

METHODS FOR EVALUATING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: The assessment on the state administration is among the key ones questions on the modern publicly management, so as from quality on administrative structures depend as performance on public policies , as well as trust in institutions , sustainability on management processes and ability on the state yes reacts on public challenges . In the conditions on growing expectations for efficiency, transparency, accountability and orientation to the results, the need from reliable methods for evaluation on the administration becomes everything more significant.

In theory and practice are developed diverse approaches for measurement on administrative capacity and quality on management. Part from them is founded on matrices for assessment on the condition, others use key indicators for performance (KPI), and third you serve with proxy indicators for measurement on difficult observable phenomena, and fourth summarize multitude indicators in composite indexes. Each from these approaches there is own advantages, limitations and specifics areas on application. Therefore, the question it's not who method is universal best, and which one is most suitable for the specific research purpose and for the specific aspect on the public administration, which is evaluates. The goal on The current study is to do comparative review on the main ones methods for assessment on the state administration and yes show their analytical opportunities . For this one goal are considered four basic groups tools: dies for assessment on status, proxy indicators, KPIs and composites indexes. Except the theoretical review , included and attached to the study example through construction on approximate Bulgarian KPI Maturity Index, through which is illustrates the possibility for creation on own composite tool for assessment on specific characteristic on public governance . The results show that Bulgaria has a relatively good strategic and digital foundation, average quality of KPI construction, but weaker actual use of KPIs in governance and problematic accountability/ transparency. The scientific contribution of the study lies in encouraging other researchers to apply similar methodology when assessing different aspects of public governance or other countries.

Keywords: *public administration, performance indicators, proxy indicators, composite indices.*

Field: Social Sciences

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of evaluating public administration acquires special relevance in context on the government, founded on results, digital transformation on the public sector and the strengthened use on international indices for comparison between countries. Along with the traditional administrative ratings , everything more often is use quantitative and combined tools that allow yes is measure as specific characteristics on institutions , both broader and more difficult observable aspects on management . This leads to the shaping on several basic approach : matrices for assessment on status , key indicators for performance (KPI), proxy indicators and composites indexes . Each from them there is own logic, different degree on applicability and specific restrictions.

At the same time missing universal and unconditional applicable method for assessment on the state administration. Some tools are more suitable for internally organizational self-assessment, others for measurement on results, and third for international comparisons and analysis on wider institutional characteristics. Exactly this imposes the necessity from comparative review on the used approaches, so that yes is highlight their analytical opportunities, limitations and potential for combined use.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Matrices for assessing the condition

The compilation of matrices, in whose fields different states of a given public institution, its structural unit or implemented function are described, is a sufficiently universal method to be used for its assessment. In 2005, under the USAID Local Government Initiative Program, a **Municipal Development Framework was developed**, which included seven main municipal functions (AAMP, Програма ИМС, 2005). Each function is further developed in a matrix, where its characteristics and the desired level of performance in a successful municipality are described.

A similar but more in-depth method is the **Internal Factor Assessment Matrix, introduced** by Fred David in Strategic Management . A Competitive Advantage Approach . Concept and Cases (David, David, & David, 2023). In this method, the strengths and weaknesses of a given public institution are

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assessed as key internal factors. Usually, a minimum of 10–20 internal factors are identified, whose states for the organization are described in the cells of the matrix. Each qualitative state is assigned a quantitative value on a Likert scale. Quantified in this way, the individual assessed characteristics of the organization, as factors for its development, make it possible to calculate an average score giving both a general idea of its state and the state of its constituent elements. This technique was used by the author to assess the four perspectives in municipalities (Борисов, 2019), according to the terminology used by Norton and Kaplan in their system called Balanced Score Card (Каплан & Нортън, 2005).

At the end of the last century, an evaluation model specific to public institutions was developed called **Organizational Capacity Assessment – OCA**, which has been adapted and updated many times over the years. The most popular version was the 2009 version, developed by USAID specifically for the public sector (USAID, 2015).

A similar list of assessments of good governance is offered by the Institute of Public Administration (Институт по публична администрация, 2015), which, in addition to management functions, includes the rule of law, ethical behavior, transparency, and innovation.

A similar approach to compiling assessment matrices is the **Common Assessment Framework method – The Common Assessment Framework (CAF)**, which gained popularity in the last decade of the last century. It emerged in response to the interest in implementing quality management systems similar to TQM, as well as other management systems typical of the business sector, by transferring them to the public sector, while at the same time emphasizing social responsibility. To date, many organizations from Europe and beyond use CAF for their own specific development goals. The CAF model has been revised several times, with the latest version from 2019, called CAF 2020. (EUPAN; EIPA, 2020) The goal is to make the tool as suitable as possible for use by public institutions.

In Bulgaria, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) serves as the National Resource Center for CAF, which aims to establish it as a quality model in public administration. The IPA's Guide to the Process of Implementing the CAF Model in the Bulgarian Administration (Институт по публична администрация, 2024) states that the self-assessment of the organization is carried out according to 28 criteria and sub-criteria. The assessment includes a total of 4 main elements for each CAF sub-criteria: 1) findings on the organization's strengths; 2) findings on the organization's areas for improvement; 3) with specifically proposed ideas/measures for improvement and 4) scoring (Институт по публична администрация, 2024).

As can be seen, in the methods for evaluating public administration based on matrices, compliance with certain **principles is assessed**, considered an important condition for achieving good governance, subjecting it to certain criteria and measuring it with specific **indicators**.

In the European Commission document "Guidance Document him/her Indicators of Public Administration Capacity Building" from 2014 provides guidance for the development of such specific indicators for capacity building in public administration. It proposes a model of "operational indicators" related to ESF investments in institutional capacity building. The document presents some examples of how the model indicators can be adapted to specific activities typically foreseen in operational programmes (European Commission, 2014).

2.2. Assessments based on Proxy Indicators (PI)

A proxy indicator is a substitute indicator that is used when direct measurement is impossible or difficult. For example, if we want to measure the management maturity of the administration, this cannot be measured directly, so we use proxies, such as the number of strategic documents; the presence of KPIs; the degree of digitalization; the transparency of decisions.

If with KPI we can directly measure the degree of improvement in administrative service through indicators such as application processing time, percentage of satisfied citizens or number of applications served, then to measure the quality of governance we must use proxy indicators such as: corruption index; budget transparency; number or percentage of citizen participation, etc.

Sometimes KPIs can also be used as **proxy indicators**, for example, if we want to measure management effectiveness we can use the proxy indicator percentage of strategic objectives achieved (KPI). In other words, KPIs measure the implementation of specific objectives, while proxy indicators are used to indirectly measure complex or difficult-to-observe phenomena (Merry, Davis, & Kingsbury, 2012).

The use of proxy indicators is a widespread practice in public administration research, as institutional capacity is a **latent concept** that cannot be directly observed.

As the OECD notes, "there will never be one perfect governance indicator", which is why proxy indicators and composite indices are often used in public administration research to assess difficult-to-observe latent characteristics (Nardo, 2005). However, Soifer, HD emphasizes that researchers should not mechanically assume that every available proxy measure is adequate, and they need to check what

exactly the given indicator measures and how well it corresponds to the concept (Soifer, 2022). This means that proxy Indicators are useful, but require careful selection and interpretation.

2.3. Performance Based Assessments Indicators (KPIs)

KPI (Key Performance Indicators) are quantitative indicators that measure the degree to which an organization's strategic or operational goals are being achieved. They are a fundamental tool for performance management – results-oriented management. In the public sector, KPIs are used to measure the implementation of policies, the results achieved, for accountability and improving the efficiency of the administration. The types of KPIs are:

- Input indicators (resources). They measure input resources, such as total budget, number of employees hired, working hours, etc.
- Process indicators (processes). They measure the effectiveness of administrative processes with indicators such as administrative service time, number of applications processed, administrative burden, etc.
- Output indicators (product). They measure the direct results of the activity, such as the number of permits issued, the number of citizens served, the number of projects implemented, etc.
- Outcome indicators (effect). They measure the real impact, such as percentage reduction in unemployment, improvement in service quality, percentage reduction in complaints, level of satisfaction, etc.

Not every indicator is a KPI. While simple indicators describe activities, KPIs measure strategic results. They are key to management and are usually few in number.

A systematic review of performance measurement and management in the public sector and shows that KPIs are not just operational indicators, but part of a broader results-oriented management system. Garengo, P. and Sardi explicitly emphasizes that Productivity and Performance Management is a central element of public sector reforms and research gaps in the use of performance are outlined information (Garengo & Sardi, 2021).

2.4. Composite Index (CI)-Based Assessments

A composite index is a tool that combines several statistical and sociological indicators into a single value to assess complex phenomena (e.g., informal economy, quality of life). It allows for the measurement of complex trends through a combination of direct and indirect methods, often with weighting coefficients as well as multiple indicators in a single aggregate value. Composite indices are used when we want to measure complex phenomena that cannot be measured with a single indicator. Makarov, I. points out that the choice of method for constructing an index depends on the purpose of the assessment, which means that there is no single "perfect" method for assessing state administration (Makarov, 2024).

Some of the most well-known composite indices used to measure various characteristics of public administration are:

1. Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) – World Bank. This is the most commonly used global governance set. It includes 6 composite dimensions: Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption, Voice and Accountability, Political Stability. For public administration, Government is most often used. Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality and Rule of Law.

2. European Quality of Government Index (EQI). Very important for the EU, especially when making comparisons between countries and regions. Measures the quality of governance based on citizens' perceptions and experiences on topics such as corruption, impartiality and quality of public services.

3. Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI). It is mainly used for developed democracies and assesses not only policy outcomes, but also the quality of democratic governance, strategic capacity, coordination, foresight and sustainable policymaking. It is very suitable for the analysis of governance capacity and policy performance.

4. Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) – Governance Index. More suitable for transition and developing countries. BTI has a separate Governance Index, which assesses how political actors manage transformation processes, taking into account the country's structural difficulties.

5. UN E- Government Development Index (EGDI). One of the most popular digital public administration indexes. It combines online services, telecommunications infrastructure and human capital and provides a comparative assessment of the development of e-government in countries.

6. Open Budget Index / Open Budget Survey (OBI/OBS). A widely used index for fiscal transparency, citizen participation, and budget oversight. If your topic is public administration through the prism of budget management and accountability, this is one of the most important composite indicators.

7. Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Perhaps the most popular index of perceived corruption in the public sector. It is a composite and based on multiple sources. It does not measure the entire public administration, but it is one of the most commonly used proxies indicators for integrity and quality of public

governance.

8. World Justice Project Rule of Law Index . Very widely used in analysis of the rule of law, accountability, open government , regulatory enforcement , civil justice and crime justice . This is one of the strongest composite indices when you want to assess the institutional environment in which public administration operates.

To illustrate the possibilities of different methods for evaluating the state administration as a whole or its individual aspects, we conducted two desk studies - on the maturity of the system for using KPIs in Bulgaria, which is based on Key Performance Indicators . Based on real data for Bulgaria, available through ChatGPT , a composite Bulgarian KPI Maturity Index was calculated, called Bulgarian KPI Maturity. Index . Five dimensions were evaluated, with certain weights in the overall score:

- Strategic Alignment – 20%
- KPI Design Quality – 20%
- Data Infrastructure – 20%
- Performance Management Use – 25%
- Transparency & Accountability – 15%

To calculate KPI Maturity Index for Bulgaria we use the following **formula** :

$$\text{KPI Maturity Index} = 0.20(64)+0.20(56)+0.20(63)+0.25(48)+0.15(52) \quad (1)$$

3. RESULTS

The obtained assessments for Bulgaria in 2025 in the five dimensions forming Bulgarian KPI Maturity Index for 2005 are as follows:

1) Strategic Alignment

Rating : 64/100

Arguments : Bulgaria has a formal strategic framework and sets targets for 13 out of 14 KPIs within the national roadmap for Digital Decade , and for some of them the targets are aligned with the EU ambitions. This is a strong signal that strategic planning and KPI logic exist at a systemic level. However, the European Commission notes that for some indicators the targets are lower than the European ones, and for public services the recommendation remains that the e-government architecture should be improved to make it more user-friendly and less burdensome for the user. This suggests that the link between strategy, KPI and actual management performance is present, but is not yet fully mature.

2) KPI Design Quality

Rating : 56/100

Arguments : Here the score is 55 because public documents show that Bulgaria uses KPIs and target values, but their quality is uneven. The presence of targets for 13 out of 14 indicators speaks of a structuring of the measurement, but the very fact that for some of the indicators the national targets are below the EU ambition suggests administrative compliance rather than a strongly performance-oriented KPI design . This dimension remains more difficult for direct external verification and contains more expert judgment.

3) Data Infrastructure

Rating : 63/100

Arguments : According to Digital data Decade Bulgaria 2024, the country has 91.9/100 for digitalisation of public services for businesses , above the EU average of 85.4. In the NIFO factsheet for 2024, Bulgaria receives high scores on key elements of digital public administration and interoperability: 4/4 for digital transformation of public administrations , 4/4 for semantic interoperability and 3/4 for base registries and security / privacy . This shows real progress in data, registries, and systems connectivity, although not full integration.

4) Performance Management Use

Rating : 48/100

Arguments : The weakest part of KPI maturity in Bulgaria seems to be the use of KPIs for real decisions. The European Commission continues to recommend improving the e-government architecture and reducing the administrative burden, which suggests that the presence of systems and digital services does not yet automatically mean mature performance. management . Additionally, WGI emphasizes that government Effectiveness is a key dimension of management, and in Bulgaria it remains around neutral values, far from the leading administrative systems in the EU. This is an indirect but useful signal that KPIs are not yet sufficiently embedded in the management decision cycle.

5) Transparency & Accountability

Rating : 52/100

Arguments : Bulgaria has public policies, open data and electronic portals, but the most recent external signals of transparency and accountability are rather weak. Transparency International Bulgaria reports a CPI 2024 score of 43/100, down from 45, with the country remaining among the countries with high levels of corruption in the public sector and second to last in the EU. In Digital Decade 2024 only 40% of Bulgarian respondents believe that the EU protects their digital rights, which is also below the EU average. This does not mean low transparency across the board, but it does mean that accountability maturity is more of a medium-low rather than medium-high.

The weighted scores for the six individual areas are as follows:

- Strategic Alignment : 12.8
- KPI Design Quality: 11.2
- Data Infrastructure : 12.6
- Performance Management Usage : 12.0
- Transparency & Accountability : 7.8

Applying formula 1 we obtain the following estimate of Bulgarian KPI Maturity Index

$$BKPMI = 12.8 + 11.2 + 12.6 + 12.0 + 7.8 = \mathbf{56.4} \quad (2)$$

If we assume the following scale:

- Low maturity – from 0 to 40;;
- Developing – from 40 to 60;
- Mature – from 60 to 80;
- Advanced – from 80 to 100,

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that Bulgaria has a relatively decent strategic and digital foundation, average quality of KPI construction, but weaker real use of KPIs in management and problematic accountability/transparency . This gives us reason to conclude that Bulgaria has a developing , but not yet mature KPI system .

Using the same approximately five-dimensional framework , Bulgaria's KPI Maturity Index May be positioned at around 56/100, below Germany and Poland and well below the leading digital-administrative systems of Finland and the Netherlands , but slightly above Romania . This places Bulgaria in the category of a developing KPI system : it has a visible strategic and digital foundation , but its weaker performance management use and lower transparency / accountability constrain overall maturity .

Table 1. KPI Maturity Index of six selected EU countries

Държава	Strategic Alignment	KPI Design	Data Infrastructure	Performance Use	Transparency & Accountability	KPI Maturity Index
Finland	82	80	84	82	88	83
Netherlands	79	77	81	78	78	79
Germany	72	70	73	69	77	72
Poland	64	60	66	58	53	60
Bulgaria	64	56	63	48	52	56
Romania	58	53	57	45	45	52

Source: Author's own calculations

4. DISCUSSION

Some international organizations, most notably the World Bank, and a number of European organizations, institutes, and foundations, play a leading role in both the use and provision of governance indicators. The most popular of these are composite indicators based on perceptions that aggregate a large amount of data and are available for a large number of countries. Arand and Oman point out that while the most popular indicators are very useful for getting an initial idea of how experts perceive the quality of governance of a country, they are also widely used for investment decisions, risk analysis, the quality of the business environment, government efficiency, etc., but at the same time, too little attention is paid to the limitations of these indicators. The more users rely on the same indicators, the more they become "internationally accepted", which further spreads their use. The high visibility of a few indicators

in academic publications and the media accelerates this process of concentration, to the detriment of new indicators that could be more meaningful. Another reason for the popularity of some indicators and their widespread use is that decision-makers require an aggregated measurement for comparisons between countries and over time and believe that they have no alternative (Arndt & Oman, 2008).

In contemporary theory and practice of public administration, there are many methodologies for its assessment. Some provide comparable data for a large number of countries, while others are more context-specific. Some of them assess the quality of overall governance, while others focus on specific and well-defined aspects of governance. The OECD warns that governance Indicators are often used uncritically both in international comparisons and in tracking changes in individual countries, which requires careful interpretation of proxies, indicators and composites indices (OECD, 2008). The main note is regarding the specificity of the data, as some of the indicators are based on publicly available administrative data, which do not always allow for full comparability between institutions. In some cases, the lack of systematic data necessitates the use of proxy indicators, which may only partially reflect the relevant aspect of governance maturity. There are also remarks regarding the concept. The indices measure governance maturity through institutional characteristics, but cannot fully capture all aspects of governance quality, such as political leadership or organizational culture.

All this gives us reason to claim that there is no one perfect method or generally valid indicator with which to measure the state of public administration. The wealth of methods allows us to select those of them that we consider most appropriate for the specific object and specific conditions, and the accumulated scientific knowledge allows us to synthesize our own indicators, justifying their use with sufficient evidence. Such an approach was also applied in the present study, in which our own composite index was generated to measure a specific characteristic of public administration, namely the applicability of key performance indicators (KPIs) in 2025 in Bulgaria. The results show that KPI Maturity The Index scores 56 on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 100 (highest). This places the country in the middle of the scale, with only Romania scoring lower among the EU countries. Of the index's components, strategic management and digital infrastructure score the highest. The country has adopted a National Development Program "Bulgaria 2030", a National Plan for Recovery and Resilience, numerous strategies in various areas of socio-economic life. In total, there are 354 national strategic documents in force by 2026. The municipalities, which are 265 in number, have also adopted their Integrated Development Plans by 2027 and are about to develop new ones by 2034. The quality of these strategic development documents is significantly better than the first ones, which were in force during the first programming period of the country's membership in the EU 2007-2013. However, weaknesses are still noticeable in terms of the adequacy of performance indicators and accountability.

The quality of the digital infrastructure in Bulgaria is two-way - the country is distinguished by excellent connectivity and high internet speeds, but at the same time it faces serious challenges in terms of the digitalization of the administration, cybersecurity, and the adoption of new technologies by business and the population.

As mentioned above, KPIs are not used enough in the management decision cycle, both to describe the goals set in strategic documents and to report on results. This is why the Performance area Management Use receives the lowest scores. The other area with low scores is Transparency & Accountability, as the lack of transparency in the work of state institutions and high levels of corruption are a real problem for the country.

5. CONCLUSION

This article discusses the main methods for assessing public administration. Each of them has its own meaning for existence and use in specific situations for specific research purposes. For example, the Matrices for assessing the state are very convenient for assigning numerical values to qualitative states using Likert scales. They allow for the preparation and distribution of single-choice questionnaires. question, in which the possible answers describe different states, evaluated with different scores. As a disadvantage, it can be pointed out that filling in the matrices or answering the questions implies subjectivity, which may not correspond to the actual state of the evaluated objects and their characteristics.

Proxy indicators, as substitutes for the main measures, make it possible to assess latent constructs that cannot be directly measured. Such objects are the state administration as a whole and its individual characteristics. However, the quality of the assessments depends on the ability of researchers to select sufficiently adequate proxy indicators describing the object of study and the availability of sufficiently reliable information sources.

KPIs are very useful in setting goals and reporting on the results achieved. They do not provide

a comprehensive description of a given administration, but illustrate its policy and efficiency. Their use requires knowledge of what attributes an indicator should contain, namely: name, value, measure, time of achievement and place of implementation.

Composite indices summarize multiple indicators and provide a more general picture of entire objects, so recently many such indices have been calculated by various international institutions, which claim to support the comparison of certain characteristics of public administration in more countries. This study illustrated the possibility of generating one's own composite indicators for evaluation with an example of measuring the level and quality of KPI use by the public administration in Bulgaria. The scientific contribution lies in the fact that such a methodology can be used to evaluate other areas of public administration or by other countries.

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