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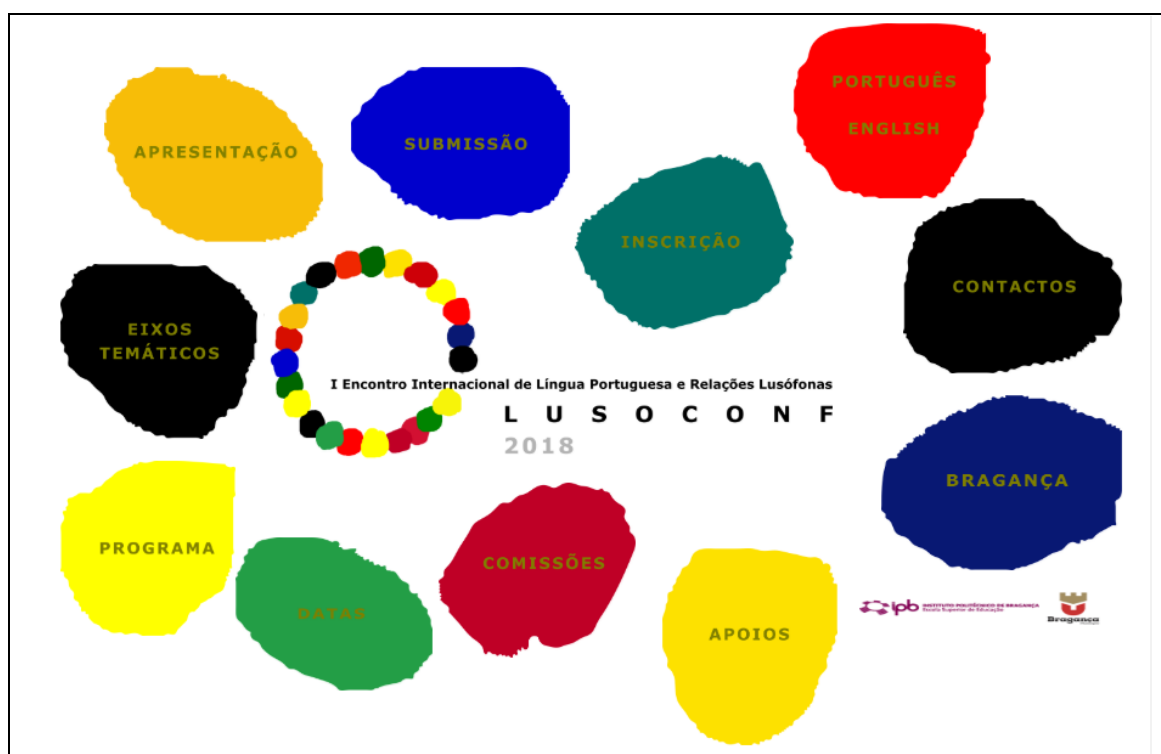
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The retake of common assessment framework: the impact on Portuguese municipalities' users

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Abstract

In 1980, the public sector focused on the theme of quality and Portugal followed the tendency, assuming a paradigm change: from bureaucratic and centralized administration to a service administration, decentralized and oriented to total quality. Among various approaches, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) stands out. It is a European model that assesses organizational performance, with reference to the Principles of Excellence and focused on continuous improvement. In addition to being free, it is specific for the public sector and was implemented in Portuguese local authorities. It is important to reinstate CAF in order to analyse the results obtained by Portuguese municipalities (15, among 308) and find out how these results and subsequent impacts interact and determine quality enhancement of such organizations. Accordingly, our research question is: What is CAF's contribution to the perception of quality improvement in Portuguese municipalities? The main general objectives are based on the verification of the following: the effectiveness of CAF implementation; the level of integration of the CAF model (nine criteria of the model and eight Principles of Excellence); the results achieved and the perceived impacts through the implementation of the CAF; and the contribution of the CAF model in the perception of the overall quality improvement achieved. The research strategy underlies a naturalistic paradigm, adopting a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with those in charge for quality in the municipalities. Regarding the literature review, a set of elements obtained through CAF's implementation in the municipalities emerge, namely: the achieved results include actions and improvement plans, good practices, quality assessment and measurement system, citizen and stakeholder's satisfaction, continuous improvement; on the other hand, in terms of perceived impacts, the achieved results emerge: organizations' quality improvements, change of public culture, TQM tool facilitator, connections between quality management models as well as practices of bench learning and benchmarking. Thus, it is intended to retake CAF and collaborate for a new theoretical approach, investigating the impacts of such implementation in the public administration, specifically in Portuguese municipalities.

Key-words: public services quality, common assessment framework, portuguese municipalities, impact, content analysis.