

abstract

An empirical study of how continuous process improvement has been used in public management by Spanish town councils

Certain Spanish city authorities updated and improved public management by adopting a continuous process improvement (CPI) approach during the late 1980s and early 1990s to enhance their public services and operating procedures. This qualitative research regarding Spanish town councils presents the findings of an exploratory study which tried to understand how CPI was applied to public management and ascertain the impact of implementing CPI on public management. It was found that CPI was being applied during evolutionary stages and improvement activities; its impact on public management in the Spanish town councils being studied here led to both positive and neutral results.

Key words: Kaizen, process improvement, local government, Spain.

resumen

La lógica de la modernización y mejora de la gestión pública sustentada en la aplicación de la Mejora Continua de Procesos (MCP) fue adquirida por algunos ayuntamientos españoles desde finales de la década de los ochenta y principios de los noventa, todo ello, con el fin de mejorar los servicios públicos y los procesos operativos. En esta investigación cualitativa en ayuntamientos españoles se presentan los resultados encontrados de un estudio exploratorio que ha buscado comprender *¿cómo se aplica la Mejora Continua de Procesos (MCP) en la gestión pública?*, y *¿cómo impacta la aplicación de la MCP en la gestión pública?* Los hallazgos de la investigación nos indican, que la aplicación de la MCP se presenta en forma de etapas evolutivas y actividades de mejora, mientras que el impacto que tiene la misma en ciertas particularidades de la gestión pública de los ayuntamientos estudiados, presenta resultados positivos en algunas de ellas, y en otras, impactos neutros.

Palabras clave: Kaizen, mejora de procesos, gobiernos locales, España.

resumo

Melhora contínua dos decursos da Administração Pública. Um estudo empírico nas Câmaras Municipais da Espanha

A lógica da modernização e melhora da Gestão Pública baseada na aplicação da Melhora Contínua de Processos (MCP), foi adquirida por algumas Câmaras Municipais espanholas desde o fim da década de 1980 e começo da década de 1990, a fim de melhorar os serviços públicos e os processos operativos. Nesta pesquisa qualitativa nas Câmaras Municipais espanholas, apresentam-se os resultados encontrados a partir de um estudo de busca cuja tentativa foi compreender as questões de como deve ser aplicada a Melhora Contínua de Processos (MCP) na Gestão Pública e como reage a Gestão Pública com a aplicação da MCP. As descobertas da pesquisa indicam que a aplicação da MCP se apresenta na forma de fases de evolução e atividades de melhora, no entanto que o impacto da mesma em certos assuntos da Gestão Pública desenvolvida pelas Câmaras Municipais estudadas, apresenta resultados positivos em algumas delas, e neutralidade em outras.

Palavras chave: Kaizen, Melhora de Processos, Governo Local, Espanha.

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An empirical study of continuous process improvement (CPI) regarding public management in Spanish municipalities

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Introduction

The arguments regarding gaining a competitive advantage in a specific market sector through continuous process improvement (CPI) are not very applicable to the public sector for obvious reasons, particularly local administration. However, the settings in which local governments act have also become notably modified during the last three decades (the same as in the private sector) (Prats and Català 2004). The society they serve has become more dynamic and complex, involving rapid and turbulent change (Farazmand 1999). New factors have emerged (economic, social, political, technological, cultural regarding management, knowledge and information) (Mendoza and Vernis 2008) which have led to local European and Spanish administrations undergoing profound transformations in their public management as a response to pressures from such an extremely convulsed setting (European Institute of Public Administration 2003; Martín 2005).

Such panorama, the logic of modernisation¹ and improvement of public management sustained by effectiveness and efficiency (a synonym for management capacity), was acquired by some Spanish town councils at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s with the sole purpose of facing such factors of change

¹ Barvadio and Novi (2004, p. 11) defined "Modernisation of public management" as being the set of policies and initiatives developed by different administrations whose aim was to improve citizen attention (users), the quality of the services being provided, improve internal organisation and operation (processes involved in work) and optimise available resources.

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which will slowly lead to recovering lost *legitimacy* regarding citizens² (Elena 1998; Giner 1998; Olías de Lima 2007). The changes which these Spanish town councils have undergone throughout these years has led to a new concept being developed regarding how their organisations should be managed, from improving the quality of services they are providing and executing their processes more effectively and efficiently so that municipal management costs less (economic saving) to maintaining the principle of legality, without the accompanying rigidity and orientating and approaching political decisions together with citizens for maintaining current social benefits (Mendoza 1991; Giner 2003; Díaz and Cuéllar 2007).

Spanish town councils deciding to rise to the challenge have evolved regarding managing their institutions through the classical bureaucratic model until achieving new forms of management in which principles such as receptivity, improvement and innovation, flexibility, adaptation, the willingness for improvement and overcoming and the ability to act and resolve matters form part of their daily tasks³ (Dunsire and Hood 1989; OECD 1991; Gallego 2007). Every local administration (the closest to citizens) embarking on such modernisation and improvement since the end of the 1980s has incorporated different private sector management models into their public management⁴ (i.e. total

quality management (TQM), European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM⁵ or the Latin-American quality award) models of excellence, service quality (surveys for collecting citizen data), service commitment letters, quality standards (ISO 9000), continuous process improvement (CPI), management indicators, integrated posts, etc.) essentially seeking ongoing municipal management improvement to fulfil stakeholders' needs and expectations (López and Gadea 2001; Torres 2005; Torrubiano 2006).

The Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP 2005) and the Spanish Association for Quality (AEC) have reported that establishing this type of quality- and/or improvement-related model or system has begun to be noticed, even though in terms of an extremely low percentage. Their study (2005⁶) indicated that only 5% of town councils had some sort of ISO 9000 certificate⁷ regarding any of their processes whilst 10% had published a service commitment letter, 2% had tried some other type of effort (improvement teams, redesigning processes, incremental ongoing improvement, etc.) and just 1% used self-evaluation models (EFQM⁸ or Latin-American Quality Award). However, according to Díaz Méndez (2007), it seems that the daily increase in political, social (more demanding citizens) and economic pressures (budgetary reductions and

² The concept of legitimacy refers here to what can be analysed as legitimacy by performance (Olías de Lima 2007, 182), i.e. that which in public organisations tends to achieve certain results according to technical and organisational possibilities and using resources at any given moment. Available services must meet sufficient conditions regarding the quantity and quality of a determined society's public resources. Legitimacy could also be understood here as being *institutional*, i.e. that which refers to ethical patterns' relationship to current conduct in a community regarding how an administration should be conducted (Olías de Lima 2007, 183). Even though these may be differentiated in theoretically, in practice both terms are interlinked, meaning that whilst using the concept of legitimacy of performance, one must not lose sight of the fact that its other dimension "institutional" could also be present.

³ Dunsire and Hood (1989, 217) have stated that legal-formal rationality and the bureaucratic model which dominated throughout the whole of the 20th century have stopped being the universal and necessary archetype for structuring public activity. They stated that alternative forms, based on exploiting management rationality and a set of marketing mechanisms, has meant that new public management has led to a decline in large public bureaucracies. The term *responsiveness*, according to the OECD (1991, 19), means: *the ability to respond (to the evolution of demand)*; it is thus a consequence of administrative functioning and a positive disposition.

⁴ López and Gadea (2001) have stated that all such models based on TQM are understood by many administrations as basic methodolo-

gical instruments for improving their public management. Nevertheless, they have also stated that all these models are more than just a set of techniques, constituting a public administration-transforming philosophy, meaning that each one must reread the sense of public service from political/policy logic for improving their own public management and innovating from concepts based on each of them (improvement models).

⁵ EFQM will be used throughout this article when referring to this model.

⁶ The study sample consisted of 258 town councils serving a population greater than 10,000 inhabitants. It is worth pointing out that practically no specific studies have evaluated this type of effort or initiative aimed at improving the local Spanish setting.

⁷ ISO 9000 standards deal with "quality" and "ongoing quality management" established by the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) which can be applied to any type of organisation or systematic activity orientated towards the production of goods and/or services. They consist of standards and guidelines related to management systems and specific tools as auditing methods (verifying that management systems complying with such standards).

⁸ The EFQM model of excellence was introduced in 1991 as a working framework for organisations' self-evaluation and how the basis for judging contestants for the European Quality Award was set up and awarded for the first time in 1992. This model is the most used in Europe and has become the basis for evaluating organisations regarding most national and regional quality awards throughout Europe.

growing taxation pressure) during the last few years has led to more Spanish town councils taking this type of improvement initiative on board. Those which have managed to sustain their improvement effort for several years and have managed to integrate it within daily management practice have become true archetypes for local administrations which are beginning or trying to start their improvement effort (Galofré 2006; Suárez-Barraza and Ramis-Pujol 2008; Suárez Barraza *et al.*, 2009).

A town council is a complex and dynamic public organisation requiring and needing the ongoing improvement of its management models according to changes in its setting (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, 1999). A transversal or horizontal approach must be adopted by these bodies in any attempt to apply such improvement models (Mora *et al.*, 2006), i.e. through a particular institution's processes. Public organisations must thus also be conceived as a network of interconnected management processes (Gulledge and Sommers 2002; Martín 2006). Such concept has meant that all Spanish town councils which have chosen these models have assumed that the notion of improving their municipal management is focused on the results of processes emphasising management and improving the processes producing public services to achieve an impact in terms of results and response to social needs (Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, 2003).

Different benefits have been reported during these years when some Spanish town councils have directly or indirectly implanted the logic of CPI, ranging from results-orientated management, reduced fragmentation and departmental hierarchies, the identification and measurement of relevant management information and data, to improved coordination and communication between institutions' employees and functionaries (Font, 1997; Ferré, 2006; Díaz, 2007). It seems that Spanish local administrations' medium- and long-term challenge will lie in constituting alert and active administration which, whilst sustaining that gained managing its processes, continuously and constantly integrates improvements and innovations and fulfils stakeholders' requirements⁹; only thus can they

continue to legitimise their function as institutions really adding public value to society (Martín, 2005: 7).

A brief look at management literature about the topic has thus been sketched; however, it is essential that one understands how CPI has been applied in the specific context of the local setting. This article thus purports to increase understanding of how CPI is applied to local administration so as to enable formulating theoretical conceptual frameworks or schemes for applying CPI in local administration in Spain. Two research questions have thus governed this study and helped to structure the purpose of this article. *How is continuous process improvement applied to and how does it evolve within public management of Spanish local administration? What impact has applying CPI had on public management?*

Theoretical framework: continuous process improvement in the public sector

Processes in organisations

The principles of "management" and industrial engineering must be examined if one wishes to trace the origins of the concept of processes within organisations. In terms of developing schools or theories of management, classical theory (led by the school of *Scientific Administration* of which Frederick W. Taylor was its main exponent) forms the starting point regarding thinking about processes (Davenport and Short 1990, 11). However, it was not until the 1990s that the term "process" came into vogue as a possible approach involving organisations' improvement and innovation (Zairi 1997). Garvin (1998) has stated that such enthusiasm for processes by organisations during the 1990s led to reducing departmental fragmentation and improved transversal coordination and communication ability. The result of diffusing the concept of "processes" has led to an explosion in the literature about this topic and the approaches required for improving them, such as CPI, redesigning and/or reengineering processes (Browning 1993; Tinnila 1995; Kezbon 1996; Tenner and de Toro 1997; Garvin 1998; Biazzo 2000).

CPI has thus been defined by Harrington (1991, 20-21) as: *"A systematic methodology developed for helping an organisation to make significant advances in the way they operate their processes."* Other authors

⁹ *Stakeholder* was incorporated by Freeman (1984). This term, also used by the EFQM model, is defined as being: "all those having an interest in an organisation, its activities and achievements. These could include clients, partners, employees, shareholders, owners, the administration, legislators".

have referred to it as: *process innovation*¹⁰ (Davenport 1993); *process redesign* (Davenport and Short, 1990) and even a possible evolution of the concept as *process reengineering* (Hammer and Champy 1993) or *business process management* (Elzinga *et al.*, 1995; Yu Yuang-Hun, 2006). Some authors have tried to order CPI into three main dimensions (Childe *et al.*, 1992; MacDonald 1995): *incremental or Kaizen CPI*¹¹, *process redesign CPI* and *business process reengineering*. Each is differentiated by the degree or type of improvement (incremental or radical), the scope of the improvement (for functional or interdepartmental processes), the costs and application times and the expectations and risks regarding the result to be obtained. The foregoing is shown in detail in the following Table.

Table 1. Continuous process improvement dimensions

	Incremental improvements - Kaizen	Redesigning processes	Reengineering processes
Degree of change	Small incremental changes	Intermediate changes	Radical changes
Scope	Functional and/or operational processes	Interdepartmental processes	All types of process
Implementation cost	Low	Intermediate	High
Expectations regarding results	Low	Intermediate	High

Source: own design based on MacDonald (1995) and Childe *et al.*, (1992)

The importance of modernising public management

Professor Blanca Olías de Lima (2001, p. 66) has defined public management as: *“the set of activities leading to obtaining public goods and services embracing activities developed by management and different administrative levels. Managing thus implies activities like combining and coordinating resources, recruiting, selecting, training and motivating employees, designing and operating processes, establishing and*

operating processes, procedures and standards, planning and operating goals and objectives and seeking the means for obtaining them.” Starting from such conceptualisation, it must be stated that exploring the ongoing (continuous) improvement approach in the extensive literature on public management theories and currents has resulted in going deeper into a rich historical evolution, full of fundamental milestones for this field¹². Thomas Woodrow Wilson, a committed exponent, published “The Study of Administration” in 1887 which burst onto the field of efficiency-based philosophy (Taylorian approach) within the public context (Rosembloom 2001).

Leonard D. White’s work viewed the true distancing of public administration as management separated from the political-administrative dichotomy (Shafritz *et al.*, 1991) and Waldo’s public administration studies in 1948, mainly characterised by applying different planning techniques, were based on the model of classic administrative functions known as: POSCOORDB (planning, organisation, coordination, reporting, management and budgeting) (Rhodes *et al.*, 1997). Nevertheless, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s that management began to exert direct influence on the public sector for attempting to make improvements there (i.e. from the problems generated by the traditional model of bureaucracy (Bouckaert 2006). One of the main stimulus during this period which provoked the transformation of the state in advanced and consolidated democracies (thus altering management’s role) was “the crisis of the welfare state”, combined with the political, social and technological transformations which have accompanied it, such as European integration (Echebarría and Lozada 1993). Echebarría and Lozada (1993, 105) have stated that, *“The economic recession came to disturb the dominant belief that the welfare state’s institutionality constitutes the definitive state in improving the democratic regime.”*

The rupture of economic and political consensus during the 1970s which has determined the so-called crisis of the welfare state (Prats and Catalá, 2000) is always referred to from the economic perspective characterising it. It thus becomes very difficult to

¹⁰ The term innovation (within this theoretical framework) can be defined as, “using employees’ creativity and scientific and technological knowledge to generate and/or introduce processes increasing the value offered to clients (Merino-Estrada, 2007)”.

¹¹ The term Kaizen comes from two Japanese ideograms meaning *Kai* = change, and *Zen* = goodness/whole, for improving. It has been understood in management terms as: *ongoing/continuous improvement* (Imai 1986; Suárez-Barraza 2007, 2009).

¹² The description of the evolution of public management given here presents the major landmarks related to this thesis’ main topic. There could thus be other landmarks which could also have been considered within this analysis of historical evolution literature. However, their description would not have added more value to the content of this theoretical framework.

think that a single perspective can explain the total set of the phenomenon (Castiñeira 1996). Castiñeira (1996, p. 598) thus proposed five perspectives for analysing a phenomenon as complex as the crisis of the welfare state (as shown below).

Table 2. Perspectives regarding the approach to the crisis of the welfare state

Dimension	Approach	Objective	Model in crisis
Legal	Legitimizing principles	Social justice	Deficit of legitimisation
Political-social	Services and functions	Social welfare	Incrementalist logic
Economic	Economic model	Economic welfare	Fiscal crisis
Managerial	Organisational techniques	Effectiveness/efficiency	Bureaucratisation, lack of governability
Participative	Social agents	Participative democracy	Loss of neocorporate liberty

Source: Castiñeira, 1996, p. 597.

Castiñeira (1996, p. 600) considered that the managerial dimension crisis emerged from the following, “The welfare state is poorly administered, meaning that the expense is greater than the quality and number of benefits being offered.” All this pressure from economic and political changes since the 1980s has thus been expressed in recurrent fiscal crises and the emergence of increasingly rigid budgets in which public administrations have been asked to satisfy more social needs whilst maintaining and reducing the costs involved in providing services (Díaz-Méndez 2007). This has meant that several public administrations from different countries have had problems with how to manage their institutions, thereby provoking a deficit in their fiscal and financial results (Giner-Rodríguez 1998).

Current literature about public management (from a political science and management viewpoint) is immersed in the analysis of new concepts such as “governance”¹³ resulting from the crisis of the welfare state (Innerarity 2006). Governance has thus been considered to be a concept more actively

considering government performance, focusing its needs on developing economic policy which is more coordinated with other institutions and social actors through state planning trying to overcome market decisions/failures, improving public service organisation and management and ensuring its efficient provision (Ysa 2004). Another new form of collaboration between government and society which has also been discussed and analysed within the context of the crisis of the welfare state is the so-called “relational state” (Mendoza 1996, 5). Understood as a new way of conceiving the state, it purports to transform the logic of welfare state performance and intervention mechanisms, maintaining the principles of universality and social cohesion inspiring it (Mendoza 1996). In other terms, the public management approach is now not just focusing its main values on efficiency, client-citizen orientation and public service quality; on the contrary, it goes much further, developing a social enterprise organisational model able to mobilise the necessary resources for managing public matters by “stimulating” the creation of complex interorganisational networks in which public and private stakeholders participate, establishing relationships between them in mutual commitment and responsibility for management participation (Mendoza 1996)¹⁴.

The aforementioned managerial and political transformations leading to administrative and governmental praxis mean that modernisation and improvement efforts can be located in countries having consolidated and advanced democracies. The modernisation of public management has thus been orientated towards the transformation of the “form” and “style” of managing administration for facing new challenges emerging from the crisis of the welfare state. Modernising policy has thus recognized a series of alternatives, perspectives, efforts and theories trying to provide “solutions” to the emerging problems within the management science (Echebarría and Mendoza 1999). Such dimensions (managerial, economic, social, etc.) originating in the crisis of the welfare state and other effects have highlighted

¹³ “Governance” is a broader concept than government as it covers government institutions and the process by which institutions interact with civil society and the consequences of mutual influence between the state and society. Innerarity (2006, p. 13) states that the activator state sustaining “governance” began to develop at the end of the 1990s from the need for putting forward an alternative to the idea of a minimum state as a reaction to managerialised administrative policy represented by the *new public management* model.

¹⁴ Improving management and public institution processes crosses public organisation frontiers, as can be seen in the relational state proposed by Mendoza (1996), as well as the production of “purely public” public services. This means that imposing limits on the private provision of services for public ends and stakeholders’ “collaborative capacity” in both sectors becomes a key aspect in managing an institution’s processes.

traditional public management's limitations (Huber and Stephens, 2000). The emergence of different alternatives, perspectives and efforts for improving and modernising public management has promised to ease such economic pressure on scarce resources (limited budgets), deal with citizens' unsatisfied demands regarding public services and focus on improving administration management, especially that which has not been well done (Metcalf and Richards 1987; Carrión 2007).

CPI in public management

William Deming's pioneering work (1986) stressed the importance of the ongoing improvement of work processes in government services. Thus, since his work about quality and ongoing improvement, the tendency and the positive impact on improving public services by applying CPI to certain governmental organisms has consolidated this managerial approach

being applied to public affairs until becoming a viable alternative for modernisation and improvement efforts in countries having advanced democracies (Gulledge and Sommers 2002; Moore, 2005). The pertinent literature thus gives examples of CPI being applied in countries where new public management (NGP) has been used as a banner for administrative reform; the emphasis has focused on redesigning and reengineering operational (public services), strategic (relationships with citizens) and support processes (controlling financial and fiscal management) in such countries (Meachm and Donahy, 1999; MacIntosh, 2003; Meachm and Walker, 2003).

Some specific efforts at implementing managerial techniques, models and approaches would be the EFQM, TQM, letters of service, ISO 9000, the Latin-American Quality Award and the CAF model (their main characteristics are given in the Table shown below)

Table 3. Synthesis of managerial techniques and approaches used in the public sector

Managerial approach or technique	Main characteristics	Authors
European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM)	The EFQM offers a reference framework formed by a set of criteria: 5 criteria regarding facilitating agents: leadership (10% or 100 points), people (9% or 90 points), alliances and resources (9% or 90 points), policy and strategy (8% or 80 points) and processes (14% or 140 points) and 4 results-based criteria: clients' results (20% or 200 points), people's results (9% or 90 points), results in society (6% or 60 points) and organisations' key results (15% or 150 points). The literature reports some cases of successful application in the public sector in Europe; it has been reported that 30% of local governments in the UK have used it and 90% of these have stated that significant improvements were directly obtained.	- George <i>et al.</i> , 2003 - Jacobs and Suckling, 2007
Total Quality Management (TQM)	TQM has practically extended throughout all industrialised countries and its popularity in the public setting has grown enormously since the end of the 1980s. It has been consolidated within such perspective until coming to represent the main alternative for public sector modernisation due to its strong emphasis on improvement and public service quality.	- Stringham, 2004 - Milakovich, 1991 - Berman and West, 1995 - Bowman and Hellein 1998
Citizen's Charters	The letters of service originated in the current of New Public Management at the start of the 1990s, being an initiative of the British Prime Minister John Major, known as a citizen's charter. Torres (2005, p. 697) concluded that letters of service show the willingness to transform a bureaucratic-type administrations into a citizen-orientated one in recent research into the use of this instrument in Spain, seeking to improve confidence in government by incorporating citizen-client redress/listening mechanisms, monitoring service performance and thus standardising and improving them.	- Pollit, 1994 - Torres, 2005
ISO 9000	The 2000 version of ISO 9000 focuses on an organisation's total approach towards customer satisfaction and management orientation and process improvement. Even though its application in the public sector has not been very widespread and has been derived from industrial sector experience, the literature reports some benefits from implanting it such as structuring, homogenising and documenting work (processes and procedures) and coordinating organisations' quality management systems, reducing defects or failures directly affecting an institution's operational and budgetary costs.	- Chu <i>et al.</i> , 2001 - Chu and Wang 2001
Latin-American Quality Award	This award was launched in 1999 by the Latin-American Foundation for Quality Management (FUN-FIBEQ). The award was agreed upon by consent during the 1st Latin-American Quality Management Convention held in Cartagena, Colombia, in 1999. It was awarded for the first time during the 10th Latin-American Summit in Panamá in 2000. One of the winning organisations on this occasion was the Esplugues de Llobregat town council, Cataluña, Spain. There have been few references in the public sector.	Camison <i>et al.</i> , 2007
CAF model	Common assessment framework CAF). This model is the result of cooperation and ongoing support developed by the European Union. It is currently being used as a tool so that European public administrations understand and use quality management techniques in their specific setting, providing a reference framework which is easy to use so that European public sector organisations can make their own self-evaluation.	CAF 2006 Saner 2002

Source: authors' design

Such managerial currents and techniques emerging from attempts to apply improvement efforts derived from them led to identifying two schools of thought in the literature regarding the feasibility of the “successful” application of private sector improvement efforts (Hazlett and Hil, 2000; Stringham, 2004); the “*optimistic*” school favoured their application, feasibility and positive impact (Milakovich, 1991; Rago, 1996; George *et al.*, 2003) and the “*sceptical*” school promoted arguments against their viability (Swiss 1992; Connor, 1997; Sharitzer and Korunka, 2000; Ramió-Mata, 2004; Lasierra, 2007). Even though the debate continues concerning the feasibility of effectively applying CPI, efforts at improving public management in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries continue and continue to grow (Gurría, 2006; OECD, 2006) due to the globalised setting, budgetary reductions and citizen pressure for receiving quality public services as well as wishing to participate in their management (Tari, 2006; Houston and Katavic, 2006; Longo, 2008). Such phenomenon has been experienced with greater pressure in administrations closer to their citizens, i.e. local governments (Díaz and Cuéllar 2007).

Some local governments have thus managed to maintain improvements in their processes and services for more than 10 years as part of their public management (Suárez-Barraza and Ramis-Pujol, 2008; Suárez-Barraza *et al.*, 2009), following an evolutionary path formed by a series of stages leading to a certain impact on the public management

specificities or particularities (Harkness *et al.*, 1996; Bessant 2003, 2005; Prajogo and Sohal 2004). Bessant’s analysis (2003), where 98% of sample cases came from private sector organisations, indicated that an organisation which has applied CPI throughout the years may experience five phases. Each phase is made up of interlinked and interrelated improvement activities. The first *precursor* phase is the level at which an organisation may “naturally” produce improvement or try to resolve problems regarding processes. This level is characterised by its short-term scope and for an organisation not needing to resort to any structured effort. The second *structured* phase involves more formal attempts to create and sustain CPI in an organisation; this leads to the third *strategic orientation* phase. The level of structuring created in the forgoing stage becomes formalised through establishing goals and objectives more systematically and strategically directing and linking CPI efforts. Once an organisation has reached the fourth phase it can generate self-produced, systematic and structured *pro active* CPI through its groups and individuals until reaching a level where an organisation’s dominant culture is CPI. In other words, the fifth phase means that an organisation has the *capacity for innovating and learning at any particular moment*.

López and Gadea (2001) have identified six particularities operating in the public setting when attempts are made to make any change in municipal management, called TQM or CPI. The following Table synthesises and summarises each particularity.

Table 4. Particularities regarding public management

Particularity	Main characteristics	Authors
Division of public management	Public management has three dimensions or settings: political, operational and strategic management	- Mintzberg, 1977 - Moore, 1998 - Longo, 2004
Organisational structure	The organisational structure governing town councils is the classical bureaucratic model ¹⁵ which may take different forms (political-fragmented, political- hierarchical, etc.).	- Mintzberg, 1984 - Morgan, 1986 - Ramió-Mata, 1999
Functional work and complying with legality	Strong emphasis on rigid compliance with legality (administrative standards and procedures) meaning that work is focused on specialised functional departments	- Echebarría, 1994 - Saner, 2002 - Hsieh <i>et al.</i> , 2002 - Aguilar, 2006 - Merino-Estrada, 2007
Process-based approach	Particularity begins to emerge, orientated towards results-based management, having a more transversal approach breaking with the classical bureaucratic model’s vertical structures	- Mukherjee and Braganza, 1994 - Gullledge and Sommer, 2002 - Moore, 1998, 2005
Heterogeneity of public service	Public management is characterised by high heterogeneity of public services provided for citizens	- Speller and Ghobadian, 1993 - López and Gade, 2001 - Gaster and Squires, 2003

¹⁵ Progressive public administration (PPA).

Particularity	Main characteristics	Authors
Different citizen-client roles	Citizens can take on different roles in their relationship with their local administration, meaning that limiting it to the term "client" is considered a limiting approach	- Swiss, 1992 - Mintzberg, 1996 - Olías de Lima, 2001
Degree of adapting managerial techniques	Analysing whether private sector managerial techniques can be adapted to a public setting	- Mendoza, 1991 - George <i>et al.</i> , 2003 - Houston and Katavic, 2006 - Tari, 2006 - Suárez-Barraza and Ramis-Pujol, 2008 - Suárez-Barraza <i>et al.</i> , 2009

Source: authors' design based on López and Gadea, including updated references

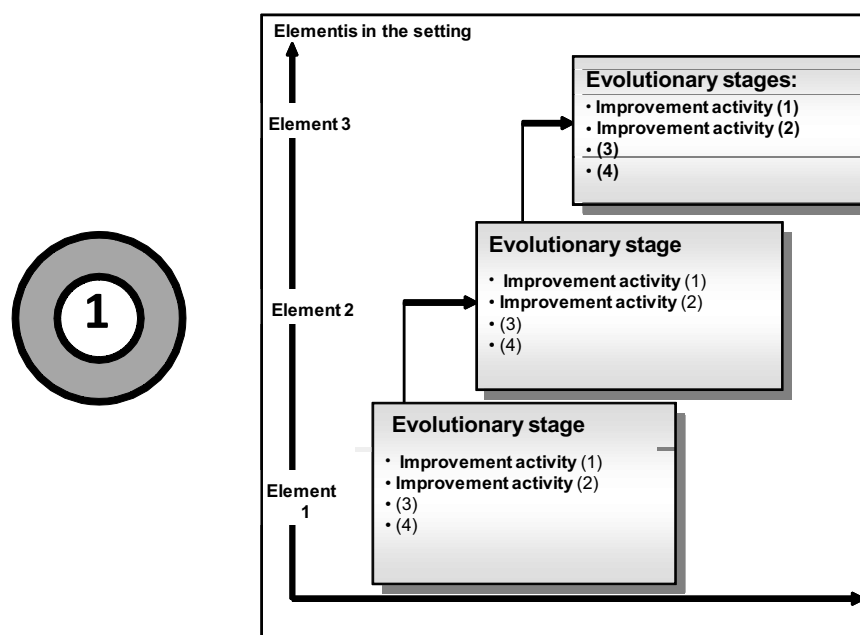
In the context of Spanish local administration, the CPI literature is practically useless from an academic angle, even though one can find some references written in the form of case studies, particularly regarding town councils initiating their efforts since the end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s (Maragall, 1992; Alcobendas town council, 1993; Giner, 1998; Torrubiano, 2007). However, such documents always deal with the topic generally, analysing matters from a practical point of view and none adopts an academic approach dealing with explanatory factors concerning how this managerial approach has been applied to local government. There is thus a theoretical vacuum which must be filled by responding to the proposed research questions.

The topic of improvement, sometimes called "quality", has become a debate regarding the Mexican government's modernisation processes by revealing itself to be an important alternative for

strengthening its government's legitimacy by means of redesigning institutions (its processes), their ongoing improvement and emphasising public organisations' greater performance (Moyado-Estrada, 2002). Nevertheless, the great challenge for Spanish and Latin-American local governments is to overcome isolated efforts and instil CPI instrumentation and institutionalisation as overall policy for promoting a managerial approach or work philosophy and as an instrument of innovation in work processes and public services received by their citizens.

Rounding off this section it should be stressed that analysing the pertinent literature led to establishing two conceptual reference frameworks helping to guide the empirical work by using the research questions posed in this study as its basic platform. The reference framework for the first research question, "*How can CPI be applied to and evolve in Spanish local administrations' public management?*" is shown below.

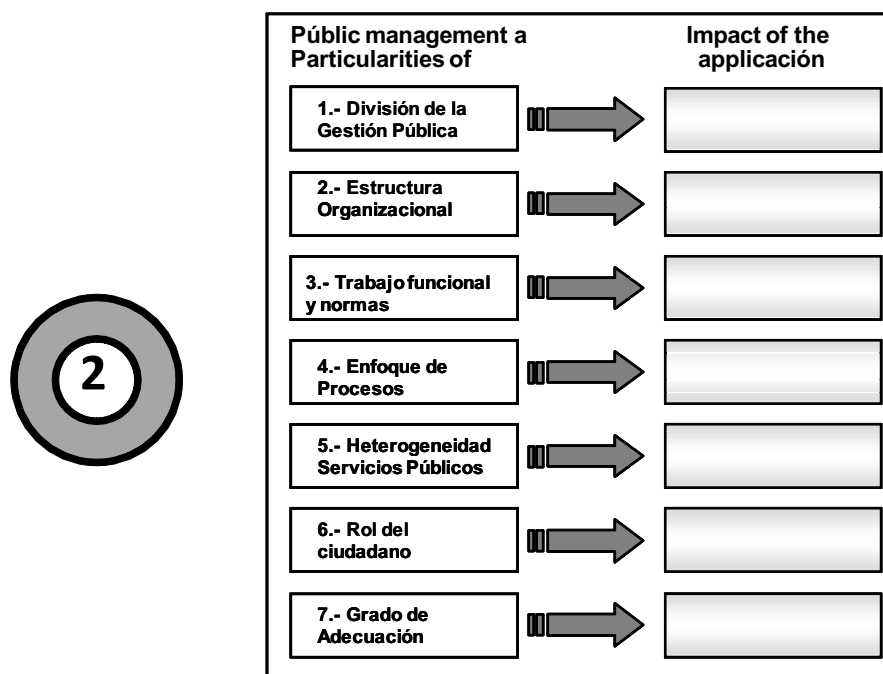
Figure 1. Reference framework for applying CPI



Source: authors' design

The reference framework for the second research question “What impact has applying CPI had on public management?” is shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Reference framework for the impact of applying CPI



Source: own design

Research methodology

The research methodology used for developing this study has been *qualitative-based* interpretativist¹⁶. This seeks to identify the meaning of a phenomenon for the pertinent actors (Patton, 2002) using a broad range of interpretative methods for increasing understanding the phenomenon (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 3).

This type of methodology was designed for constructing theory from findings appearing in the case studies being analysed (Einsehardt 1989). Constructing theory thus becomes how and why a local administration has applied its CPI efforts

throughout the years and the impact which this has produced on its particularities regarding public management (Van de Ven and Poole 1995).

The main strategy used is case study research analysis (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003) allowing the use of many sources of information, thereby reducing the possibility of loss of data and increasing its verification (Cooper and Schlinder, 2000). Exploiting this method's particularities, the selected cases' contingency can be analysed, focusing the investigation from a complete and holistic view of the phenomenon (Stake, 1994).

Case studies

The present investigation was carried out in two Spanish town councils (see Table 5); they were comparable because they have more than 40,000 inhabitants, have made a CPI effort over more than 15 years (having traceability reports) and have the financial and human resources for developing it. Also, both are exceptional cases, as they have obtained national and/or international awards, and CPI, TQM or excellence certificates.

¹⁶ Qualitative-based interpretativist research emerged from the social sciences. It is associated with a set of traditions and disciplines ranging from phenomenology (philosophy), ethnography (anthropology), ethno-methodology (sociology), symbolic interactionism (social psychology), hermeneutics (theology, philosophy, critical literature), heuristics (humanist psychology) and semiotics (linguistics) (Patton, 2002). Qualitative-based interpretativist research leads to explanations directly associated with phenomena being studied and has been very suitable when the object of investigation has been exploration-descriptive (differently to demonstrative objectives) regarding a new fact or little known one seeking to conclude with its description (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Glaser, 2004).

Table 5. Description of the selected case studies

Town council	CPI status	Other selection criteria	Population (date of investigation, 2007)	Number of civic employees
Town council "A" (situated in the metropolitan area of Barcelona)	CPI applied to and sustained for more than 15 years	A Spanish town council known for its broad experience in management systems related to excellence, CPI and total quality. This town council has received several awards for quality and excellence in its management such as the Latin-American Quality Award in 2000 and a special mention from the judges from the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in the same year	46,079	296
Town council "B" (situated in the autonomous community of Madrid)	La CPI applied during 20 years	A Spanish town council known for its broad experience in management systems related to excellence, CPI and total quality. Town council "B" obtained the 500 points necessary for obtaining the EFQM Gold Seal Award in 2004	107,098	1,140

Source: authors

Compiling data

The data was collected using five methods: 1) direct observation, 2) participative non-intrusive observation, 3) documentary analysis, 4) semi-structured in-depth interviews and 5) daily investigation, in the following sequential order. Special attention was paid to triangulating the four methods during data collection, converging on the same set of facts for strengthening the study's internal validity (Einsenhart and Graebner, 2007).

Direct observation. Direct observation consisted of making visits to places where the town councils' operational work was happening. Observation procedure emphasised the execution of work processes, characterising their limits and process frontiers (start and finish). Points were thus visited where some work processes could be seen from their coming into effect (citizen attention points, service modules, dedicated windows, remote points, etc.), their processing (offices, work areas, workshops, pumping units, stores), up to their finalisation or the delivery of a particular service (citizen attention points again). Photographs were taken to document basic moments, situations and facts pertaining to the study (Buchavean, 2001).

Non-intrusive participant observation. In the present investigation, 52 field events centred on two types of work meetings were observed using this method: observation of meetings of process improvement teams, work or change groups responsible for improving work processes in their natural setting and context and observation of meetings with quality or improvement coordinators (staff team). Work sessions with improvement teams were recorded, except when the teams requested that this should not happen. Ten hours of recorded material were obtained; these were transcribed and analysed.

Documentary analysis. The documentary material necessary for case integration was compiled for each town council, after direct observation of the installations. Twenty-eight types of internal documents and 21 types of records were collected from both town councils to be analysed, ranging from minutes, reports, quality and process improvement manuals, internal journals, broadcast/publicity articles, material on their Web pages and training manuals. Such mimeographed documentation meant that rapport and better understanding of the phenomenon in question could be established in each case (Merriam, 1998).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews. The 18 semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out after the direct observation and non-intrusive participative observation (source of support). Those interviewed were town council employees who were directly involved in CPI efforts (see Table 6.). Eighteen interviews were held, lasting around 75 to 120 minutes; these were transcribed and close contact was maintained by telephone and e-mail with participating actors to resolve doubts and interpretations.

Table 6. The actors interviewed

Actors interviewed	Town council "A"	Town council "B"
Political level		
• Mayors	1	
• Deputy mayors	1	1
Technical-managerial level		
• Public managers or CPI effort coordinators	1	1
• Those responsible for processes (intermediate posts)	2	1
• Department directors (social area, town-planning, finances, citizen attention, public works, human resources, etc)	3	2
• Public employees (some improvement team leaders)	3	2
Total	11	7

Source: authors

Research diary. This consisted of annotations jotted down during each contact made in the investigation. This method was extremely important since it represented a source for guiding and adjusting the investigation when it was necessary (e.g. during participation with improvement teams when a meeting could not be recorded), representing a useful instrument for making observations and noting down any relevant data. Moreover, it represented a useful instrument for making reflections, informal comments and other basic elements when collecting/ noting data (Einsenhardt, 1989).

Data analysis

A database was constructed, as well as matrices, networks and tables for the patterns so obtained for analysis. Likewise, when all the evidence had been reviewed, analysed and codified, a first draft of each case study was written in which the main informants re each town council were considered. Reviewing the case studies' first draft helped validate the data collection and was also useful for identifying possible gaps and obtaining more data and patterns, forming reflections which were relevant for the study. Following the design established for the investigation, a cross-case analysis was made to compare the cases to find frequencies and/or coincidences in individually determined concepts or differences which could have been explained logically.

A sequence of CPI evolutionary stages appeared from such analysis (using process theory as a basis –horizontal analysis at micro level– Pettigrew, 1990, 1997). Using reference framework 2 led to obtaining a theoretical scheme regarding the context, containing the impact of applying CPI regarding the particularities of public management. It is worth noting that these research products arising from cross-case analysis were compared again with the pertinent literature (theories and both reference frameworks so obtained). The foregoing was an essential step towards increasing research reliability, taking the conclusions to the limit to establish a more creative theoretical framework which would really make a contribution towards the field of operation management in the public setting. This work was thus considered to be an iterative process of qualitative investigation due to the toing and froing between the data obtained through the reference framework and the literature studied (Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2001).

Field study: a description of the cases analysed: *Town council "A" (Barcelona)*

Like several Catalan towns in the suburbs of Barcelona, the municipality related to town council "A" underwent significant demographic growth from 1950 to 1970, transforming it from an old area of rural second homes for Barcelona's middle class to an industrial city having a high quality of life. The spirit of the city¹⁷ may be found in the latter expression, according to some of its citizens. The town council's spirit of opening up and change was observed in the expressions of its technical and political leaders following years of work on CPI. For example:

"Our municipal management has been based on the principles of quality, improvement and service for many years now. It is a recognised model within the framework of our more immediate setting and within the tissue of municipalism throughout Spain. We received a visit from two town councils a few days ago, Elx (Alicante) and Arganda del Rey (Madrid), and representatives from the Catalan Association of Municipalities (ACM) and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), who have been interested in our organisational system and the good results obtained, fundamentally in the quality of the services which we offer. the spirit of ongoing improvement present in each and every one of the projects taking shape in this city, to make our city more agreeable, healthy and friendly" (town council manager in *Revista Interna*, March 1997).

Town council "A" having 296 employees (data taken from town council reports, 2007), manages a city of 46,079 people (2007), its municipal area covering 46 km² in the Baix Llobregat region. Politically, town council "A" has been run since the democratic transition (1979) by the Cataluña Socialist Party (PSC), having more than 15 years' absolute majority, thereby leading to ongoing and stable decision-making. Technically, a central body called *Gerencia*¹⁸ has been mainly responsible for the institution's

¹⁷ This expression has been taken from citizens' comments in *Revista Interna* edited monthly by town council A, sustained by the results of four-yearly surveys carried out by the institution. For example, 95.6% of the citizens in the 2000 survey stated that they felt satisfied to live in this city compared to other municipalities in the province of Barcelona having similar populations which returned 86.1% to 82.2%. Memoria del Premio Iberoamericano, 2000, page 66.

¹⁸ Town council management structure (organigram) forming a link between town council policy management and operational management (Ramio-Mata, 1999).

strategic¹⁹ and operational management. Town council “A” functions within its strategic context using “*Integrated management system for town council processes*”²⁰ structured into three essential elements: citizens, processes and employees. By applying such managerial system town council “A” has tried to face the difficult challenge of providing its citizens with more and better goods and services, without increasing its management costs.

Town council “B” (Madrid)

The city pertaining to town council “B” is situated to the north of Madrid’s metropolitan area, covering 45 km² and having 107,098 inhabitants (2006), industrial and service activities predominating in its area. The town council has had to confront very important situations involving change in its setting and citizens’ demands since the first democratic elections held in 1979, spectacular demographic growth (almost 20,000 inhabitants in 12 years) and an important lack of infrastructure and equipment involved in improving the population’s quality of life. During this period, the institution’s municipal action has been characterised by a marked emphasis on sociocultural services, the development of new modernisation mechanisms, innovation in its management (participative methodology, technological projects) and the willingness for managing large-scale urban planning.

Such urban planning has been projected since the 1980s by the government team for managing and promoting the development of industrial and service infrastructure which has slowly enabled this city to become a focus for attracting investment from private companies which see this city’s potential for developing their businesses as it is an active and booming city (given its closeness to Barajas airport and the city of Madrid). Its management model²¹ has

been a priority for the town council and an element for ongoing transformation and improvement, being positively appreciated by citizens, politicians/policy makers and other stakeholders, as well as having been a management model which has been endorsed on several occasions by receiving recognitions and awards such as the United Nations Public Service Award, the European Good Practice Award (for Spain) during the Rotterdam conference, the European Excellence Gold Seal award in 2005 and the Municipal Performance Plan (MPP) Public Management Excellence Award in 2006.

Regarding its political context, town council “B” has passed through a period of political stability during which the Spanish Workers’ Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español - PSOE) has enjoyed three terms of office until 2007, when the Partido Popular came to power. Regarding its technical context, town council “B” has seven municipal management performance areas dealing with policy-making, ten technical-professional offices and a general coordination section. Inter-functional committees have been set up²², such as the *Coordination Committee*²³ and the *Management Committee*²⁴ for dealing with a departmental system’s externalities²⁵. This city, since its beginnings as a democratic town council, has opted for improvement and modernisation. Like other local administrations beginning improvement or modernisation efforts during the middle and end of the 1980s, understanding CPI has evolved in line with learning about such managerial approach.

Evolutionary stages involved in en applying CPI

Applying CPI and its evolution in town council “A” can be approached through a series of five evolutionary stages in which landmarks show how the model has matured. These stages identified during the

¹⁹ Strategic management may be defined as: “the process by which an organisation formulates a mission, vision, values and strategic objectives to provide an organisation with leadership/management” (Hill and Jones, 2011).

²⁰ Town council “A”’s specific system planning, directing and managing local administration’s daily tasks, having a horizontal and/or transversal process approach for delivering public services.

²¹ A management model, according to Robbins and Coulter (2005:495), is “a strategic design concerning how a company tries to obtain profits from a wide range of strategies, processes and activities,” clarifying why, for the public sector, it is trying to comply with legality and provide public services.

²² A group of specialists from different town council functional departments or areas temporarily collaborating to achieve a common objective.

²³ Its purpose is to facilitate coordination and links between policy management and operational/technical areas. It consists of four directors from the main town council performance areas and is responsible for coordinating the main management areas.

²⁴ This is the main operational and administrative management facilitating entity. It is formed by all the directors from the area and managers from the institution and is presided over by the mayor and the first deputy mayor. It is also the area which is responsible for the Corporate Quality Plan and for promoting and following-up the introduction and evaluation of Quality Plan tools and results.

²⁵ Some synonyms for externality could be factors, elements or variables.

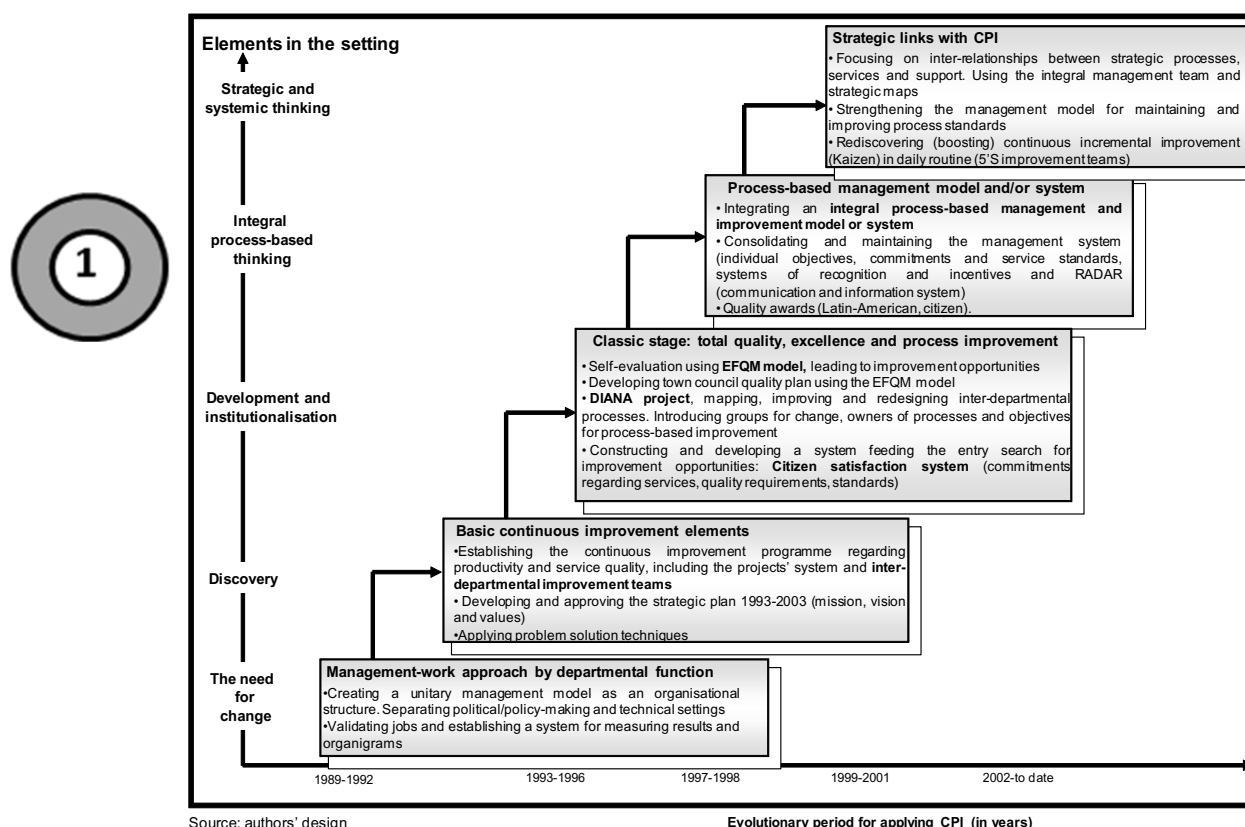
investigation are explanatory factors re the research question, *How have CPI been applied and how have they evolved in local public management?* Such evolution has been labelled in the following phases:

1. *Managerial approach stage - work by departmental functions (1989-1992).*
2. *Basic elements during ongoing improvement stage (1993-1996).*

3. *“Classical” management by total quality, excellence and improvement stage (1997-1998).*
4. *System and/or process management model approach stage (1999-2001).*
5. *Strategic involvement with continuous process improvement (CPI) approach stage (2002-to date).*

The key improvement activities carried out in each evolutionary stage are identified below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Improvement activities by stages in town council “A”



The way CPI have been applied in town council “A” has been a process which has been specified over a 20-year period for constructing what is now this managerial approach adopted by this town council. In fact town council “A” has adopted a problem-solving methodology²⁶ through improvement teams (a Kaizen-type CPI approach involving incremental improvements) (stage two, Figure 3), until managing to form a *CPI-based managerial system* (stage four,

Figure 3). Regarding this, the deputy manager and quality coordinator commented that:

“During those years we understood that we needed to do something, and this was when we began, firstly, to detect that the problems were inter-departmental and then sought as a solution, the improvement teams, using a problem resolution methodology we learned during each period until achieving what we have today.” (E-EL-01 a, June, 2005²⁷).

²⁶ Suárez-Barraza (2011, 58) understands a method for resolving problems as: a Kaizen methodological pattern representing an ongoing effort to improve daily work, seeking to identify, analyse and resolve the root cause of a problem arising from an organisation’s operational process for changing its *status quo*.

²⁷ This code was used for each interview to try to control the interviews held; the code refers to the letter E (interview), the first two letters of the name of the town council in question, a consecutive number and the date when the interview was held.

After applying the Kaizen-type CPI approach (problem solution) for some years, they became aware that this in itself was not enough, since in spite of the personnel involved being motivated, the improvements did not have a real impact on the whole work process. Put in other terms, CPI conceived as a methodology for resolving problems through improvement teams fell short in its scope for improvement as the processes where departmental problems were found were horizontal ones and their improvement was not confined to functional departments' frontiers. Town council "A" thus visualised CPI more as a problem solution methodology than redesigning work processes using a horizontal approach (interdepartmental) (stage three, Figure 3). This leap forward regarding how CPI were applied in town council "A" was mainly due to the institution's discovery of the EFQM model of excellence. One of the quality coordinators stated that,

"The topic of process management was a great find. In fact, it let us have a model integrating all these problem-resolution tools and techniques in an ordered and systematic way which, until now, had been not much regarding the need we identified as more pressing: process improvement with EFQM thus let us do it in a more orderly way." (E-EL-02, September, 2005).

In later years, due to the positive results obtained by using this new CPI approach, it operated as a process redesign approach involving service quality techniques for encouraging citizen participation by establishing a series of agreements or commitments regarding co-responsibility. CPI thus became integrated into town council operative management regarding aspects such as the MPP and the operating budget. CPI thus began to be seen by town council "A" as part of its management system from a more holistic and strategic approach (stage four, Figure 3.). It could even be said that it did not just form part of the management system but that such managerial approach began to represent the heart of the system itself. Town council "A" currently manages its organisation through its Integrated Process-based Management System arising from citizen and other stakeholders' needs, executes processes, measures and improves it through objectives regarding individual processes and then reflects again on improvements in four-year cycles. One of the quality coordinators commented that,

"The town council's process-based management system has been the driving force, I think, in this organisation's modernisation and improvement because it has ensured

that the people participate, the people know what is expected of them, the people know how they will be measured and it has led to the citizens knowing what they can expect of the town council and a good part of our planning has been based on process-based management, the budget, the MPP, process objectives, and even individual objectives." (E-EL-02, September, 2005)

CPI evolution has been accumulative in terms of public organisation learning (management, quality coordinators, intermediate posts and employees). In other terms, CPI techniques and tools providing responses to their needs were maintained and became integrated into their management system. It is worth stressing that the application and evolution process was hardly planned throughout this entire trajectory due to there being practically no type of prior experience in the Spanish public sector when the town council's improvement effort began.

The following section deals with the evolutionary stages identified by town council "B". As can be seen, the stages did not coincide with those in the previous case, basically due to contingency and other explanatory factors dealt within the conclusions. Each town council went through a similar evolutionary process, but the chronology regarding the phases and their motivations varied, even though the proceedings introduced by both lead to talking of a performance model or pattern (conceptual framework).

Town council "B", stages:

1. *Management modernisation stage (1984-1995)*
2. *Management system quality development and integration stage (1996-2001)*
3. *Improvement and innovation stage: towards an intelligent town council (2002-to date)*

Town council "B" began such attempts to incorporate managerial techniques into its daily tasks (see Figure 5); this was case of the objectives-based management and user satisfaction studies. The mayor stated that they sought to begin to transform their town council's public management so that it could face the new challenges approaching it:

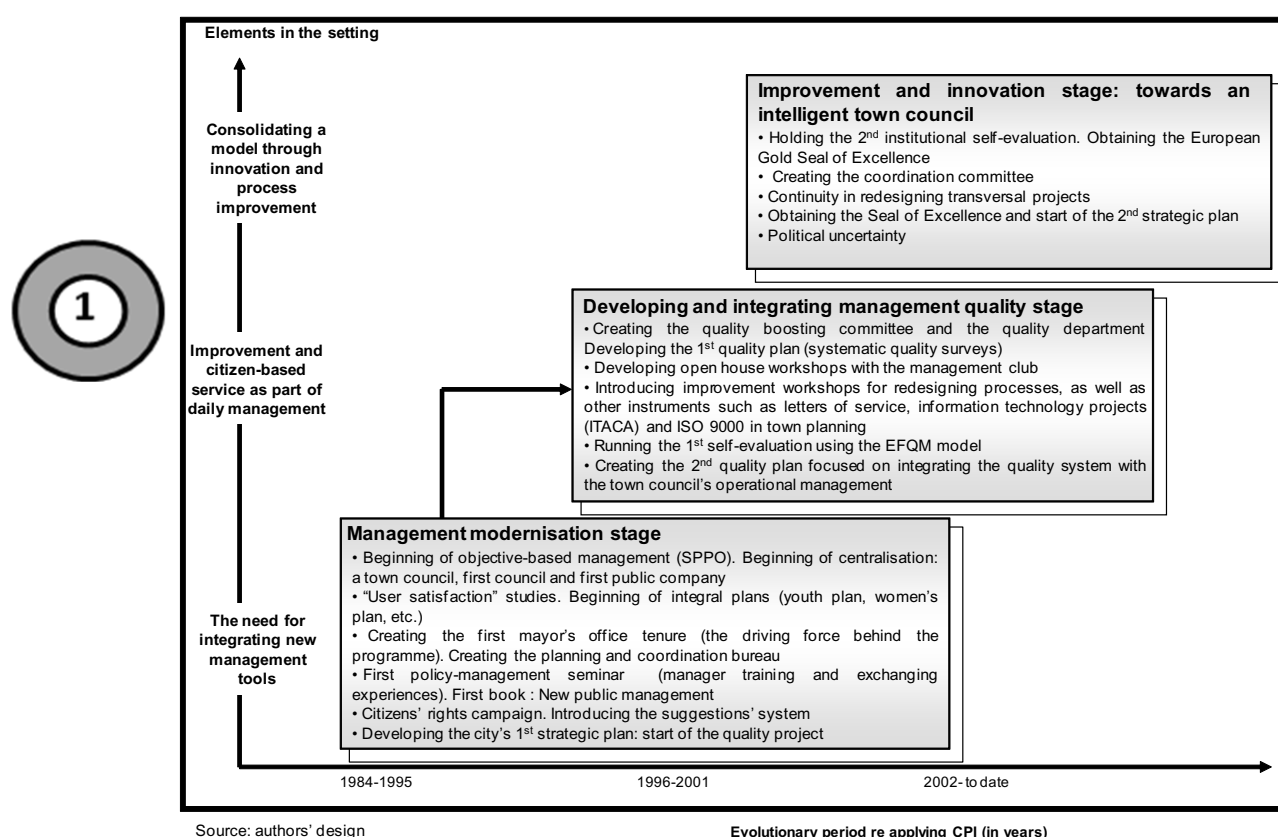
"In 1979, following the first democratic town council elections, we took over management, coming from the private company-sector and we held the view of excellence. I have been the mayor since 1983 and the first deputy mayor since 1979. Practically since then, our

efforts have been focused on making our administration like the English court which, at one time, was the entity standing for service prestige and quality" (interview held with the mayor published in the *Management Club VIEW* newspaper, January 2006, year IV, No. 36, p. 12).

Different lines of action then emerged from here in both the first and second Quality Plans²⁸ containing CPI as a central theme. According to the town council's first Quality Plan, CPI was thus conceived

as a process problem solution methodology by setting up improvement workshops as well as being seen as a mechanism for documenting, standardising and certifying urban planning licence department work processes (using ISO 9000). The same thing happened during the second Quality Plan by incorporating the EFQM model of excellence self-evaluation; this led to tuning the details corresponding to understanding CPI as a problem resolution or process standardisation methodology²⁹.

Figure 4. Improvement activities by stages in town council "B"



Nevertheless, by integrating EFQM into its municipal management model, this town council began to see CPI from a more strategic viewpoint in which process improvement represented a un agglutinating element for its main purposes such as local administration,

i.e. its relational approach (directed towards the citizens), its managerial approach (directed towards results) and its approach regarding legality. Town council "B" thus currently conceives CPI as a central piece in its public management model where three essential steps are made in the whole organisation to ensure ongoing compliance with them.

²⁸ A quality plan according to ISO 9000:2005, basic elements and vocabulary, defines it as being, "a document specifying which procedures and associated resources should be applied, who should apply them and when they should be applied to a specific project, product, process or contract."

²⁹ Standardising processes is a phase of problem resolution methodology seeking to homogenise the work of an organisation's work processes.

- *Step 1 – Detecting and analysing the requirements and expectations of the city’s population to make them become the central hub of municipal management. The town council must thus have a department specialising in investigation and having many sources for detecting and listening to its inhabitants;*
- *Step 2 - Introducing some tools for improving service provision, trying to guarantee that these are adapted to local requirements and expectations. There was more public employee participation³⁰ during this second phase through listening to their proposals and attending improvement workshops; and*
- *Step 3 – Evaluating the results obtained through surveys in which the citizens evaluated/rated municipal management. These results were imparted and broadcast. The information so obtained led to a new cycle of ongoing improvement.*

This fresh approach to understanding CPI is summed up in the words of the citizen attention coordinator:

“Quality tends to be something more than forming part of the management system; it cannot be a parallel system. The quality management system has to be integrated into the town council’s day-to-day management system. This is our approach, and I think that it is very important. I mean, quality is not a department which has to supervise how many certifications it has, how many improvement teams it has formed/trained; no, quality has to be embedded in the management system. If you are using the budget in your management system, then that is where quality is, whatever it may be in

each case, it is used by every town council, quality has to penetrate there” (E-A-01 June, 2006).

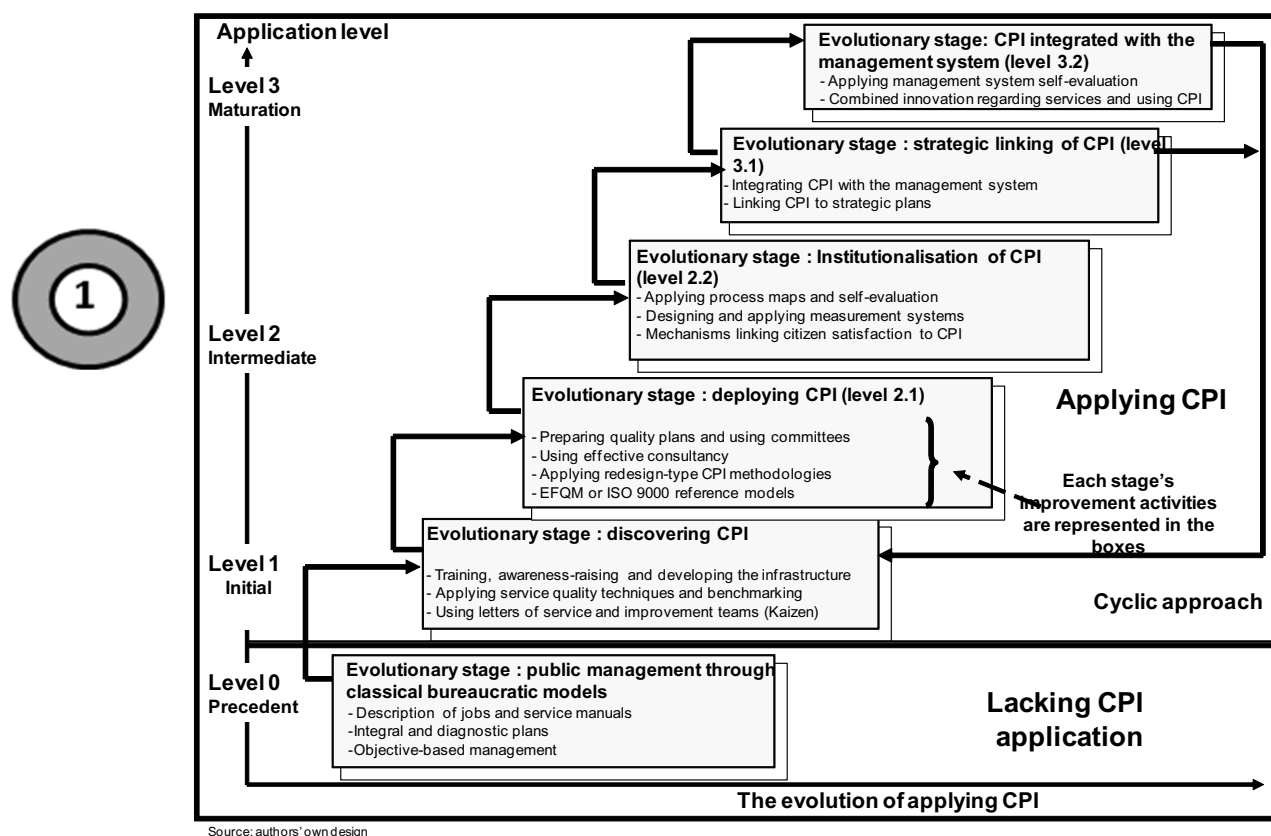
Results and Discussion

The purpose of this investigation became increasingly framed within an understanding of applying CPI to Spanish local administration to enable theoretical conceptual schemes or frameworks to be formulated regarding applying CPI to local administration. The first theoretical contribution responded to the question *How have CPI been applied to and evolved within local administrations’ public management?* Following cross-case analysis it could be stated that CPI was applied to local administration management through a set of *evolutionary stages* at different application levels.

Figure 5 shows the result of analysis by comparing cases. It allows common application levels and evolutionary stages and improvement activities for each case analysed to be identified. Four application levels regarding applying CPI were thus identified: *preceding level* (level 0) up to *maturation level* (level 3). Common improvement activities comprising each evolutionary stage were identified in each of them. When level 4 or maturation was reached, then evidence was obtained for indicating that town councils “A” and “B” had to provide feedback regarding level 1 and 2 evolutionary stages’ improvement activities to improve their previously established CPI management system model. This confirmed the cyclic approach to CPI application and evolution.

³⁰ Participation refers to training improvement teams made up by public employees directly involved in resolving problems arising in their daily work.

Figure 5. Applying CPI to public management



As part of the analysis comparing cases, it could also be observed that the evolutionary stages and their improvement activities did not appear to the same extent in each town council. Each evolutionary stage and improvement activity was presented during a determined moment in each local administration's history or during a specific situation which the town council was experiencing at the time. Each of these moments thus had distinct relevance regarding its application and evolution.

*Public management through classical-bureaucratic models*³¹ (level 0 = preceding) stage. Each town council studied began its CPI efforts from classical-bureaucratic management models reflected in their current organisational structures. Town council "A" had introduced the «*process-based management*» model managed through a matrix organisational

structure. Town council "B" had opted for a coordinated approach by creating organisms helping them to minimise the negative effects which classical-bureaucratic models could have produced in its institution. An example of this would be this town council's coordination committee.

The motives for applying CPI in their management as an initial modernisation and improvement step during this first evolutionary stage varied depending on the case (town council "A" being immersed in a budgetary and fiscal deficit and town council "B"'s need to try to face the effects of classical-bureaucratic models provoking dysfunction in its work processes and services). Nevertheless, when comparing the cases, a common topic was the willingness to try to change or improve by a group of public or political/policy-making workers.

The stage called *discovering CPI* or *initial stage 1* emerged from this. Town council "A" spent almost three years discovering, forming and applying improvement activities throughout the whole institution, such as improvement teams, problem

³¹ This is based on mechanistic organisations which are pyramidal, vertical, full of functional departmental standards and rules re work supported by Taylor's scientific administration theory and Weber's theory of bureaucracy (Morgan, 1986). Mintzberg (1984) called them "mechanical bureaucracy."

resolution and developing service quality techniques (surveys and citizen panels). The objective-based management technique took longer to apply in town council “B” and in some town council areas, until service quality techniques became consolidated in the entire institution (surveys and studies), as well as some modernisation plans such as the youth plan (quality plan prerequisites) thereby allowing a transversal approach to processes to be adopted.

Town council “A” reached the zenith of its work on improvement and redesigning processes during the *second or intermediate stage, in its CPI deployment level (2.1)* by applying the Diversified Information and Assistance Network (DIANA) project and its groups for change, as happened in town council “B” with its first Quality Plan, and getting several improvement activities under way, such as the improvement workshops, letters of service or ISO 9000 town-planning.

A strong presence could be seen in both town councils for the second sublevel of the *intermediate stage – CPI institutionalisation*. This happened in town council “A” by applying a *process-based management system* integrated into the town council’s public management which was reviewed cyclically (every four years) through service commitments serving as the source for maintaining and redesigning processes. Town council “B” tackled integrating the

second Quality Plan in the town council’s strategic and operational management using the management and coordination committees as the driving forces for sustaining the improvements achieved via periodic EFQM self-evaluation and process indicators.

The *third stage, the so-called subsequent strategic and system improvement level*, was equally present in both town councils. Its presence was strong in both of them; the first level of the third stage (3.1., strategic) could be seen in the strong link or integration between the four-year MPP and the systematised CPI improvement activities. On the other hand, only partial evidence was found in the last level of the third stage (3.2., system improvement), since both town councils had just started to explore the improvement of the whole management system using CPI. Town council “A”, for example, had revamped its former innovative improvement activities (combined Kaizen and redesign improvements) for boosting and rejuvenating its cyclic process management system. Town council “B” had opted for getting closer to what was local (relational scheme), having a strong emphasis on coordination at management level and the search for more radical innovations in its more transversal processes such as information technology projects and process maps for improving and keeping its quality system integrated to the management of the institution. The following table summarises the above.

Table 7. Analysis of improvement activities according to evolutionary stage

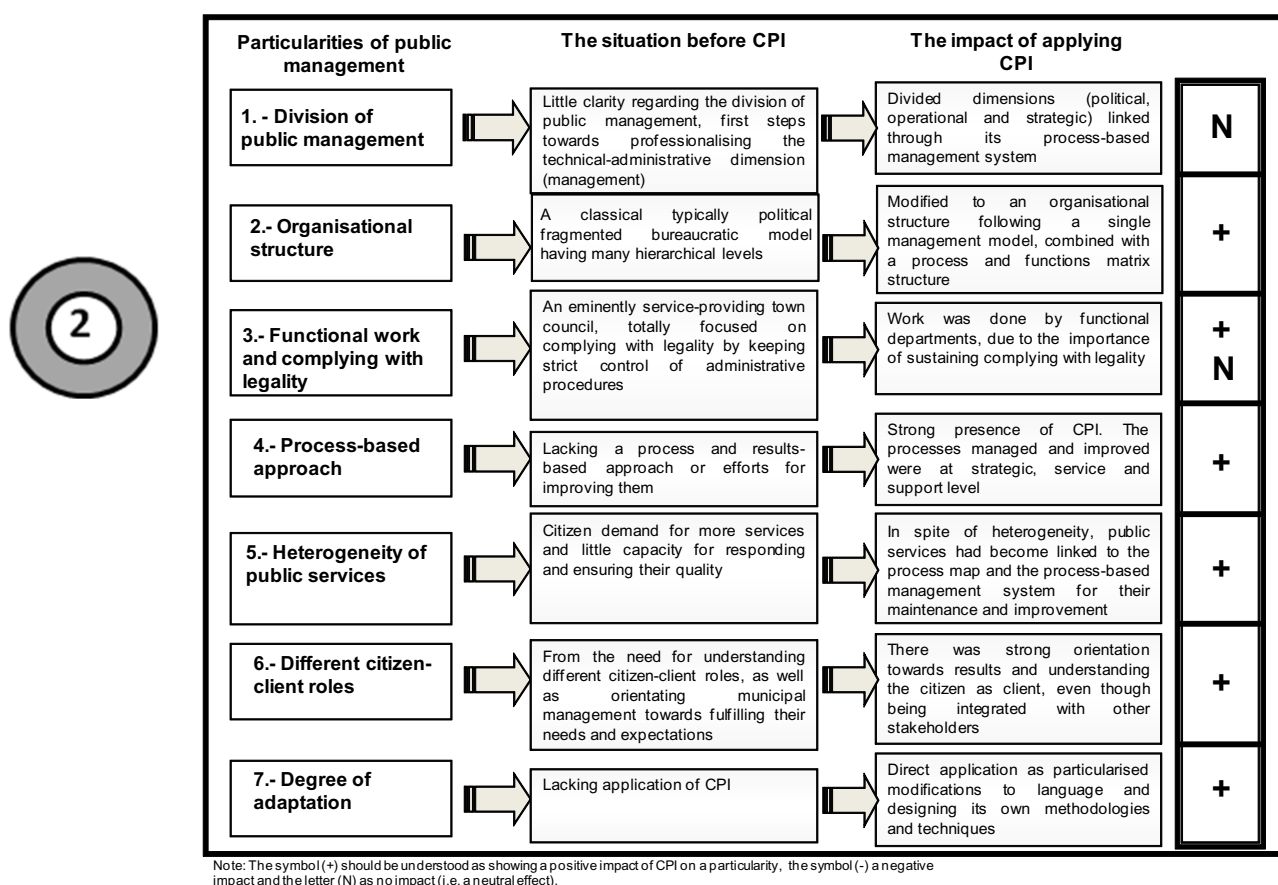
Evolutionary level/stage	Improvement activities
0 Precedent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job description - Service and procedure manuals - Integrated plans - Objective-based organisational diagnosis and management
1 Initial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training and raising public awareness - Service quality (surveys, focal groups) - Letters of service - Improvement teams, problem resolution (Kaizen)
2.1 Intermediate deployment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality plans - Management quality committees - Using effective consultation - Workshop training - Redesigning processes - Running Kaizen improvement workshops - EFQM reference models (self-evaluation) and ISO 9000 (auditing)
2.2 Intermediate/institutionalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Process maps - Measurement systems (operational indicators) - Mechanisms linking citizen satisfaction to processes (service commitments, quality boosting committees, IT projects) - Self evaluations

Evolutionary level/stage	Improvement activities
3.1 Strategic maturity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CPI management system - CPI bonding with strategic plans and MPP - Strategic, operational and individual objectives - Management squads - Information systems - Strategy follow-up through committees
3.2 System maturity/improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self evaluations and/or external auditing (EFQM, ISO 9000, Latin-American) - Applying combined Kaizen improvements and redesigning PDCA cycle levels

This article's second contribution consists of analysing CPI, given the public sector's specific singularities. Each town council's performance (see Figures 6 and 7) regarding elements detected in the literature review as being "particularities of public management" (see Table 4) and how introducing CPI has affected such variables is analysed in answer to the second research

question *How has applying CPI affected public management?*³² Even though the pertinent literature on applying CPI may have reported the presence of evolutionary stages and improvement activities (Harkness et al., 1996; Bessant, 2003; Prajogo and Sohal, 2004), their application has not been analysed in public sector literature.

Figure 6. The impact of applying CPI in town council "A"



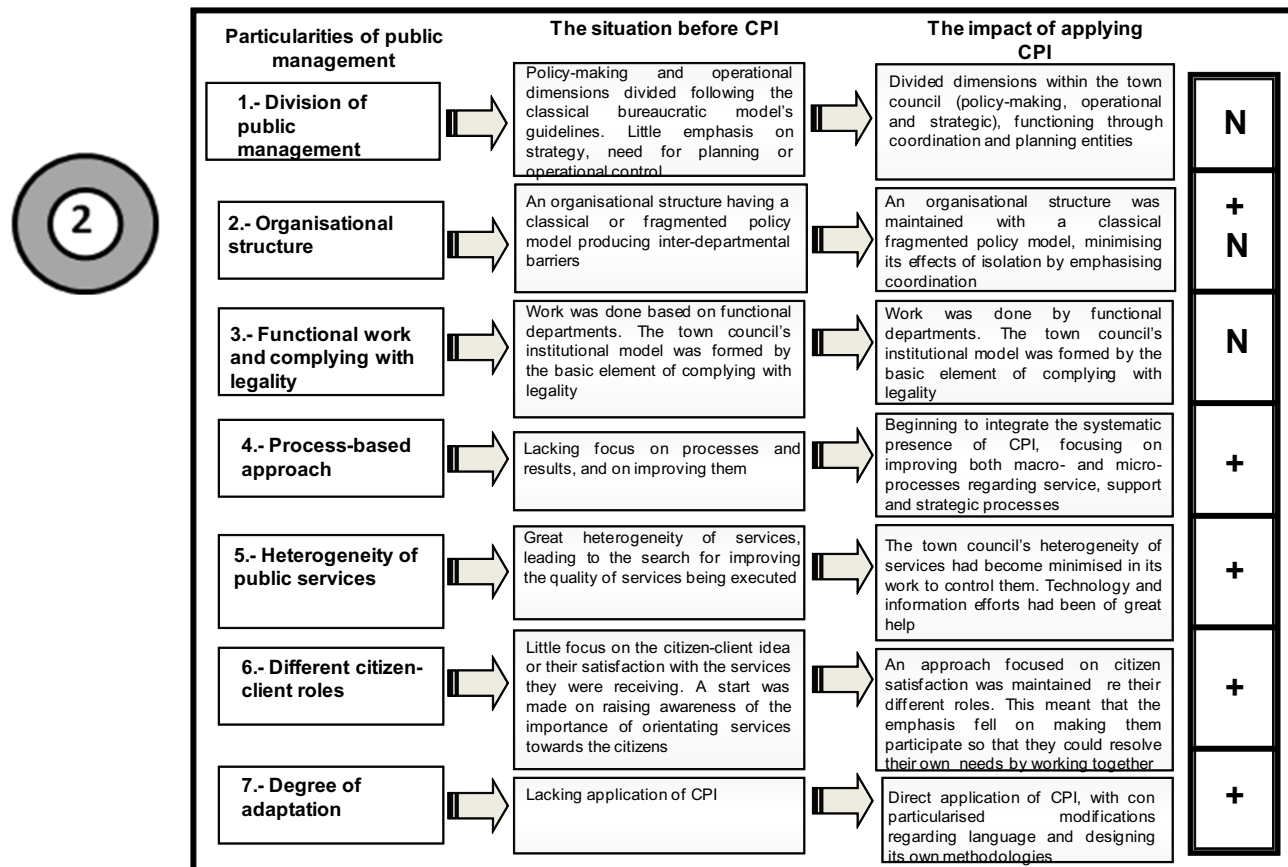
³² It should be stressed that measuring the impact of applying CPI in both town councils was supported by each data collection method used in the investigation. The investigators have thus inferred and measured each impact, supported by evidence found in each town council. Obviously, we are aware that such measurement is qualitative interpretativist based, meaning that such results must be validated using a quantitative

approach. Nevertheless, based on the evidence found, it can be stated that such impact was significant re some of the variables identified as being particularities of public management, above all when it had passed through different improvement activities and evolutionary stages. Each variable identified as being a particularity was used as an overall management indicator for the impact of CPI.

The most significant difference found concerning management CPI literature regarding the first contribution was that the pace of applying CPI effort in a public setting was slower, more gradual and prolonged. Such evolutionary stages happening

at such pace was strongly influenced by some public sector particularities identified in the literature and shown in Figure 1 (political dimension, organisational structure, service heterogeneity and citizen roles).

Figure 7. The impact of applying CPI in town council "B"



Source: authors' own design

Note: The symbol (+) should be understood as showing a positive impact of CPI on a particularity, the symbol (-) a negative impact and the letter (N) as no impact (i.e. a neutral effect).

Some particularities directly influenced the pace of CPI application and evolution. 1) *The political dimension's influence*, i.e. the guidelines, decisions and management in the sphere of this setting influenced the time for applying CPI. 2) *The influence arising from the cultural setting of work resulting from organisational structures following the classical bureaucratic model*, thereby leading to certain dysfunction in coordination, communication and managerial information flow, as well as power struggles when it came to applying CPI. 3) *The strong emphasis on fulfilling legal requirements (approach input) and standards* which could have

delayed or halted the application and evolution of effort (Moore 1998, 2005; Ramió-Mata 1999; López and Gadea, 2001; Hsieh *et al.*, 2002; Saner, 2002). CPI application and evolution thus happened in slow and gradual stages. Elements of sustainability³³ have been developed as solutions have emerged with patience and

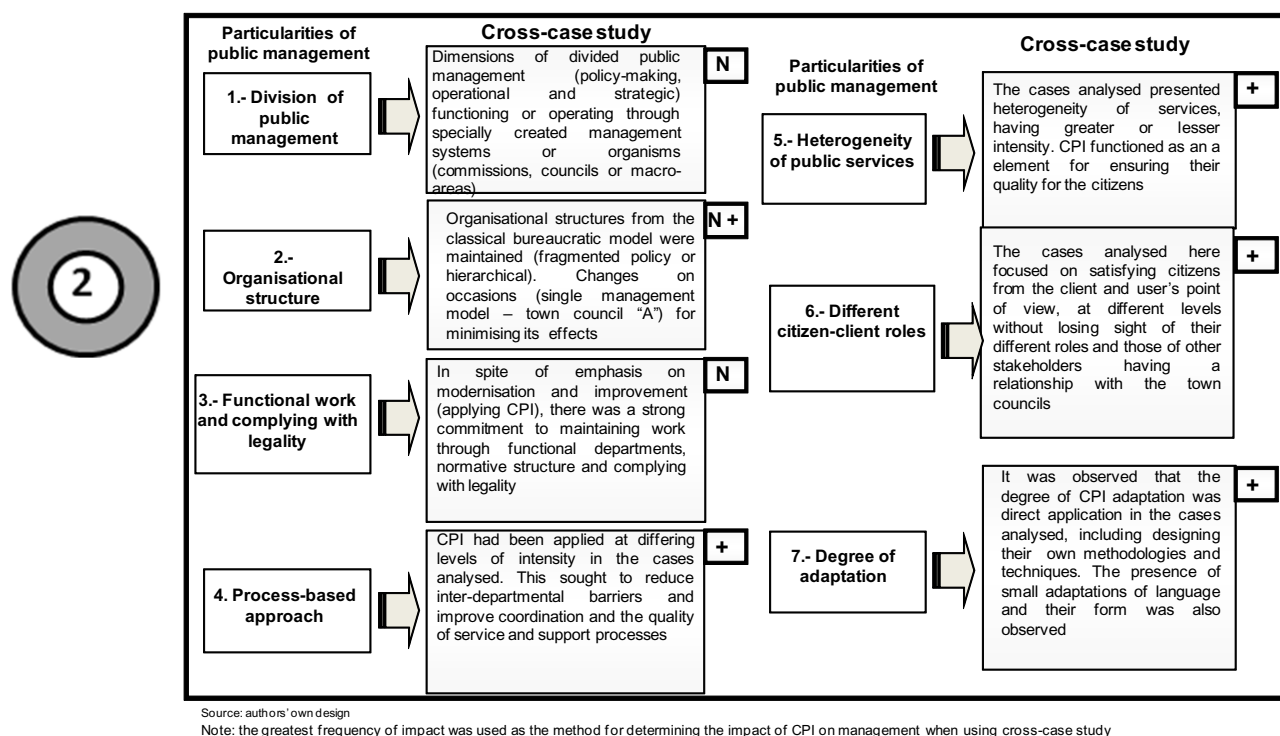
³³ The term sustainability in this article does not refer to the concept of sustainable development. It specifically refers to the maintenance and/or sustainability of improvement undertaken during work processes (Bateman, 2005).

perseverance to pressures from the external setting. Basic elements have been necessary to enable waiting for the necessary political and technical moments (opportunity advantages) (Kingdon, 2002) to ensure that improvement efforts were ongoing and constant.

The analysis from comparing both cases and the CPI literature review led to positive impacts being observed from introducing CPI into local government (see Figure 8). As can be observed, it partially confirmed that indicated by the literature when pointing out the classical bureaucratic model's influence on town councils' public management (whether political, fragmented or hierarchical) (Mintzberg, 1984; Morgan 1986; Ramió-Mata, 1999). The results indicated that town councils have sought to reengineer organisational structures to minimise the negative effects of these types of organisational structures (such as opting for managerial or coordinated models).

It could be observed that in spite of the town councils being studied having placed a marked emphasis on modernising and improving municipal management, each of them had maintained departmental work through typical daily management functions. A tendency to modify this aspect, which new public management has led to in other OECD countries, was thus not present (Echebarría, 1994; Saner, 2002; Hsieh et al., 2002; Aguilar, 2006; Merino, 2007). However, according to the evidence found, such particularity of management was maintained but integrated with an approach which tried to eliminate and minimise bureaucratic obstacles which did not provide citizens with added value whenever possible. It could thus be indicated that the search for minimising and reducing the classical bureaucratic model's effects had led the town councils being studied to implement CPI in their municipal management.

Figure 8. The impact of applying CPI in the town councils being analysed



Evidence was also found indicating that CPI had been directly applied here with small adaptations regarding the language used and incorporation (developing own methodologies). This confirmed that stated by

Mendoza (1991) when indicating that managerial techniques, such as operations management which includes CPI, could be directly applied to the public sector. The result also corroborated that stated by

more recent authors arguing that other approaches such as EFQM, ISO 9000 and letters of service could be directly applied to public management, with minimal adaptations being made to them (George et al., 2003; Houston and Katavic, 2006; Torres, 2005; Tari, 2006; Suárez-Barraza and Ramis-Pujol, 2008; Suárez-Barraza, et al., 2009). Another result emerging from this investigation going beyond that indicated in the literature was that CPI had been directly applied and that the resulting improvements had been sustained.

Conclusions and future research

The empirical results found in the case studies analysed here indicated that the local administrations being studied were able to apply CPI over a period of time through a group of improvement activities. Such evolutionary application has had a certain impact on some particularities of public management of the particular town councils in question. The evidence indicated that such improvement effort has led to CPI techniques and tools being directly applied in practice when there was the willingness and commitment or when willingness had been sought and established by political and technical managers for improving or modernising their management and work processes. Very few adaptations were made regarding how they had been done in the private sector, thereby resulting in a positive impact on

certain management particularities. Nevertheless, such application and evolution had happened slowly and gradually through a series of evolutionary stages and improvement activities, always waiting for the right political moment for carrying them out.

Future lines of investigation could be directed towards at least two basic dimensions; one could extend the study to other local administration context or settings according to welfare state models' evolution (Esping-Andersen, 1999 and 2000) and applying the paradigm of new public management and governance. The relationships arising from the effects of applying CPI to classical bureaucratic model organisations could also be analysed, going deeper into the influence of organisational structures (functional type classical bureaucratic models presented by Ramió-Mata (1999), matrix and divisional organisations, professional bureaucracies, etc.) and management systems (e.g. unit networks or business units, forms of decentralisation or independent executive agencies, etc.) which could facilitate or inhibit applying CPI.

It should be pointed out that this investigation did not attempt (and certainly has not attempted) an empirical generalisation of the results outside its particular, defined context. However, according to the evidence produced here, indications did arise from this study having explanatory capacity which could be extrapolated to other public administration entities implementing CPI.

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