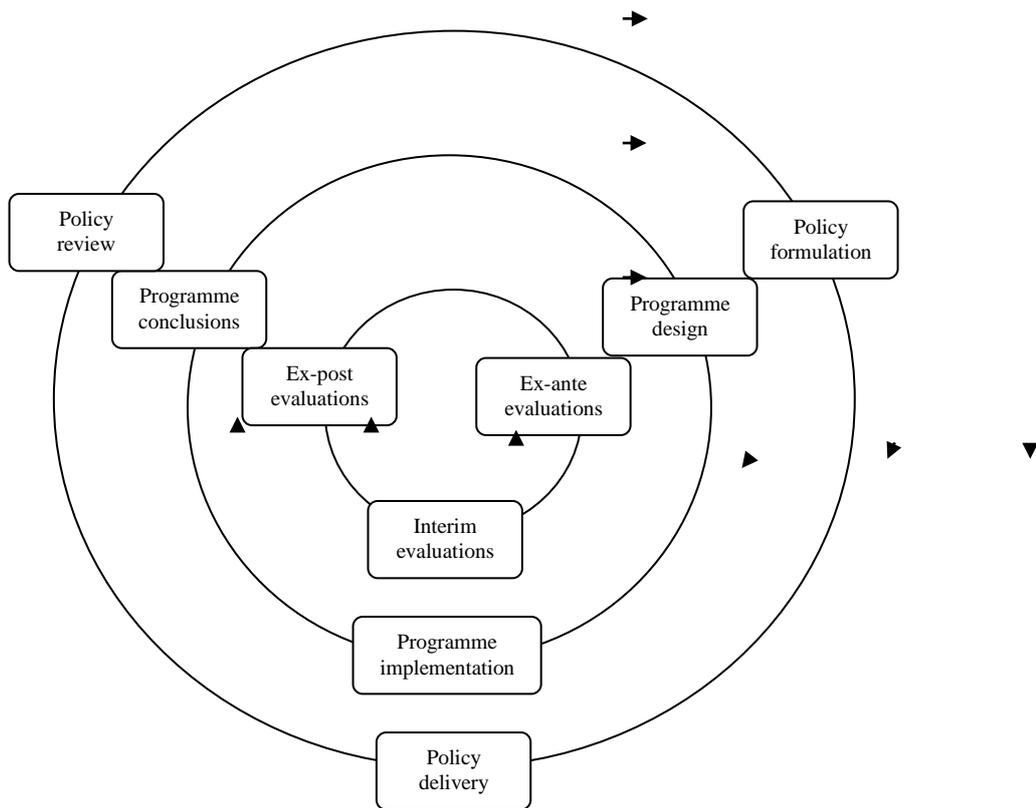


Figure 1. Policy, programme and evaluation cycles

Source: adapted *Evalsed - The resource for the evaluation of Socio-Economic Development* http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/guide/guide_evalsed.pdf

The inner circle moves from ex-ante evaluation that documents needs to be addressed and the results to be obtained in the programmes, through to interim evaluations that inform the management with the progress and implementation of the interventions within the

programmes and in the end to ex-post evaluation that focuses on results and the contribution of the programme to change.

As presented in the paper, the recommendation from ex-ante evaluation was included into programme design, just as interim evaluations were helpful instruments to shape programme implementation and bring substantiation on early effects of OPACD.

1. THE CONTEXT OF THE PROGRAMME

The European Social Fund 2007-2013 is the EU's main instrument for strengthening economic and social cohesion. One of the policies that are supported through ESF 2007-2013 is strengthening institutional capacity and the efficiency of public administrations and public services with a view to reforms, better regulation and good governance.

Capacity building was a key priority for Romanian administration. The existence of a dedicated operational programme for administrative capacity development in 2007 makes noticeable that the importance of strengthening these capacities is considered as a noteworthy topic in Romania.

The general objective of the Operational Programme for Administrative Capacity Development 2007 – 2013 (OPACD) is to contribute to the creation of a more efficient and effective public administration for the socio-economic benefit of Romanian society. The interventions financed through the OPACD target both central and local governments. First of all, in order to maximise the impact, OPACD co-financed projects that contribute to a sustainable improvement in public administration capacity in Romania, through structural and process improvements to the public policy management cycle, with a horizontal approach to improve policy making, strategic planning, performance measurement and evaluation, as well as human resource management. An important approach of the OP was to sustain projects to carry over the decentralization process in the Romanian public administration leading to better quality and improved efficiency of the public services.

OPACD operations are structured on 3 Priority Axes and 7 Key Areas of Intervention (KAI), as follows:

Priority Axis 1:

- KAI 1.1 Improving political-administrative decision-making;
- KAI 1.2 Strengthen the accountability framework;
- KAI 1.3 Improve organizational effectiveness;

Priority Axis 2:

- KAI 2.1 Support for decentralization of services sector;
- KAI 2.2 Improving the quality and efficiency of service delivery;

Priority Axis 3:

- KAI 3.1 Support for implementation, overall management and evaluation for OPACD and preparing the next programming exercise;
- KAI 3.2 Support for communication and promotional activities of the OPACD.

The Priority Axes of the OPACD to achieve the overall objective are designed to:

- **address horizontal management problems at all public administration levels** (central and local) with a focus on key attributes that strengthen the reliability of

the administration, in particular decision making, better regulation, accountability and organisational effectiveness, and

- **specifically target improvements to the decentralisation of service delivery in certain prioritised sectors** (Health, Education, Social Assistance) and improve the quality and efficiency of service delivery.

The OPACD financial allocation for the 2007-2013 is **244.7 mil Euro** (of which 85% is EU contribution and 15% national contribution).

The indicative operations for OPACD are expected to support a stronger institutional structure for policy making, leading to a higher quality of policy initiatives and better service delivery by the local and central government. This is why evaluations have faced the challenge of understanding whether the strategic planning development interventions or the better regulation initiatives have met their targets, not solely on paper, but actually addressing the key structural weaknesses.

The requirement to conduct systematic evaluation activities of the OP is provided by the Council Regulation (EC) no. 1083/2006, laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (Articles 36, 47-49). Regulation stipulates that ex-ante evaluation of operational programs the responsibility of Member States, and ex-post evaluation is the responsibility of the Commission. The regulation mentions that during the programming period each *Member States shall carry out evaluations linked to the monitoring of operational programmes in particular where that monitoring reveals a significant departure from the goals initially set or where proposals are made for the revision of operational programmes, as referred to in Article 33.* (Article 48(3) REG (EC) no. 1083/2006).

According to Article 48 (1) from REG (EC) no. 1083/2006, *the Member States shall provide the resources necessary for carrying out evaluations, organise the production and gathering of the necessary data and use the various types of information provided by the monitoring system. They may also draw up, where appropriate, (...) an evaluation plan presenting the indicative evaluation activities which the Member State intends to carry out in the different phases of the implementation.*

Although the development of such a plan was not compulsory, the managing authority for OPACD elaborated the evaluation plan.

The task of organizing the appraisal of an important operational program for developing the administrative capacity, for a period of seven years, required the identification of evaluation priorities and to ensure that all the evaluation are integrated into the program implementation system in an efficient approach.

2. THE EVALUATION OF OPACD

2.1 Ex-ante evaluation Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Building

Ex-ante evaluation of the OP was carried out between August 2006 and January 2007. The ex-ante evaluation process adopted an interactive approach which led to the consideration of initial recommendations received from evaluators in completing the OP. The appraisal

included interviews with key actors, several meetings with the scope of collecting information and recommendation from the stakeholders, as well as seminars on programme indicators.

The recommendations of the ex-ante evaluation were:

- The need to organize new consultations with representatives from National Institute for Administration (NIA), National Agency for Civil Servants (NACS), Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (CUPAR) and the three line ministries (Health, Education, Social Assistance) who manage selected priority sectors in order to ensure that the OP reflects their immediate needs;
- Performing a thorough analysis regarding the competencies of civil servants. On this basis, it should establish a detailed needs analysis, for better concentration of resources.
- The strategy of the programme should focus more on improving productivity and efficiency of public administration according to the Lisbon Strategy. A brief justification is necessary to demonstrate that the objectives of OPACD will be achieved with the proposed activities and operations.
- The OP indicators and their targets should be linked to the efficiency and productivity of Romanian public administration;

Also, during the ex-ante appraisal were conducted two ad hoc analyses: the first assessment was focusing on the review of the achievements to date of the reform in public administration, assess the up-coming priorities of the reform in Romania, to have a sound reflection of the real needs of the public institutions. The main recommendations expressed the need for further cooperation between line ministries and the agencies and to ensure that the OP would reflect their urgent needs. An important recommendation was to improve communication and cooperation between central and local government, as well as between the different tiers of the local institutions.

The second ad-hoc analysis was on the justification of the selection of priority sectors of the OP. The sectoral focus was an important element of the OP. Based on the selection criteria and the justification of the selection, respectively:

- Size of the sector compared to the national budget;
- Proportion of people employed in the sector compared to the whole public administration;
- Stage of implementation of PAR;
- Need on the central and local level;
- Significance of the sector from the point of view of the economic and social cohesion;
- Significance of the sector from the point of view of competitiveness;

It was relevant for OPACD to support intervention in the health, education and social assistance sectors. One important suggestion was to introduce more information in respect to sectoral issues in the SWOT analysis, strategy of the programme, description of priorities and in the implementation chapter.

As a result of ex-ante evaluation recommendations, the following actions were taken:

- reformulation of Priority Axis 1 and key areas of intervention;

- focus on developing partnerships and creating sustainable partnership structures;
- planning the change management activities and ensuring strong political support through regular consultations at high level between stakeholders;
- reformulation of Priority Axis 2 and key areas of intervention so that the main objective is the customer satisfaction as well as providing effective and efficient public services to the citizens.

2.2 Ad-hoc evaluation of OPACD in 2009

The identification of three priority sectors for the OP had in view to support strategic projects in social sectors that could produce effects on the quality of public services.

But as it turned out, almost one and a half year after the OP was launched, these priority sectors had yet to produce a single project application worthy of financing. The fact was more troublesome as the 3 priority sectors had an advantaged funds allocation (50% of the total amount of funds available on KAI 1.3 and 2.1), which if not used, could have undermined financing of other areas of interest. This institutional lack of interest raised concerns and determined the MA to conduct its first assessment of the programme, both in terms of its relevance and effectiveness of the management system. Therefore, the decision was taken to organize an ad-hoc evaluation of the key areas dealing with the priority sectors, KAI 1.3 *Improve organizational effectiveness* and KAI 2.1 *Support to the sectoral service decentralization process*. The appraisal had two purposes, on one hand, the accountability for this continuing inability to generate projects and, on the other hand, the so-called knowledge production (understanding why this particular strategy was not properly working).

The evaluation produced quick and wide-ranging responds which indicated an unrelieved lack of personnel exclusively trained to develop and implement projects financed from structural funds in the ministries responsible for the sectoral strategies. The assessment made known also the lack of funds for co-financing or persistent delays in elaborating projects at central level, those were supposed to guide the development of local projects.

Although this evaluation exercise was carried out internally by the managing authority, it provided the basis for the line ministries in charge to organize debates and meetings with their specific stakeholders and involve them in a serious needs assessment, as well as to disseminate good practices for successful projects. It also triggered an increased pressure on the MA to organize training sessions for its beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries.

As this paper is mainly concerned with how evaluation recommendations translate into effective management tool, it can be safely argued that the first programme evaluation proved an essential instrument to raise awareness upon the limited capacity of potential beneficiaries to elaborate and implement projects.

2.3 The mid-term evaluation 2007-2010

The first interim evaluation of the programme had a specific scope to provide the top management with a comprehensible point of view on the progress of the implementation and the contribution to the objectives set out at the level of priority axes. The evaluation was focusing on the relevance, the coherence, the effectiveness and efficiency of the OP, as

well as the contribution to strategic objectives by identifying the achievements, opportunities and future prospects in relation to the programme implementation strategy.

This evaluation was also the first one to determine significant changes at the level of OP in terms of allocation of funds and planning of further calls for projects.

The first important finding of the evaluation was that the three priority ministries were still lagging behind in terms of consistent projects in line with the originally established development objectives.

A direct recommendation of the external evaluators was to create an alternative set of operations to reflect on the updated priority needs. On the basis of the conclusions, the MA took a positive decision to implement this recommendation and requested the Monitoring committee of OPACD to approve the reallocation of funds so as to support other impending calls for projects. These calls were targeted at training needs or public expenditure reduction through restructuring and improved efficiency.

Also, as NGOs' participation was quite low, the evaluators recommended finding an optimal path to enhance their contribution to the OPACD objectives. This emerged as a targeted call for proposals in 2010.

A second important evaluation finding was that the level of rejection of project applications was higher than usual for both priority axes. Predictably, the conclusion was that there was a lack of capacity within the beneficiary organizations for the preparation of good project applications. Therefore, training courses for potential beneficiaries were intensified in order to support the development of better project pipelines and to provide them with constant feedback until a lower rejection rate would be reached.

The most important achievement of this evaluation was to reveal to the MA a large number of system weaknesses and sensitive areas which needed a quick response. Although the contracting and monitoring processes were suitable, the general running of implementation was not smooth, as a serious backlog in the evaluation of project applications had overwhelmed the MA resources. The evaluation's recommendations were merged into an action plan which devised a number of technical assistance solutions, important for a proper implementation of the programme.

Main problems and measures to overcome the problems occur during the implementation of the OP in 2008, 2009 are listed in table 1 and 2.

The analysis was made looking from the perspective of the applications; the evaluation of the application form submitted and the process of contracting the projects, as well as the project implementation and the reimbursement claims.

Table 1. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2008

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in legislation; • Lack of documents correlation; • Shifting from PHARE application to structural funds; • Lack of experience at the beneficiaries levels • Unclear allocation of competences; • Low interest of priority sectors (education, health and social assistance); • Delays in submitting the applications; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the guidelines in accordance to new pieces of legislations and improve their quality; • Correlate the documents; • Training for the potential beneficiaries; • FAQ posted on MA official website; • Organizing meetings with different stakeholders for clarifying their competences; • Set-up meetings with priority sectors (education, health and social assistance); • Intensify the communication with the potential beneficiaries – meetings, newsletters, updating the info on official website;
2	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unavailable specialized personnel on evaluation; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing the service of evaluation for the applications;
3	Contracting	-	-
4	Projects implementation	-	-
5	Reimbursement claims	-	-

Source: adapted from Interim evaluation of the Administrative Capacity Development Operational Programme 2007 – 2010 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Rezumatul-evaluarii-intermediare-a-PO-DCA-2007-2010.pdf>) and Annual implementation report 2008 (http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/RAI_2008_PODCA1.pdf)

Table 2. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2009

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too general guidelines issued by MA; ▪ Low interest of priority sectors (education, health and social assistance); ▪ Lack of experience in developing applications at the beneficiaries' levels; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revising the guidelines and make them specific for each call for proposals; ▪ Set-up meetings with priority sectors (education, health and social assistance); ▪ Developing documents with specific thematic (equal opportunities, public procurement, sustainable development, VAT) where the info was lacking or incomplete - distributed to the potential beneficiaries;
2	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in contracting the services for the evaluation of the applications (due to public procurement); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed an internal method for public procurement procedures for all the projects co-financed through OPACD;
3	Contracting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in contracting the projects (due to extended period for submitting the necessary documents, or the documents were not appropriate fulfilled); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assuring help-desk for the beneficiaries (information given by project officers for reducing the delays in submitting the documents);
4	Projects implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in public procurement procedures (lack of experience in preparing the technical documentation by the beneficiaries); ▪ Difficulties in applying public procurement law; ▪ Applying the "lowest price" principle for services; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA published on the official website information regarding public procurement; ▪ MA elaborated corrigendum for the guidelines with specific information regarding public procurement; ▪ MA elaborated the <i>Manual for the implementation of the project</i>;
5	Reimbursement claims	-	-

Source: adapted from Interim evaluation of the Administrative Capacity Development Operational Programme 2007 – 2010 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Rezumatul-evaluarii-intermediare-a-PO-DCA-2007-2010.pdf>) and Annual implementation report 2009 (http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/RAI_2009_PODCA1.pdf)

2.4 The mid-term evaluation 2010-2012

The second interim evaluation was focusing on the relevance of OPACD implementation strategy, as it tried to investigate whether programme interventions were appropriate consolidating the institutional capacity and if the implementation measures taken by MA were adequate.

The general conclusion mentioned that *the strategy of OPACD continued to be relevant through the 2010-2012, considering the fact that the interventions financed reflect existing needs, as identified by current national strategic documents* (Interim evaluation of the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Development (OPACD) for the 2010 - 2012 period, as part of the project „Support for the functioning of MA OPACD and for the preparation of the next programming exercise” SMIS code 40101). In other words, the MA has taken appropriate decisions based on the previous assessments.

First conclusion was that the categories of eligible beneficiaries under OP continued to be generally relevant for the programme logic of intervention. The high share of projects implemented by central government reflected the focus of the programme logic on strategic interventions, which in terms of effects were thought to bring constructive approach on the performance of the public administration. According to the evaluation, this focus ensured both the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

The evaluation supplied evidence on a number of problems with significant consequences in the implementation process of the OP, especially the underestimation of the number of application forms received after several numbers of calls for proposals in 2009 and 2010.

It also concluded that there was insufficient coordination (before 2011) between the process of developing projects and the monitoring of the programme.

The evaluation and selection system, for OP project applications was largely adequate. However, four aspects require improvement: (1) decreasing of the rejection rate for project applications during the administrative verification and eligibility verification stages, (2) detailed description and clarifications regarding the criteria and in particular of the sub-criteria used during the technical and financial evaluation, (3) granting higher scores for aspects linked to the project effectiveness and, (4) communication to the potential beneficiaries, and in particular to the rejected applicants, of comprehensive information with regard to scores granted to their financing requests.

The evaluation provided other useful recommendations which translated into measures which strengthened the capacity of the MA, such as performing an on-going risks analysis for projects in progress, in terms of extending the implementation period and budget execution, but also the selection of only those newly-awarded projects which would help attain programme objectives, namely within key areas of intervention showing gaps in achieving relevant indicator goals. Some of these recommendations are reflected in tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2010

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of experience in developing applications at the beneficiaries' levels; ▪ Low interest of priority sectors (education, health and social assistance); ▪ High workload of MA personnel; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Revising the guidelines and make them specific for each call for proposals; ▪ Meetings with the top management of the sectoral ministries for increasing the number and quality of application submitted by the ministries (ad-hoc evaluation 2009); ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA;
2	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in contracting the services for the evaluation of the applications (shifting to framework agreement); ▪ The number of application is high comparing to the evaluation capacity of MA; ▪ Long period for evaluation of an application; ▪ High workload of MA personnel; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developed framework agreement for service on evaluation of applications; ▪ MA limited the number of clarification during the evaluation process (max 3); ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA;
3	Contracting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in contracting the projects (due to extended period for submitting the necessary documents, or the documents were not appropriate fulfilled); ▪ High workload of MA personnel; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assuring help-desk for the beneficiaries (information given by project officers for reducing the delays in submitting the documents); ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA;
4	Projects implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in public procurement procedures (extended period for running the procedures as well as concluding the contracts); ▪ Difficulties in applying public procurement law; ▪ High workload of MA personnel; ▪ Applying the "lowest price" principle for services; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA published on the official website information regarding public procurement procedures; ▪ MA elaborated corrigendum for the guidelines with specific information regarding public procurement; ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA;

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
5	Reimbursement claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incomplete reimbursement claims submitted by the beneficiaries; ▪ Delays in certification process of the reimbursement claims at the level of MA (increased number of reimbursement claims with small amount – less than 25.000 Euro); ▪ High workload of MA personnel; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA organized seminars at central, regional and local level (especially on public procurement and reimbursement claims) for increasing the quality of reimbursement claims; ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA;

Source: adapted from Interim evaluation of the Administrative Capacity Development Operational Programme 2010 – 2012 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/REZUMAT-EVAL-INTERM-2-PO-DCA-RO-final.pdf>) and Annual implementation report 2010 (http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/RAI_2010_PODCA1.pdf)

Table 4. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2011

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	-	-
2	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Less expertise of the evaluators in the field of public administration – especially on health, education and social assistance); ▪ Lack of evaluators commitments; ▪ High rate of personnel fluctuation at the level of MA (50%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA organized meeting with the evaluators ("common language") for better understanding the objective of OPACD and the beneficiaries needs; ▪ MA set-up a mechanism for monitoring the quality of evaluation (amended the internal procedure for evaluation); ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA, as well as hiring a qualified personnel who took over the responsibilities;
3	Contracting	-	-
4	Projects implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Changes in public procurement legislation; ▪ Delays in public procurement procedures (extended period for running the procedures as well as concluding the contracts); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Government introduced a general and simplified check-list for verifying the public procurement procedures; ▪ MA organized monthly meeting with the officials from line ministries;

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Applying the “lowest price” principle for services; ▪ Large number of supporting documents; ▪ Increased number of controls (from different entities); ▪ High workload of MA personnel; ▪ High rate of personnel fluctuation at the level of MA (50%); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ help-desk for the project implementation teams; ▪ Correlation between different control entities in order to reduce the number of control mission; ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA, as well as hiring a qualified personnel who took over the responsibilities; ▪ MA reallocated 30 mil euros from KAI 2.1. to KAI 2.2. (recommendation from interim evaluation 2007 - 2009); ▪ Collate and analyze monthly progress and procurement activities within the projects, explanations related to possible delays and planned activities for the next period.
5	Reimbursement claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in certification process of the reimbursement claims at the level of MA (increased number of reimbursement claims with small amount – less than 25,000.00 Euro); ▪ Delays in submitting the reimbursement claims (especially the central government); ▪ Difficulties in fulfilling the reimbursement claims; ▪ High workload of MA personnel; ▪ High rate of personnel fluctuation at the level of MA (50%). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA organized seminars at central, regional and local level (especially on public procurement and reimbursement claims) for increasing the quality of reimbursement claims; ▪ MA organized bilateral meetings with the officials from line ministries for speeding up the reimbursement claims; ▪ Clearer information on filling the reimbursement claims offered by experts from MA; ▪ Supplementing the number of staff within MA, as well as hiring a qualified personnel who took over the responsibilities;

Source: adapted from Interim evaluation of the Administrative Capacity Development Operational Programme 2010 – 2012 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/REZUMAT-EVAL-INTERM-2-PO-DCA-RO-final.pdf>) and Annual implementation report 2011 (http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/RAI_2011_PODCA+anexa1_08-06-2012.pdf)

Table 5. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2012

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	-	-
2	Evaluation	-	-
3	Contracting	-	-
4	Projects implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in public procurement procedures (extended period for running the procedures as well as concluding the contracts, especially at the central government); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Updated <i>Manual for the implementation of the project</i> (clearer information); ▪ MA developed an analysis on the use of funds allocated to each KAI in order to better use the allocated amounts and to achieve the objective of OPACD; ▪ MA contracted up to 118%; ▪ continuous support offered by the MA experts;
5	Reimbursement claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in submitting the reimbursement claims (especially the central government); ▪ Difficulties in fulfilling the reimbursement claims; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA had continued the organization of bilateral meetings with the officials from line ministries for speeding up the claims; ▪ Clearer information on filling the reimbursement claims offered by experts from MA; ▪ help-desk; ▪ Monitoring and support visits by project officers either by external experts (through outsourced service) or by MA experts; ▪ Outsourcing the service of verification the reimbursement claims; ▪ Collate and analyze monthly progress and procurement activities within the projects, explanations related to possible delays and planned activities for the next period;

Source: adapted from Interim evaluation of the Administrative Capacity Development Operational Programme 2010 – 2012 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/REZUMAT-EVAL-INTERM-2-PO-DCA-RO-final.pdf>) and Annual implementation report 2012 (http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/rai_podca_2012.pdf)

The good practices and the general recommendations from both interim evaluations were capitalized into new actions, in 2013, to surmount the problems in the area of projects implementation and the verification of reimbursement claims. The actions taken were reflected into excellent result of OP in 2013 when the total value of contracts signed represented a rate of 118.7% of the ESF allocation (*Annual implementation report 2013, page 8*).

Table 6. Main problems and measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD in 2013

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
1	Applications	-	-
2	Evaluation	-	-
3	Contracting	-	-
4	Projects implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High rate of personnel fluctuation within the management teams of the projects (at the level of beneficiaries); ▪ Delays in public procurement procedures (extended period for running the procedures as well as concluding the contracts, especially at the central government); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MA organized meeting with the officials from line ministries and send information letter in order to limit the request for amending the team members; ▪ Continuous support offered by the MA experts; ▪ Monitoring and support visits by project officers;
5	Reimbursement claims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delays in submitting the reimbursement claims (especially the central government); ▪ Difficulties in fulfilling the reimbursement claims; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring and support visits by project officers; ▪ Continuous improvement of presentation and information content of OPACD website by posting updated materials and examples of good practice; ▪ Meetings and working groups with beneficiaries on specific topic; ▪ Government approval of the <i>Memorandum on the main measures to accelerate the implementation of projects financed from European Social Fund through PODCA and delays recovery by the beneficiary institutions of central government;</i>

		Main problems during the implementation of OPACD	Measures to overcome the problems arises during implementation of OPACD
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collate and analyze monthly progress and public procurement activities in each the projects, explanations related to possible delays and planned activities for the next period.

Source: adapted from Annual implementation report 2013
 (<http://www.fonduriadministratie.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/RAI-PODCA-2013.pdf>)

2.5 Performance evaluation of the management and implementation of the OP (2008-2014)

The objective of the performance evaluation was to determine if OPACD projects have reached their intended results. This measurement have been done through qualitative research methods that aimed to prove that projects had an impact at the level of public administration, beside the formal nature of achievements described through result indicators in the Programme.

The analysis revealed that the management of the programme focused on attaining its specific objectives by achieving the programme indicators and supporting interventions with the purpose of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

Accordingly, the programme management constantly aimed at taking key actions depending on the problems encountered, as well as on the challenges emerged during the implementation period. Among these, there are the measures taken for ensuring improvements in the content of the guidelines for applicants, constant development of the beneficiaries' capacity through elaboration of methodologies related to public procurement, provision of help desk support through the project officers in order to improve the preparation of technical and financial reports, organisation of monitoring visits, constant provision of information to the beneficiaries. Starting with 2010, the focus has been on the monitoring of target indicators, the elaboration of studies and analyses necessary for monitoring and evaluation, etc.

This approach led to the achievement of a very good contracting rate of the European Social Fund (ESF) allocation, to a level of the absorption rate in accordance with the programme implementation stage, to a good progress related to the reimbursement rate of European Commission (EC) allocation, to an improvement of MA OP ACB own capacity, and to a decrease of the in the period of reimbursement claims verification period.

The size of outcomes was, however, dependent on factors outside the reach of OPACD projects, pertaining to the management and pre-existing reporting culture in beneficiary institutions. Other effects were an improvement in the quality of the services provided by the decentralized structures that received funding, but an exact quantification has yet to be delivered.

The evaluation of OP interventions provided important empirical evidence for recommendations and their subsequent delivery into substantial actions at OP level. Moreover, it unearthed an abundance of measures taken by the MA to improve the implementation system.

The MA, following past evaluation recommendations, ensured improvements in areas like:

- the content of the guidelines for applicants,
- the constant development of the beneficiaries' capacity through elaboration of methodologies related to public procurement,
- the provision of help-desk support by project officers in order to improve the preparation of technical and financial reports,
- better organization of monitoring visits,
- an increased focus on the monitoring of target indicators, coupled with the elaboration of a study on indicators (for better monitoring and reporting purposes).

The performance evaluation made known a number of recommendations for the programming period 2014 -2020, useful in designing the new Operational Programme for Administrative Capacity, some of them having been anticipated by the programming unit. This match-up can evidently be attributed to the ongoing process of consultations and interactions between evaluators and programmers.

Finally, to attest on the enduring nature of good recommendations and their profitable outcomes, we present a wrap-up of actions which should be the target of “appropriation” for the 2014-2020:

- A better planning in launching calls for projects and deciding the logical sequence for launching the calls for projects and approving the projects (the logic in approaching needs and problem solving), having in mind at the same time the importance and urgency of the intervention in line with the national strategic documents;
- Closer ties between potential beneficiaries in the local public administration and the MA in the communication process, through caravans/seminars for information and training, workshops and experience-sharing, so as to bring added value to the strategic approach and the quality of the financing applications;
- Organizing training sessions for potential beneficiaries (in the phase of preparation of the financing application);
- Communication measures focusing on the dissemination of information regarding successful projects, as well as on common mistakes in drafting reimbursement claims, including the use of examples/explanations/definitions in the supporting documents, the elaboration of a list of common mistakes/errors found by project evaluators or project officers, together with the relevant answers;
- Identification of a list of priority strategic projects for each category of beneficiaries, projects whose objectives converge directly with the specific objectives of the OP.

CONCLUSIONS

Using evaluations in different stages of an operational programme represent an appropriate method to pertinently implement the operational programme dedicated to consolidate a performing public administration in Romania.

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