



An assessment of a municipal physical activity programme for seniors based on the EFQM model: Integrating the views of internal and external stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

The growing proportion of senior citizens and the importance of encouraging active well-ageing behaviours explain the increasing efforts carried out by governments to develop exercise programmes particularly targeted to this group. The complexity associated with the running of these programmes and the resources committed make their quality assessment essential. The aim of the current paper is to validate and refine the use of the EFQM model in this context. A programme of a medium-sized municipality of the Centre region of Portugal was used as a case study to evaluate the adequacy and relevance of the EFQM model and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current programme based on the data collected from service users, instructors, municipal leaders and programme partners. High levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, together with the clarity of programme mission and strategy emerged as main areas of strength. On the other hand, insufficient attention to the measurement of people satisfaction, as well as the leaders' failure of to show appreciation for the efforts developed by the programme instructors are key areas for improvement.

1. Introduction

Municipalities and other public sector entities develop a series of programmes to implement public policies plans. Many of such programmes require substantial resources and involve a series of partners. Due to accountability concerns and to the importance of fostering efficiency and effectiveness in the use of public resources, there is a growing need to evaluate such programmes. The use of the European Foundation for Quality Model (EFQM model) can be useful in this regard since it integrates a variety of performance dimensions and is based on the views of different stakeholders.

The aim of the current paper is thus to adapt and validate the use of the EFQM model to evaluate a Municipal Program, by developing a methodology and testing a portfolio of instruments specifically developed to collect feedback from users/participants, partners, collaborators/instructors and leaders. A Physical Activity for Seniors Programme (PAS Programme) run by a Municipality of the Centre Region of Portugal was selected to illustrate the problem. The self-assessment was conducted by the Division of Sports and Youth and was based on data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, as well as on documentation held by the team in charge of the Programme.

The diagnosis conducted had two main purposes: 1) to identify the Programme strengths and areas for improvement; and 2) to point out priorities on where to act.

Physical activity programmes for seniors are an interesting example to use since more and more public policies are being developed to promote the active ageing of the senior population. In Europe in general, and in Portugal in particular, the percentage of people over 65 has strongly increased over the last two or three decades. According to official data from the Portuguese Institute of Statistics (INE: [Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2015](#)), Portugal is the fifth country with the highest ratio between senior and young people in Europe (141/100, against an average of 119/100 in the EU-28).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines active ageing as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.” ([World Health Organization, 2002, pp. 12](#)). Regularly practicing a physical activity plays a big role in this regard ([Kirandi, 2016](#)). Studies tend to confirm that doing exercise on a regular basis can mitigate many negative consequences of ageing processes. Remaining physically active has health benefits (improving mobility and helping to prevent various diseases), economical benefits (reducing the State's health expenses)

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and, overall, improves the quality of life of citizens (people feel physically and psychologically better and tend to be consequently happier than those who are physically inactive). According to the WHO “recent figures from member states of the European Union (EU) indicate that 6 in every 10 people above 15 years of age never or seldom exercise or play a sport and more than half never or seldom engage in other kinds of physical activity, such as cycling, dancing or gardening” (https://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/factsheet_olderadults/en/). The same organism also calls attention to inequalities among socioeconomic groups, where poorer people have less free time and poorer access to leisure facilities, or live in environments that do not support physical activity. It is likely that the same argument applies to the elderly population. The costs burden associated with physical inactivity are very high. WHO statistics indicate that “for a population of 10 million people, where half the population is insufficiently active, the overall cost is estimated to be €910 million per year”. In this context, increasing the adherence to physical activity among elderly people is thus an important public health challenge.

Statistics for Portugal reveal a similar scenario. The latest report from the National Programme for the Promotion of Physical Activity (the Programme was launched in 2016 and is one of the eleven Priority Health Programs that are linked to the National Health Plan) reveals that only 1/3 of Portuguese adults reports to be sufficiently active and that, in 2017, only half of the Portuguese adults recognized daily activities, as forms of physical activity, and only 2% knew the WHO physical activity recommendations (Programa Nacional para a Promoção da Atividade Física, 2019). Specifically targeted to the elderly population, in Portugal, there is a number of physical activity programmes for seniors, most of them run by the municipalities (Marques et al., 2011: 3). Among the 174 Programmes identified in their study aimed at improving the quality of life of elderly citizens, 125 had the promotion of physical activity as a main goal (Marques et al., 2011).

It is important to implement initiatives to assess such Programmes, since evaluation is essential to identify shortcomings and foster a continuous improvement culture. Models that have proved to be effective in assessing organisational excellence, based on a broad set of criteria, as it is the case of the EFQM model, can be useful, but need to be adapted to capture the views of many partners that do not have a daily contact with the entity that runs the Programme. Moreover, as stressed by Martínez-Moreno and Suárez (2016), the implementation of quality management is essential to enhance trust on public organisations, attract users and ensure mechanisms for evaluation, certification and accreditation.

Evaluation tells decision makers whether, and how effectively, their projects, policies, processes, and/or plans have achieved their intended

goals and objectives. Yet, programme evaluation puts some challenges to the models typically used for organizational assessment, as programmes tend to involve scattered resources and a large number of partners and other stakeholders. To further complicate the matter, stakeholders need to act in a coordinated way but tend to interact with the entity responsible for such programmes only at specific moments in time.

Not surprisingly, despite the numerous physical activity programmes for elderly that have been created in recent years their evaluation is scarce. Although some service quality instruments have been developed in the sports context, they tend to be confined in terms of the service provision dimensions considered and mainly collect data from service users. In the few cases that incorporate the perceptions of internal stakeholders only the programme coordinators were listened to.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: after this introduction, the following section makes a brief review of some literature on Programme assessment using the EFQM model. Next, the approach used to conduct the self-assessment exercise of the Programme selected is presented. Then, the case study is described in some detail and the results of the self-assessment exercise reported, pointing out, for each model criterion, the main strengths and areas of improvement. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations are highlighted.

2. The use of the EFQM model in Programme Assessment: brief literature review

There are few studies analysing the management and policies carried out by Municipalities Sports Services (Martínez-Moreno & Suárez, 2016). Most research conducted in sports and leisure activities is focused on measuring service quality and not on assessing the level of excellence achieved by service providers (i.e. organisational excellence).

The EFQM model is probably the most widely used framework (Black, Meredith, & Groombridge, 2011) and gives a holistic and integrated perspective of the performance of an organisation (EFQM: European Foundation for Quality Management, 2012; Heras-Saizarbitoria, Marimon, & Casadesús, 2012), regardless of its size or sector. When properly applied, it is expected to contribute to the development of organisational practices that form a coherent system, capable of delivering results by putting into place the strategy defined by the organisation (EFQM: European Foundation for Quality Management, 2012). One of the main strengths of the model is its ability to support self-assessment exercises. The self-assessment process is based on the regular and systematic analysis of a set of organisational dimensions that correspond to the model criteria (see Fig. 1). As depicted in Fig. 1, the EFQM model comprises 9 criteria (5 enablers, 4

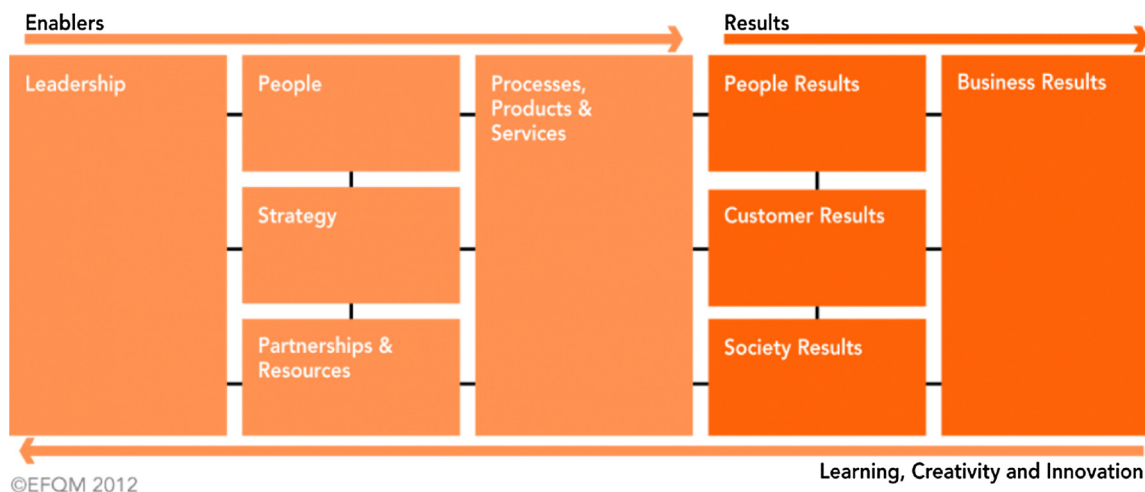


Fig. 1. EFQM model.

results) divided into 32 sub criteria. The Learning, Creativity and Innovation arrow highlights the importance of using performance data to inform further improvements across the criteria.

The model encourages the self-assessment team to look at the organisation's system and practices to facilitate improvement (Black et al., 2011; Talwar, 2011) and the exercise leads to the identification of a series of strengths and areas for improvement (EFQM: European Foundation for Quality Management, 2003).

Programs are composed of clusters of activities intended to achieve an objective or related set of objectives (McDavid & Hawthorn, 2006). Patton (2008) defines program evaluation as "the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming, and/or increase our understanding" (Patton, 2008, p.38). Furthermore, evaluation is expected to be based on the views of multiple stakeholders. In fact, as Brody, Godschalk, and Burby (2003) suggest, broader stakeholder involvement contributes to stronger plans and to more effective implementation of proposals.

The literature on programme assessment is vast (Fernández-Díaz, Rodríguez-Mantilla, & Jover-Olmeda, 2017), but seldom looks at the potential of quality management frameworks in collecting and analysing the views of programme leaders, users and partners. Often the idea of assessing the programmes 'real impact' – understood as a set of substantial changes occurring over time, following an intervention or specific action (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2017) – is stressed while the difficulties associated with it are acknowledged.

As Howlett et al. (2009, cited in Guyadeen, 2017) stress, evaluation is not only concerned with program effectiveness, but also comprises the process of delivering programs such as the organizational methods used to deliver the program, program inputs (e.g., resources), program outputs (e.g., tangible measures of a program) and cost effectiveness. The appealing of the EFQM model in this regard is clear, given its holistic and comprehensive nature.

In the physical activity context, the importance of effectively evaluating programmes has also been stressed in the literature (Martin & Vehige, 2006). Yet, most studies focus on measuring the impact of the programmes in the participants' physical and health indicators (mainly by comparing their abilities before and after practicing exercise) and do not explicitly take into consideration other performance issues, as well as ignore the assessment of management processes.

To some extent, the current paper builds on the work of Martínez-Moreno and Suárez (2016), who report one of the very few applications of the EFQM model on sports. Yet, while the authors have only used the views of internal customers when assessing the level of quality management and excellence in the Municipal Sports Services of local authorities in Spain, the current research integrates the views of different stakeholders.

Marques et al. (2011) have apparently been the first researchers to use the EFQM model in physical activity programmes. In the first stage of their research, the authors have identified and screened the physical activity programmes existent in Portugal. Among the 26 programmes that fulfilled the researchers' eligibility criteria, at the time the study was conducted, in 2009, only one reported that they had a quality management initiative. Contrarily to the current research, in Marques et al. (2011) study only the coordinators of the physical activity programmes were asked to give their feedback on the level of implementation of each criterion (and sub-criterion). The approach was time consuming and did not allow for the collection of feedback from multiple stakeholders. Moreover, it might well happen that, for some issues, programme coordinators are not the best informants. In the current study, the methodology followed addresses each criterion on a more flexible and more fruitful way by identifying the group of stakeholder(s) who is more prepared to give relevant information on that particular topic.

3. Methods

This study uses a case-study approach (see next section for details) and roughly describes a self-assessment exercise conducted by the Division of Sports and Youth of the Municipality that is in charge of the programme analysed.

The EFQM model was used as the basis to assess the PAS Programme. Properly conducting a self-assessment exercise requires organisations to select a well-structured framework that fits its context, to use multidisciplinary teams, with the support of the leaders, but with enough autonomy to make some judgements based on data collected from internal and external stakeholders through a variety of instruments (Moura e Sá & Maia, 2011). Furthermore, for the diagnosis to be meaningful, the framework adopted should be validated and, as much as possible, to have international prestige (Martínez-Moreno & Suárez, 2016).

In this study, the methodology applied to assess the PAS Programme makes use of a mixed methods approach, combining the administration of questionnaires, the conduction of semi-structured interviews and the analysis of documents related to the Programme. Theoretically, the assessment should be conducted by a multidisciplinary team, with members from different areas and with different profiles, which would look together at the various model criteria. However, these kind of programmes do not have a big team to run them in a permanent basis. The organisational structure committed to them is often minimal.

In this case, only two members of the Division of Sports and Youth formed the team responsible for conducting the self-assessment process. Therefore, to integrate the views of a wide variety of stakeholders, for each model criterion the most adequate informants were selected. This way it was possible to involve in the exercise many PAS Programme participants, the generality of the instructors, the programme leaders/coordinators (Director of the Programme, Head of the Division and the City Councillor responsible for Sports in the municipality) and a wide range of partners and promoters. For each stakeholder, a questionnaire or an interview guide was developed, based on the issues to be addressed within the various criteria. Interviews lasted 30–60 min and were recorded. In addition, relevant documents were analysed. Written documents included procedures, flyers and reports. Table 1 gives an overview of the data collection sources and instruments used.

Among the 11 instructors that answered the questionnaire (7 women and 4 men), three of them have been collaborating with the PAS Programme since the first edition, whereas for two of them this was the first edition they are associated with. Their average age is almost 31 years. The questionnaire was administered by the self-assessment team and completed questionnaires were directly returned to the team with no interference in the process from the Programme coordinators.

The self-assessment exercise incorporated the views of 50 participants collected by means of a questionnaire survey. 33 women and 17 men participated in the study. The average age of the participants surveyed was 68.4 (the oldest being 82 years old and youngest 59). Most of them are participating in the PAS Programme for quite some time (22 out of the 50 respondents have participated in between two and five editions). Only six were newcomers.

A variety of partners was listened to. Interviews were conducted with 6 strategic partners (including high education institutions, the Alzheimer association and other institutions operating in the health sector), 8 local partners (Presidents of parishes that belong to the municipality) and 20 local promoters (associations and private institutions of social solidarity, in particular elderly homes, day care centres and cultural associations).

Data collected provided some evidence about how the programme is run and what is been implemented in each criterion. Based on such evidence, a qualitative score for each criterion/sub-criterion was estimated. This assessment was conducted by the two members of the Division of Sports and Youth who formed the team responsible for conducting the self-assessment process. Due to the low level of maturity

Table 1
Data collection sources and instruments.

Stakeholder	Criteria (Focus)	Data collection instrument	N. of responses/ N. of interviews
Participants	Customer Results	Questionnaire (15 items) Face-to-face administration April 2019	50 + results of participant satisfaction surveys (administered in 2016, 2017 and 2018)–2018)
Instructors	People People Results	Questionnaire (38 items) April 2019	11 (out of 13)
Programme Leaders/Coordinators	Leadership Strategy Resources & Partnerships Processes, Products & Services Key Performance Results	Interviews	3
Partners	Resources & Partnerships Society Results	Interviews	6 Strategic Partners 8 Local Partners 20 Local Promoters

of the self-assessment team in the use of the model, a simplified scale was used, by considering only three levels of implementation: low, medium and high. To arrive to the corresponding score the RADAR logic (www.efqm.org) was employed. This means that for each criterion the following questions were considered (adapted from the EFQM website – www.efqm.org):

- Is the PAS Programme measuring the right things?
- Is the integrity of the results assured?
- Are the targets clear? Are the targets being met?
- Does the PAS Programme use any comparative data to assess its performance?
- Does the PAS Programme have a clear idea of what is causing the results (which are the approaches implemented)?
- Are the approaches implemented aligned? Are they reviewed on a regular basis?
- Are the approaches deployed to the different segments that run the PAS Programme?
- Is the PAS Programme being improved based on the learning that emerges from the assessment?

4. Case study

The PAS Programme was launched by the municipality in 2007. The aim of the Programme is “to contribute to an active, healthy and integrated senior population, who is capable of enjoying high levels of autonomy and independence for how long as possible” (<http://www.congressoenvelhecimentoativo.pt/atividade-senior/>).

More specifically, the Programme has the following purposes:

- To stimulate the participation and involvement of the local community in a multidisciplinary perspective in order to make the most of the existing knowledge and enhance the value of the Programme;
- To promote strategies to ensure a wide coverage of the 25 parishes existent in the municipality;
- To value the initial and the specific training of the Programme instructors while supporting their continuous training and providing opportunities for experience sharing.

The implementation of a process for monitoring and assessing the Programme, based on multidimensional evaluation of the participants is an important component. Yet, as stated in the Programme documentation, the assessment is essentially based on the physical outcomes for the participants. The process is supported by the Polytechnic School existent in the municipality and takes place at three different moments in time: at the beginning of the Programme (when the activities start), around the middle of the Programme and at the end (after the last class is delivered). The physical progress assessment is based on a valid instrument, designed by experts. Moreover, at the end of each

edition, all participants are asked to fill a satisfaction survey.

The instrument used to assess the physical progress is based on the biopsychosocial paradigm and collects data on the participants' perceptions regarding the following dimensions: health status, physical and functional limitations felt in the execution of daily tasks, well-being and expectations concerning physical exercise. The study also monitors the physical and functional capacity – balance, functional mobility, falling risk – and anthropometric profile. To assess the physical and functional capacity, the *Senior Fitness Test*, the *Functional Reach Test*, the *Timed Get-Up and Go Test* are used (Figueiredo, Afonso, & Freitas, 2016).

In what the participants' satisfaction survey is concerned, it comprises 20 questions, including items to measure loyalty (number of editions in which the participant took part, probability of enrolling again in the next edition, positive referral), as well as questions to assess the instructors' performance and the physical infrastructures, along with an overall assessment item,

In 2019, the Programme is having its thirteen edition. Over the previous twelve editions, the number of participants, partners and promoters has consistently increased, as well as its geographical coverage (see Table 2).

The Programme runs for 41 weeks/year and includes more than 13.000 h of activities (classes). Currently, the 2448 participants enrolled in the 2019 edition are allocated to 113 groups spread all over the municipality territory. Around 100 institutions are involved in the Programme, including the 25 parishes that form the Municipality and 67 local associations.

The 13 instructors that collaborate with the PAS Programme hold a degree in Sports/Physical Education and most of them have specific training in the field of active ageing. Every year, 5 training courses are organized covering different topics associated with active ageing and 6 internal training sessions are prearranged. Furthermore, annually, the municipality hosts the *Active Ageing Congress: Physical Exercise and*

Table 2
The PAS Programme in numbers.

Edition	N. of participants	N. of local promoters
2007	517	16
2008	769	19
2009	1502	29
2010	1850	39
2011	1864	42
2012	1172	31
2013	1430	37
2014	1822	45
2015	2102	56
2016	2223	63
2017	2362	63
2018	2421	65

Health, which represents an important opportunity for continuous learning.

Besides a large number of local promoters, the Programme involves also a relatively wide variety of strategic partners, especially in the areas of health and education. One of the initiatives that results from such partnerships is the assessment of the risk of developing diabetes. Another example is the assessment of the oral health of the participants conducted by students of a University that collaborates with the Programme.

5. Results

This section presents some results of the self-assessment exercise carried out based on the nine EFQM criteria. Due to obvious constraints, in this paper results are shown by criterion (rather than for each sub-criterion) and only limited evidence is given to support the various strengths and areas for improvement identified.

5.1. Leadership

The three leaders interviewed – i.e. the Director of the Programme, the Head of the Division and the City Councillor responsible for Sports in the municipality – are unanimous in considering that they participate and give support to continuous improvement processes. In an effort to monitor the execution of the Programme and give support to improvement actions, leaders participate in some meetings. One of them has explicitly mentioned that he attends some training sessions and goes often to events organised within the PAS Programme.

Leaders state that they promote continuous improvement, by “analysing the Programme weakest points” and by introducing on a regular basis some changes: One example is the “redefinition in each edition of the activities offered by the PAS Programme to better reach the various segments of the population”. The three agree that continuous improvement initiatives are based on a systematic evaluation of the PAS Programme. Therefore, the leadership commitment to a continuous improvement culture is one of the strengths identified.

All the leaders interviewed have assumed that they communicate and interact with partners and other people involved in the Programme to reinforce its aims and culture. There is a preference to direct contact channels – mainly meetings and phone calls. Surveys and social networks have only been referred by one of the interviewees. In any case, leaders stress the importance of interacting and sharing information with other stakeholders: “Unless information is shared about the values, mission and objectives of the Programme, partners and other members are simply task performers and do not add really value to the Programme”.

Based on the evidence collected and taking into account the questions suggested by the EFQM when scoring (see above), the self-assessment team has evaluated the implementation level of each of the sub-criterion as ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’ (see Fig. 2). The same reasoning applies to the remaining criteria.

5.2. Strategy

According to the PAS Programme leaders, everyone involved – not only the instructors, but also partners and promoters – knows the Programme mission and objectives. Consequently, policy and strategy communication is apparently a strength of the PAS Programme.

There are procedures to plan, evaluate and control the PAS Programme. Quality goals are set. Policy and strategy are based on stakeholders’ needs and expectations. However, leaders acknowledge that they do not always give enough attention to the strategies and initiatives carried out in other municipalities when they are designing their own strategies and setting their goals.

In what concerns the use of performance information to review the plans and the strategy some shortcomings are visible. There is no measurement of quality (and poor quality) costs. Very few indicators regarding the efficiency of the Programme are collected. Therefore, the strategy revision process is constrained by the lack of performance data. This issue is particularly challenging, since while one of the interviewees stresses that no much information exists because of “the lack of resources” another is not even aware of the need to develop more mature performance measurement systems. “There are not enough defects or problems identified or reported to justify the measurement of quality costs”.

Fig. 3 summarises the assessment made for the Strategy criterion.

5.3. People

The planning, management and improvement of the PAS Programme human resources is a relatively well-developed area. Actually, the PAS Programme has a strategy to recruit highly qualified instructors, all of them with a degree. According to the instructors’ opinion, the emphasis when searching people with the appropriate skills is particularly in physical activity and sports. Surprisingly, only four instructors have mentioned that having specific qualifications in gerontology is highly valued by the PAS Programme leaders.

Offering specific training to people on a regular basis is a strong point of the Programme. All the respondents have mentioned that they receive training in relevant areas. Instructors refresh their knowledge and/or develop their skills by participating in training sessions. One of the respondents has also referred that the *Congress on Active Ageing* organised by the municipality provides a good opportunity in this regard.

Instructors unanimously feel they enjoy considerable autonomy in deciding how to perform their daily tasks with the groups and in implementing solutions to the problems they face: “As a technician, I enjoy considerable freedom to plan my classes and that pleases me.” Teamwork is equally a common practice”.

In what concerns the communication between the instructors and the PAS leaders, the scenario is not so favourable. Three out of the eleven participants state that no formal processes are used to find out people’s opinions. The fact that not all people feel they are listened to is an area with room for improvement. Although the vast majority of the

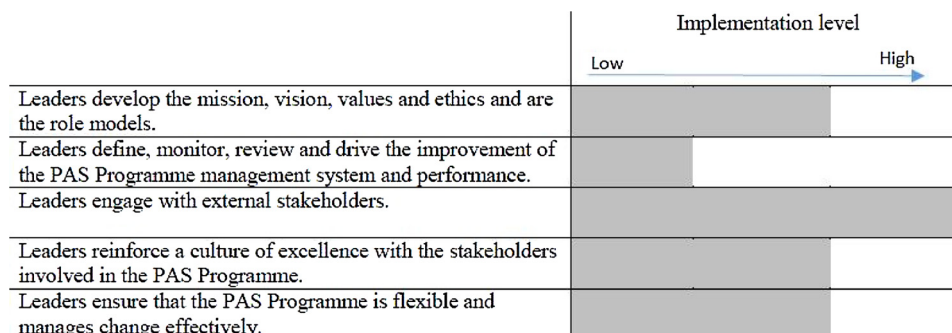


Fig. 2. Leadership criterion assessment- summary.

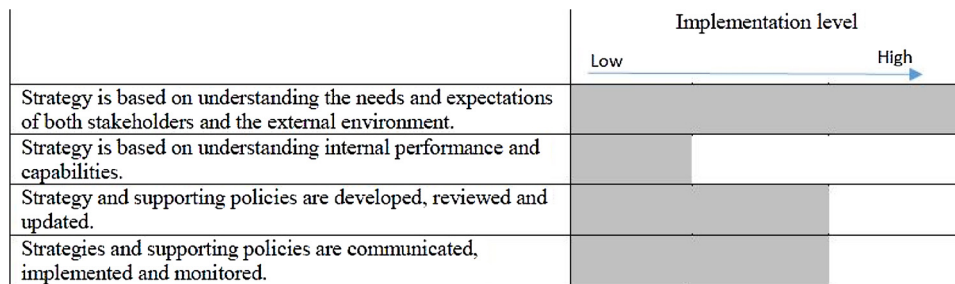


Fig. 3. Strategy criterion assessment- summary.

respondents indicate that communication channels to provide information about customer needs exist, only around half of them specify which channels are implemented. Email and telephone are the most common answers. Communication about the quality procedures is also not uniform, with two of the respondents admitting they have no information on that. When it comes to having information on the Programme quality results, only five instructors have explicitly mentioned they do have access to the results of the “participants’ questionnaire”.

The Programme instructors feel that there are not enough rewards and recognition schemes. Less than 50 % feel that the PAS Programme coordinators recognise their effort. The major source of recognition are the participants (mentioned by all of them). For three of the respondents there are no nonmonetary forms of recognition in place. This is clearly an area for improvement in the future.

Given this picture the self-assessment team has scored the implementation level of the various People sub-criteria as shown in Fig. 4.

5.4. Resources & partnerships

Partnerships are an essential element of the PAS Programme. Partners are diverse and include education institutions and health organisations with high reputation. Everyone involved agrees that co-operation with partners enhances the municipality’s capabilities to run successfully the programme. All the strategic partners that were interviewed feel that their participation contributes to improve the quality of the Programme. Mutual benefits are, according to the strategic partners, obvious. Local promoters play an important role in giving information to the participants, taking care of enrolment procedures and giving assistance to form the participants groups. Presidents of the parishes that participated in the study equally value their collaboration with the Programme and consider that providing transportation and allowing the Programme to use their premises are their main contributions they make to the PAS Programme.

There are some procedures about the way partnerships are managed. All the partners recognise that formal communication procedures exist and refer that there are several channels possible to use.

The financial resources committed to the PAS Programme are

managed. In particular, there is “a tight budgetary control of the expenses”.

Maintenance plans do not exist for all buildings, equipment and materials, which is a weakness of the PAS Programme. It might happen that management of buildings and equipment committed to the Programme is an under-developed area due to the fact that many of the physical infrastructures used are scattered throughout the municipality territory and do not belong to the City Council.

In what information and knowledge is concerned, leaders consider that systematic records are made of the relevant events/occurrences. Yet, it was possible to verify that the results of the participants’ satisfaction survey for 2018 were still not registered in the system.

Fig. 5 summarises the PAS Programme assessment on the Resources & Partnerships criterion.

5.5. Processes, products & services

There is considerable agreement among the leaders that processes are identified and documented. There are manuals with comprehensive documentation about work methods, especially in what concerns physical activities and participants’ health conditions assessment.

Services are designed and delivered to improve the balance, flexibility and strength of the participants. Participation screening is in place to guarantee the safe participation of participants. The physical progress of the participants in the PAS Programme is followed using well-established instruments developed by experts. Instructors are familiar with such instruments and apply them to all participants. Participants who answered the questionnaire administered by the self-assessment team have confirmed this scenario.

Moreover, 13 participants affirmed that they have already made some kind of improvement suggestion and they all agree that the PAS coordinators were receptive to their suggestions. It is interesting to notice that the large majority of the suggestions related to the hypothesis of launching new activities. This is a clear indication that services are developed (and re-designed) to create optimum value for the users.

The Programme is widely promoted by the municipality, as the increasing number of local promoters associated with it indicates.

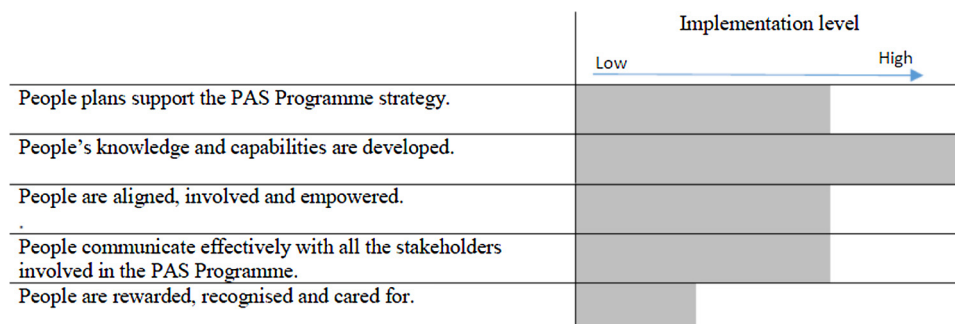


Fig. 4. People criterion assessment- summary.

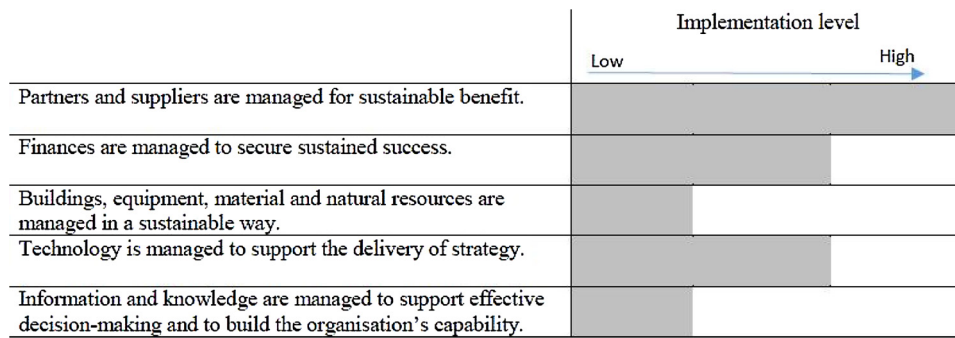


Fig. 5. Partnerships & Resources criterion assessment- summary.

Marketing actions are developed according to the Programme target.

On the other hand, processes to collect and analyse customer feedback need to be improved. In fact, leaders admit that no procedures are established to deal with participants' complaints and the same applies to suggestion mechanisms.

Taking into account the strengths and weaknesses identified in the Processes, Products & Services criterion the self-assessment team arrived at the scores exhibited in Fig. 6.

5.6. Customer results

The number of participants for each edition (see Table 2) shows that the level of adhesion to the PAS Programme is evolving positively. Participants in general want to continue to enrol in the Programme, which clearly is an indication of a good level of loyalty.

Participant satisfaction is regularly assessed. At the end of each edition, all the participants are asked to fulfil a questionnaire. A summary of the results for the 2018 edition based on a random sample of 250 participants is provided in Table 3.

The vast majority of the 50 participants surveyed are aware of the existence of the satisfaction questionnaires and indicate that they usually give feedback. The opinions among the respondents about the Programme are very positive. Participants stress that: "There are many activities. It is very interesting", "I have fun and I am feeling much better", "It is healthy and it is good to make new friends".

Participants also feel that leaders communicate with them. 16 respondents mention that they have already been contacted by the PAS Coordinators and state that telephone calls are the main channel for that.

The level of complaints is very low, which can have contradictory meanings. It might well be a signal of high levels of satisfaction. However, it can be also a reason for some concern especially if we take into consideration that the PAS Programme does not have clear procedures to deal with complaints and might not doing enough to collect negative feedback. In fact, 44 % of the participants tell that they do not know how they can complain about the Programme. The only participant who mentioned that he/she has already made a complaint indicated that he/she got no answer.

Table 3

Satisfaction and loyalty.

2018	
Satisfaction level	
● % of answers of 4 or more (on a 5-points Likert scale)	76.8 % (positive trend when compared with 2006 and 2007)
Loyalty	
● Willingness to participate again in the future	98.4 %

Fig. 7 summarises the assessment made for the Customer Results criterion.

5.7. People results

The instructors' performance is regularly assessed using a variety of instruments, including direct observation of some classes and the feedback given by participants through the questionnaires. Absenteeism is controlled and the coordinators have procedures to ensure that the instructor is replaced and the class takes place.

The PAS Programme does not have formal mechanisms to measure people satisfaction:

"There are no records, but I guess PAS Coordinators assess that during meetings and also looking at the participants' questionnaires"
 "In the meetings they ask us how everything is going and if there is any problem".

The fact that the PAS Programme does not use surveys, interviews and/or structured appraisals to collect people's perceptions about several issues is an important drawback.

Based on the responses obtained from the questionnaires applied within this self-assessment exercise, it is possible to affirm that the instructors are pleased with the work they perform:

"I am working in my field and when we do what we like to do the participants can feel that too. That is rewarding".
 "I know that my work is important to enhance the participants' physical and psychological well-being".

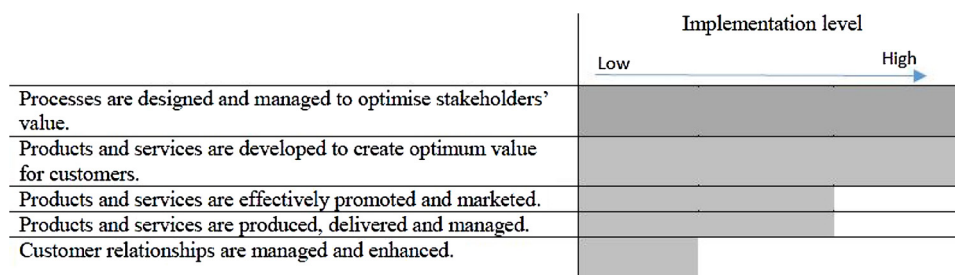


Fig. 6. Processes, Products & Services criterion assessment- summary.

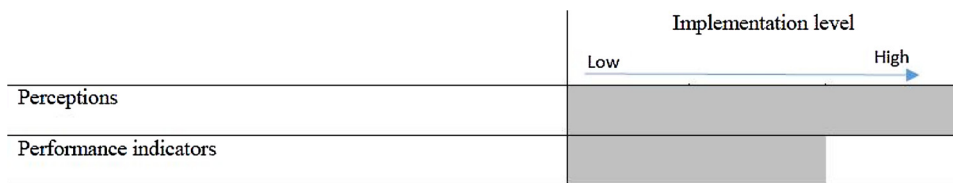


Fig. 7. Customer Results criterion assessment-summary.

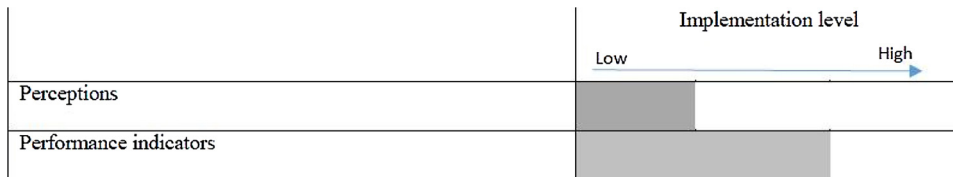


Fig. 8. People Results criterion assessment-summary.

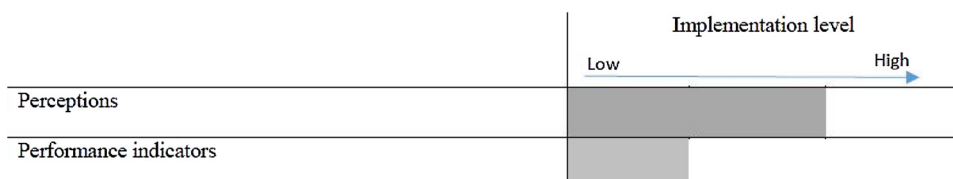


Fig. 9. Society Results criterion assessment-summary.

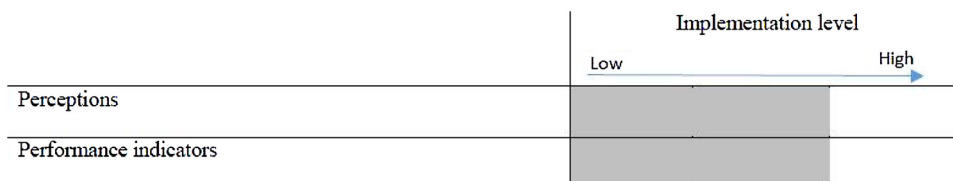


Fig. 10. Key Performance Results criterion assessment-summary.

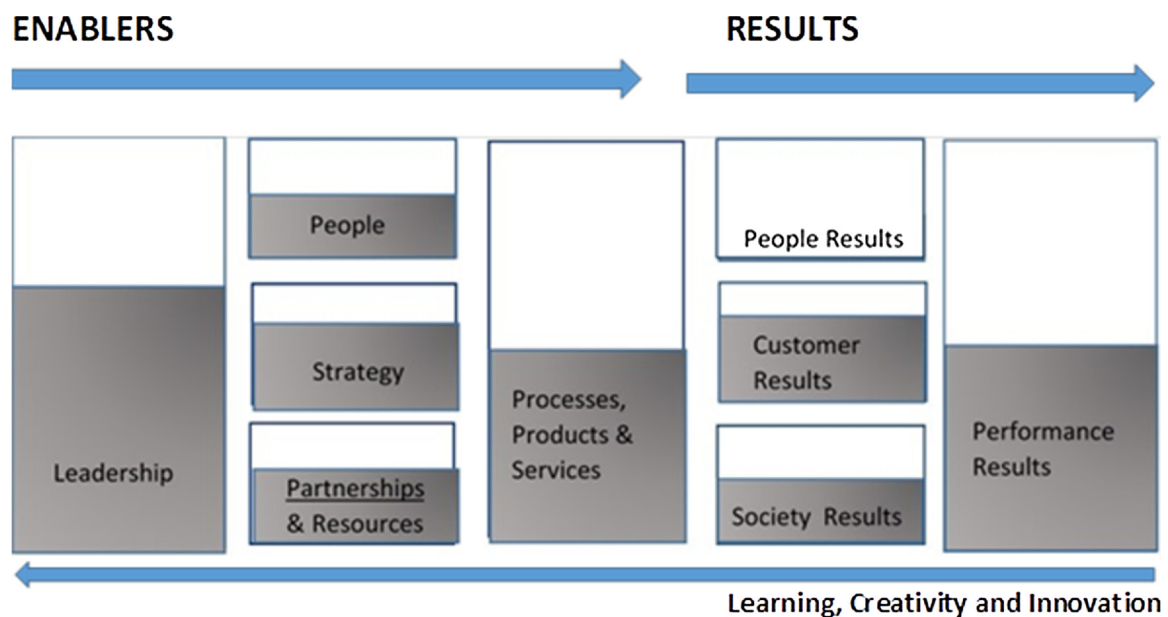


Fig. 11. Overall assessment results.

Nonetheless, some instructors are not satisfied with contractual and salary issues.

“The way we are contracted is the main reason for my disappointment. Covenants (‘green receipts’) do not give me stability and I need to pay my monthly bills. There is no holiday pay... It is not possible to give a qualitative boost to the Programme unless these kind of things are changed.”

“The way we are allocated to the groups should be changed. Sometimes

we have to work with a group from a geographical location that is not convenient for us and that obliges us to spend too much money in travel arrangements”.

Some complaints were also made about the PAS Programme insufficient concerns with family-work balance issues.

Given this scenario the self-assessment team has scored the implementation level of the two People Results sub-criteria as shown in Fig. 8.

Table 4
Improvement actions identified.

What to do in the near future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create an instrument to assess the instructors' satisfaction and apply it to all of them at the end of each Programme edition. • To establish new (symbolic) forms of recognition of the instructors' efforts and make leaders publicly show their appreciation for the way they contribute to the Programme goals. • To develop procedures to ask local promoters information about the physical and maintenance conditions of the buildings, equipment and materials used by the Programme. To record such data. • To design and implement complaint handling procedures (and suggestion schemes). • To improve information management systems to ensure that relevant and updated data on programme performance is available for decision-making. • To improve management accounting systems to capture data on quality (and poor quality) costs and provide information necessary to measure processes efficiency. • To launch benchmarking initiatives with other municipalities to share information on the strategy and results of other physical activity programmes.

5.8. Society results

Given the very own nature of the PAS Programme its impact on the society/local community is highly relevant.

The number of people involved and the significance of the partners that cooperate with the Programme are clear indications of its positive impact.

The Programme assumes its social responsibility beyond the strict purpose of improving exercise habits, since it promotes the assessment of the participants' risk of developing diabetes and the diagnosis of their oral health.

Several representatives of the parishes interviewed have highlighted the importance of the Programme in fighting loneliness and social isolation.

The reputation of the Programme is high and PAS Coordinators have been asked to present the Programme in seminars and conferences in different regions of Portugal. One of the representatives of the parishes involved considers that: *"Making visible the success of the Programme and be awarded with any kind of prize would be an important stimulus to the Programme and to everyone involved."*

Yet, there are very few indicators and measures of the programme's impact in society.

Taking into account the shortcomings identified in the way the PAS Programme measures its impact on the society and also the best-practices found, the self-assessment team evaluates the Programme has depicted in Fig. 9.

5.9. Key performance results

The PAS Programme assessment process includes indicators of its financial results. Particular attention is given to the control of budgetary indicators.

Satisfaction indicators are calculated based on the feedback from participants and partners. Stakeholders perceptions about the Programme are generally very good. However, leaders acknowledge that there is a lack of process efficiency indicators.

Despite this lack of measures and indicators, there is a strong positive feeling regarding the impacts of the PAS Programme: *"The Programme has a direct impact on the participants, especially on functional dimensions, improving their health, making them feel happier and less socially isolated"*.

Additionally, there is insufficient benchmarking with other physical activity programmes, both in what concerns their strategies/practices and results achieved.

Fig. 10 summarises the PAS Programme assessment on the Key Performance Results criterion.

To sum up, and based on the number and relevance of the

improvement areas found in the various EFQM criteria, it is possible to see that the PAS Programme is strong in some dimensions of the EFQM model (noticeable Strategy and Customer Results) whereas still needs to make considerable efforts in other aspects (People Results and Society Results, in particular). Fig. 11 shows the estimated implementation level (grey area) for each model criterion. Since the Division of Sports and Youth had no experience in using the EFQM model and this was the first attempt to evaluate the Programme based on the methodology proposed, it was decided not to use the 1–1000 points scoring scale, which requires more skills and competences in applying the RADAR logic.

Moreover, as a results of the self-assessment exercise carried out, a list of potential improvement actions was identified (see Table 4).

It should be stressed that some of these actions are already being implemented, which further corroborates the validity of the EFQM model as a performance assessment tool in this context.

6. Conclusion

The production of information about the merit, worth, and demonstrable costs and benefits of an initiative is essential to improve stakeholders' understanding (and support) of a project or programme. From an internal perspective, evaluation tells decision makers, programme leaders and coordinators, whether, and how effectively, their project, policies and/or plans are achieving their intended goals and objectives.

The growing proportion of senior citizens and the importance of encouraging active well-ageing behaviours explain the increasing efforts carried out by governments, especially at the local level, to develop exercise programmes particularly targeted to this group. The complexity associated with the running of these programmes and the resources committed make their quality assessment essential.

The current paper used the EFQM model to assess a physical activity programme for seniors designed and run by a municipality of the Centre region of Portugal. In order to gather empirical evidence, methodological triangulation – i.e. questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews, and additional document analysis – was employed. The approach was successful in gathering relevant data and leading to the identification of a set of strengths and areas for improvement.

The EFQM model provided a comprehensive and holistic view of the PAS Programme. While the understanding of stakeholders needs and expectations and the way partnerships are managed have been pointing out as main strengths of the Programme, People Results has emerged as a major candidate for improvement. As an indication of the validity of the exercise, municipal leaders are already working in some of the improvement areas identified (e.g. a survey questionnaire is going to be administered to the instructors in the 2020 edition and a complaints handling procedure is being implemented).

Listening to a multiplicity of stakeholders by means of questionnaires and/or semi-structured interviews focused on specific model dimensions (for which they can be regarded as 'key informants') has revealed to be a good strategy that can be applied to other situations where Programmes/Projects are being assessed and it is not possible to form a multidisciplinary self-assessment team, given the size of the structures that typically run such programmes on a permanent basis.

The study has some limitations. Firstly, not all stakeholders have assessed the Programme according to all the criteria. In particular, having criteria exclusively assessed by the programme leaders/coordinators might lead to a somehow too narrow view of what is happening in some specific areas. However, it must be acknowledged that rather often some stakeholders lack knowledge and first-hand experience to give valuable feedback in some areas/model dimensions. Therefore, a balance needs to be found in order to get stakeholders' adherence to significantly participate in the assessment of the areas they are more comfortable with and are more knowledgeable. This is particularly important when assessing projects and programmes that often

involve a very large number of very diverse stakeholders. Additionally, the research design employed was cross-sectional. The evaluation of the usefulness of the EFQM model and its ability to drive improvement efforts in this context would benefit from a longitudinal approach. The use of a single case study, although adequate to explore the specificities of well-ageing programmes involving a multiplicity of stakeholders and their impact on quality assessment exercises, puts considerable constraints on the generalisability of some findings.

Research on the assessment of physical activity programmes from a quality management point of view is scarce. This study has contributed to shed some additional light on the matter by proposing an assessment approach that is easy and flexible allowing to collect and incorporate the views of a wide range of stakeholders, including the programme partners.

6.1. Lessons learned

Despite using a single case study, based on the self-assessment exercise conducted it is possible to derive some principles that can be useful to programme assessment in general:

- To adopt a systems perspective and to include the views of both internal and external stakeholders when assessing programmes;
- To involve in particular community partners in the exercise;
- To base actions and on evidences (management by fact), rather than personal agenda or other preconceptions;
- To focus on results and to understand value creation processes;
- To foster continuous improvement and innovation in management interventions;
- Despite introducing necessary small adjustments over time, to maintain the same framework in future exercises to allow progress to be assessed.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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