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SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS OF BULGARIAN ADMINISTRATIONS  
LEARNING ORGANISATION INDICATORS

SOFIA, 2021

**Analytical document**

**IS YOURS A LEARNING ADMINISTRATION?**

**Self-evaluation results of Bulgarian administrations on learning organization indicators**

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## THEORETICAL FRAME

People and their ability to learn are the most important competitive advantage of modern organizations (Reeves & Deimler, 2011<sup>1</sup>). Effective learning is increasingly identified as a key factor upon which modern organizations depend to thrive in the highly dynamic world of digital technology (Garvin, 1993<sup>2</sup>; Senge, 1990<sup>3</sup>). The deeper reasons that led to this development are related to globalization, the development of information technology, and the progress of science. A few years ago, IBM showed that the advent of the Internet and digital technologies have led to extremely rapid growth in knowledge and information. They calculated that the total knowledge of mankind doubles every 2 years, and in fields like medicine, even every 18 months. IBM forecasts that soon this rate of development will not only not decrease, but will increase by 2050 humanity's knowledge will start to double every 12 hours<sup>4</sup>.

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What is behind these truly astonishing changes, and how do they affect our world? **First** of all, there is a major shift in the systems of learning itself. It is far from being confined within the formal education system anymore. It is taught in every organization; it is taught on the job and learning has become part of work itself for many employees. **Second**, learning in organizations is supported by multiple factors. Any, even not-so-significant technological lag behind the competition is equivalent to disaster, and the need for thinking people and the fierce war for talent forces companies to develop their employees. **Third**, the complexity of modern business processes makes traditional hierarchical decision-making ineffective. The distinction between decision-makers and performers is increasingly disappearing. If in the early twentieth century great strategists like Ford could create an entire corporation around them, today organizations that rely on a few people to think and the rest to execute are doomed. Processes in the modern world have become too complex to be entrusted to a single person to understand, and as a result, teams make the most important decisions. They typically involve people who are not generally expected to make strategic decisions, but who have primary information about the problem or who are then expected to implement the decisions made. **Fourth**, to meet the challenges of competition and immediately satisfy customer needs, organizations are increasingly seeking to solve problems at the lowest possible hierarchical level. Proactivity is trending. Employees are expected to solve problems as they arise and certainly before they become a crisis. **Fifth**, with the development of technology, many complex but purely executive positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Reeves and Mike Deimler. 2011. Adaptability: The New Competitive Advantage. Harvard Business Review

<sup>2</sup> David A. Garvin. 1993. Building a Learning Organization. Harvard Business Review

<sup>3</sup> Peter Senge (1990). The Fifth Discipline. Currency Doubleday

<sup>4</sup> IBM Global Technology Services, (2006). The toxic terabyte: How data-dumping threatens business efficiency

are disappearing because the work of humans is being taken over by robots. This is fundamentally changing the geography of human labor, and the pace of this change will only increase. We can foresee a future in which there will be almost no work done by humans that does not require either problem-solving, decision making, or some form of creativity.

The idea of learning organizations is not new. In the early 1990s, Fortune magazine proclaimed: *“Forget about the old leadership, nowadays the most successful corporations are so-called learning organizations”*, and Arie de Goeij of Shell adds:

*“the ability of companies to learn faster than their competitors is their only sustainable competitive advantage”*. The ideologist of the new views is Peter Senge, whose work *“The Fifth Discipline”* has become a desktop book of modern business leaders (Senge, 1990<sup>5</sup>). For Senge, learning organizations are not just those that seek to develop their people by constantly sending them on training courses, but those that develop an organizational culture that stimulates thinking and learning. The modern knowledge society has arisen because people love to learn and are inherently motivated to do so. But there are also many barriers. For example, traditional leadership, authoritarian organizational culture, and human ego are some of them. *“When they graduate from university and enter organizations”*, notes O'Brien of Hanover Insurance Group, *“people are smart, knowledgeable, studious, enthusiastic, with ambitions to make a difference. As they approach their 30s, a small minority are identified as talented and get rapid career progression. The rest just wait for days off to do what makes sense for them. Almost nothing remains of the energy, spirit, and enthusiasm they were charged with when they started their careers.”* Peter Senge, on the other hand, is astonished by the lack of team learning in most organizations: *“How is it,”* he asks rhetorically, *“that a board of motivated and willing to give their all directors with an individual IQ of over 120 makes decisions worthy of an individual with an IQ of 63!”* Many of the barriers to learning are rooted in cognitive misconceptions typical of humans, which philosophers since Socrates have addressed. For example, we are often not critical and observant enough and do not notice relatively slow-moving processes before the change becomes sufficiently visible. But then it is often irreversible. The reaction of the American car industry to the import of cars from Japan is very telling in this respect. In the 1960s, when these imports began, nobody saw this as a threat, because the total share of Japanese cars sold was about 4% of the market. 10 years later, again no one pays attention, although the share has become 10%. Even in the late 1970s, when the market share of Japanese cars became 15%, there was still no problem for the Big Three from Detroit. However, when in the 1980s Japanese car sales now accounted for 20% of the market, American manufacturers raised the alarm, started asking for government intervention, studied Japanese technological management, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Senge (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. Currency Doubleday

Their reaction proved too late, they never managed to change the trends and continued to lose ground in the following decades. Another cognitive weakness is our inability to see processes in totality or to learn from experience when the decision and its consequences are distant in time. An example is the Cold War arms race. Each of the two great powers, the US and the USSR saw the other's arms programs as a threat to their security and reacted with even more aggressive arms programs, leading to the next level in the spiral of arms buildup.

We could go on and on with examples, and expand the list of internal and organizational barriers to learning in organizations. These barriers are plenty enough and difficult enough to overcome because, despite the drive of most organizations to become learning organizations, only a few succeed. Deloitte's 2015 survey of 3,300 organizations worldwide shows not only the importance of learning but also the growing frustration with the difficulty of transforming organizations into learners (Deloitte, 2015<sup>6</sup>). According to Garvin, Edmondson & Gino (2008<sup>7</sup>), the main reason for this is that managers simply do not know how to achieve such a goal. According to these authors, management needs clear guidance, specific goals, precisely defined steps, and a tool for feedback, measurement, and evaluation of progress. Guided by this understanding, they created "Is Yours a Learning Organization", a tool that assists company leaders and public administration in the process of transforming traditional organizations into learning organizations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino's methodology emerged in 2008 and is used by all types of organizations worldwide. The fact that it not only specifies goals but also offers the opportunity for self-assessment of progress contributes to its spread. It contains three main components:

- Building an organizational culture that supports learning
- Introducing specific processes and mechanisms for learning
- Enforcing a learning-friendly leadership style

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## **LEARNING-FRIENDLY ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE**

Organizational culture contains all the written and unwritten rules by which an organization functions - its mission, vision, structure, relationship to the outside world, leadership, internal communications, etc. In terms of learning, Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino identify 4 aspects of it:

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<sup>6</sup> Deloitte (2015). Global Human Capital Trends. Deloitte University Press

<sup>7</sup> David A. Garvin, Amy C. Edmondson, and Francesca Gino (2008). Is Yours a Learning Organization? Harvard Business Review

*Psychological safety.* Learning is about exploration and therefore in an academic environment, it is not only acceptable but expected to have differing opinions, to criticize, and to make mistakes. In many other organizations, however, such things are taboo. People take criticism personally and get offended; they don't propose new things or express different opinions because they are afraid that if they are wrong, they risk losing more than they would gain if they are proven right. According to Garvin and his colleagues, as well as other researchers, transforming organizations into learning ones involves changing their culture, and for this reason, the process is complex, uncertain, in some cases slow, and others accompanied by rapid and radical change.

*Evaluating differences.* Many of the problems faced by modern organizations are complex and would be difficult to solve by one person. Different perspectives need to be heard because they provide an opportunity to find a truly comprehensive and balanced solution, rather than one that creates additional problems or sets up new, more difficult problems for the future. Sometimes even incorrect opinions are valuable because they stimulate the development or clarification of solutions. However, to have different points of view, there needs to be not simply tolerance of differences, but also mechanisms to encourage opinions to be expressed freely.

*Openness to new ideas.* Learning is not only correcting mistakes and solving problems but also seeking and discovering new approaches. Although many organizations declare that they encourage their employees to be creative and innovative, few are truly willing to test new ideas or undertake more significant changes proposed from within. Recognizing and embracing change as an ongoing, continuous process is a significant challenge for many organizations. The dynamic world we live in often pushes us to the limits of our flexibility and adaptability.

*Time to reflect.* The effects of learning are relatively distant in time and therefore the illusion is created that it is a kind of investment that can be postponed. The problem is that the quieter time, without multiple urgent tasks and with less work, never comes. In many organizations, people are overworked and constantly stressed by tight deadlines and too much work. They don't have time not only to learn but often to think better about what they are doing. Building a supportive learning organizational culture means taking time to reflect and review work and work processes.

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#### **INTRODUCING SPECIFIC LEARNING MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES**

In this block, Garvin and his colleagues introduce the elements that make up the "infrastructure" of a learning organization. These are training, knowledge transfer into practice, exploration and experimentation, information gathering, and analysis.

*Experimenting with new approaches.* Learning organizations have rules and procedures for experimenting. They don't just generate new ideas, but can quickly test them in practice and evaluate their impact. Implementing innovations is often delayed because the organization cannot quickly and easily conduct a simulation or pilot study and evaluate the results.

*Information gathering.* Performance review and problem identification are not effective when there is insufficient data. Systematic information gathering is a hallmark of learning organizations. Depending on the business of the company or the functions of the administration, the relevance of the information collected may vary. In most cases, organizations collect benchmarking data with similar organizations, study best practices, collect data from internal and external customers, and analyze more global economic, political, social, and technological trends that could potentially impact their operations.

*Analysis.* The data collected, the information from workflow reviews, and the results of experiments must ultimately be analyzed. However, due to the complex nature of problems, the often hasty, subjective, or one-sided analysis leads to wrong conclusions. There is a constant need to identify hidden assumptions that are being made and to analyze the information gathered from the experience or practice of others from different perspectives. This is the only guarantee that wrong or unbalanced decisions will not be made. To this end, however, the organization must build sustainable and well-functioning two-way horizontal and vertical communications.

*Training.* At first glance, this seems to be the most unproblematic area because most modern organizations do not undervalue training. For example, US companies spend about \$60 billion annually on continuing education. However, the forms of learning are constantly expanding and today there are options such as distance learning, webinars, video conferencing, etc. that were unknown until recently. The availability of many learning opportunities presents a new challenge for HR units to quickly identify training needs and find the fastest and most effective form of learning about each specific identified need.

*Transferring knowledge.* One of the biggest problems associated with training and analysis for quite some time is transferring knowledge and skills into practice. In some cases, employees fail to put what they learn from training or experience into practice, and in other cases, information from analyses simply does not reach decision-makers quickly and consistently enough. Therefore, learning organizations need to build comprehensive and well-functioning mechanisms for disseminating knowledge and information.



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## **LEARNING-FRIENDLY LEADERSHIP STYLE**

Much of the responsibility for transforming an organization into a learning one falls on its leaders. Employees themselves can do relatively little to change the organizational culture or change work processes. Leaders are expected to build organizational culture to support learning, implement mechanisms and tools for information gathering, provide time for reflection, bring people together to discuss, stimulate diverse viewpoints, problematize implicit assumptions, encourage innovative thinking, and not hesitate to implement needed changes.

The methodology proposed by Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino is used as a tool for self-evaluation. The three main blocks are operationalized with questions covering different organizational culture aspects, learning processes, and leadership. The questionnaire is completed by employees anonymously, and the results are compared with other organizations. Benchmarking allows one to identify strengths and weaknesses that a particular organization exhibits in its efforts to become a learning organization.

The blocks "Learning-friendly environment" and "Existence of specific learning processes and practices" contain statements that participants are asked to answer using a 7-point response scale with the following options:

- Extremely Inaccurate
- Somewhat inaccurate
- Somewhat inaccurate
- Cannot judge
- Somewhat accurate
- Quite accurate
- Extremely accurate

Respondents are asked to judge how accurately each statement describes the climate and processes in their structural unit. A structural unit, according to the methodology, can either be a team, a department, a directorate, or an entire organization.

The third block of the questionnaire, "Learning-friendly leadership," contains statements that are answered to describe specific behaviors of leaders. Respondents can answer using a 5-point scale with the following options:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

In all blocks of the questionnaire, respondents could choose only one response option. The results are aggregated and summarized for the individual structural unit.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN IN BULGARIAN STATE ADMINISTRATION**

The methodology of Garvin et al. was translated and approved by the Bulgarian administration in 2016. In the first study, 70 administrations were invited, who were willing to implement the European quality management model "Common Assessment Framework" (CAF). The questionnaire was uploaded to an online survey platform, which ensured quick and convenient administration of the tool and correct recording of the responses received. In the following two years, 2017 and 2018, the survey was repeated and became a tradition. In each of these surveys, there was little progress from the previous years. It was therefore decided to start the survey at larger intervals of 3 years.

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## **RESULTS**

The 2021 survey was conducted between October and November 2021. 81 administrations participated, significantly more than in previous surveys. In each administration, expert and managerial staff from the general and specialized administrations were randomly selected to complete the questionnaire according to pre-established quotas. The purpose of the quotas was to ensure the survey was representational for the entire Bulgarian administration. In addition, there was a limit on the minimum number of respondents per administration, again introduced to ensure data correctness.

All respondents completed the questionnaire anonymously via the IPA online platform. Data collection was completed in November with almost 3,000 people completing the survey - again far more than in previous surveys. Of the 81 administrations participating, only 56 met the minimum number of staff who completed the questionnaire. The rating of learning administrations for 2021 is based on the self-assessments of these 56 public administration structures of which:

- 21 central administrations
- 11 territorial structures of central administrations
- 11 regional administrations
- 13 municipal administrations

To assure participants that their anonymity was guaranteed, we limited the demographic information collected to only those factors that we were concerned might influence the survey results - gender, years of experience in administration, and job title. Thus, respondents only had to provide a limited set of demographic information about themselves:

- Which administration they are from;

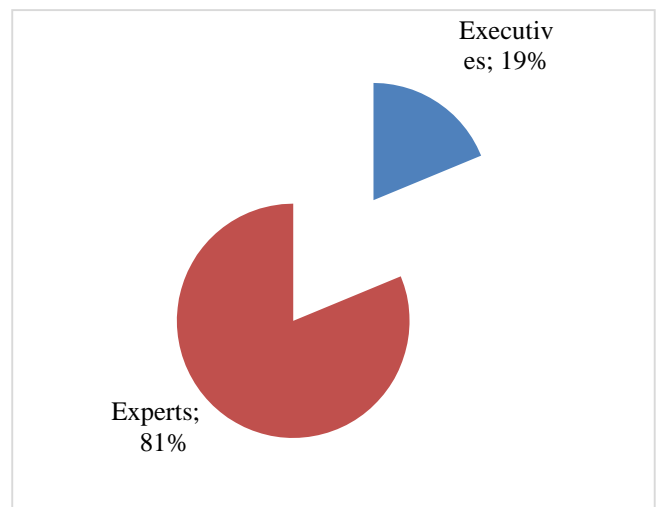
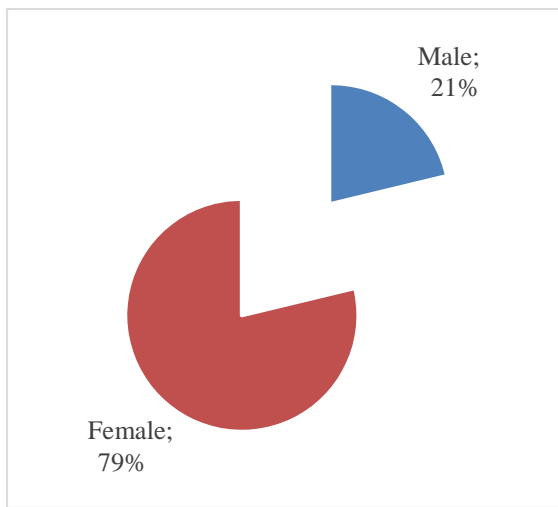
- whether they were in an expert or managerial position;
- their gender;
- in which of the three categories - up to 3 years, between 4 and 10 years, and over 10 years – does their length of service in the administration falls?

The following graphs show the distribution of respondents by these demographic variables. The gender control showed that 79 percent of the respondents were female and 21per cent were male respectively. These figures roughly correspond to the distribution of men and women in the Bulgarian administration.

**Figure 1**

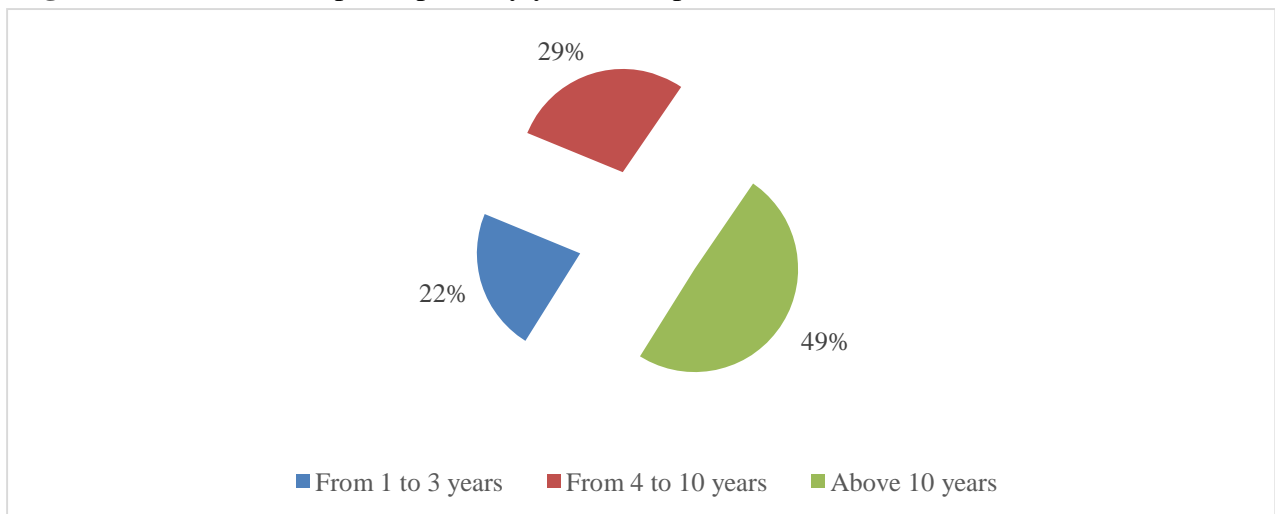
**Figure 2**

Distribution of participants by gender Distribution of participants by position



555 executives (19%) and 2,398 expert employees (81%) participated in the survey. The distribution of respondents by job title is also consistent with the general distribution of job types in the civil service.

**Figure 3** Distribution of participants by years of experience



The sample distribution by seniority shows that experienced staff with more than 10 years of experience in administration predominate - 1457 or 49%. Recruits with up to 3 years of experience accounted for 837 (29%), and those with between 4- and 10 years of experience accounted for 659 (22%). Compared to previous surveys, there are now significantly more employees with more than 10 years of experience and fewer with between 4- and 10 years of experience.

A review of the data by demographic characteristics and a large number of participants and administrations leads us to believe that the survey data are representative of the Bulgarian administration.

#### **Benchmarking the Bulgarian administration with foreign organizations**

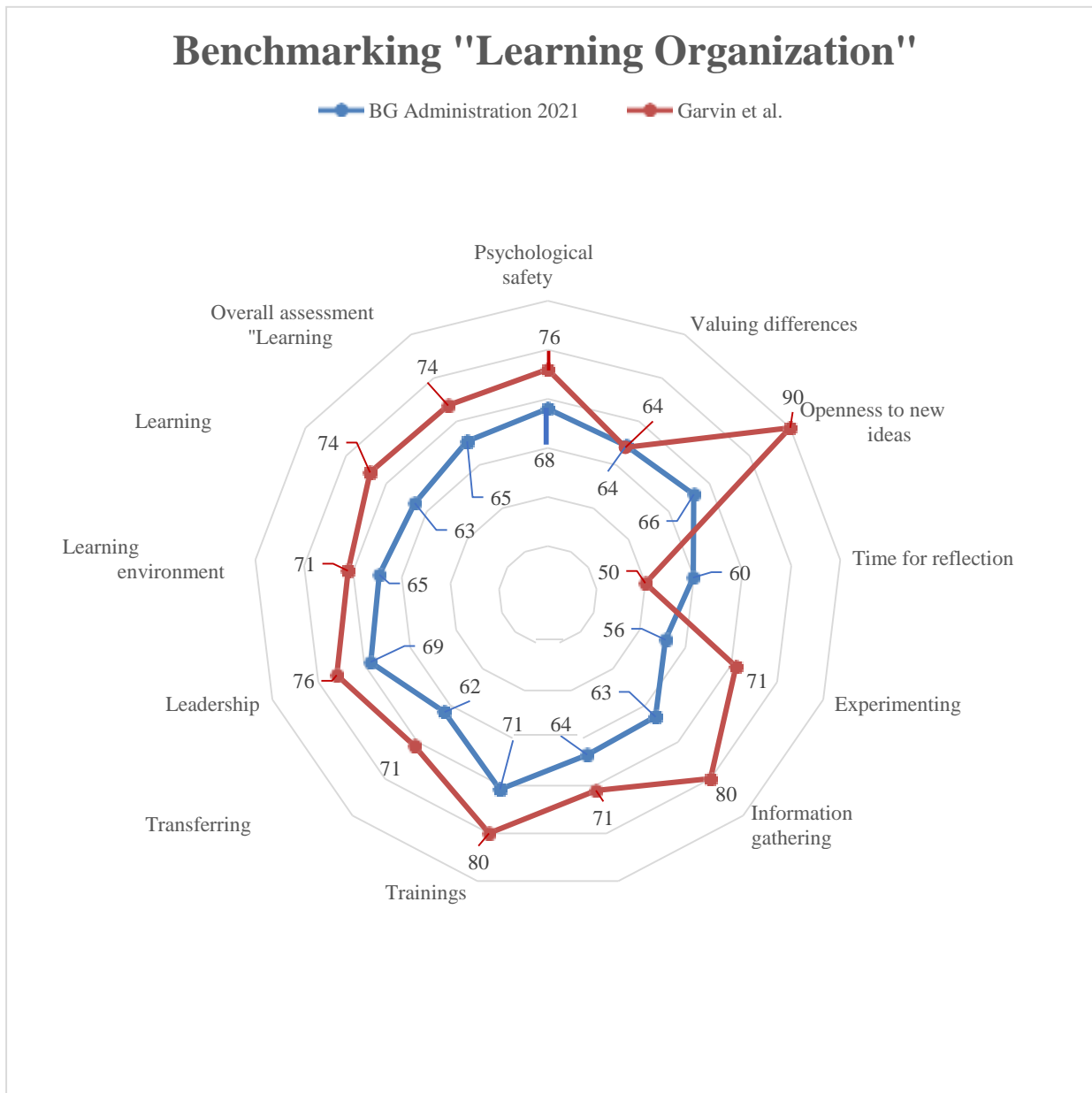
The aggregated data from the pilot study in the Bulgarian administrations were compared with the benchmarking values provided by Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino (2008). When considering this benchmarking, it should be borne in mind that:

- 1) Garvin et al. data include both business organizations and administrations. The authors note that administrations score lower on the questionnaire compared to business organizations but do not provide separate markers for them;
- 2) The maximum score on all learning culture dimensions is 100;
- 3) The middle zone is determined by the distribution median and on most Learning culture dimensions it's between 65 and 75 points. The exceptions to this are the indicators of Openness to new ideas, Information gathering, and 'Employee training' where the median values are higher. By Openness to new ideas, the average zone is between 81 and 91 points, and on the dimensions of Information gathering and Employee training, it is between 71 and 81 points;

- 4) The data for the Bulgarian administration represent the aggregated average scores of the 81 Bulgarian administrations participating in the pilot study

Figure 4 presents the results of the comparison of the learning culture in the Bulgarian administration with that in foreign organizations (Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino, 2008).

**Figure 4** Aggregated results of the Bulgarian administration on the questionnaire "Learning Organization" compared with aggregated results of foreign organizations Garvin, Edmondson, and Gino, 2008



Benchmarking shows that on most indicators of learning culture, the Bulgarian administration continues to lag. The only area where it has an advantage

is 'Time for reflection'. This was also the case in previous surveys. Compared to foreign organizations, the Bulgarian administration is to some extent less pressured to act and has the opportunity to spend more time reflecting on its decisions or assessing their impact.

Scores on other indicators are more or less below the median of Garvin et al. Most of them fall in the second quarter of the distribution, i.e., between the 25th and 50th percentile.

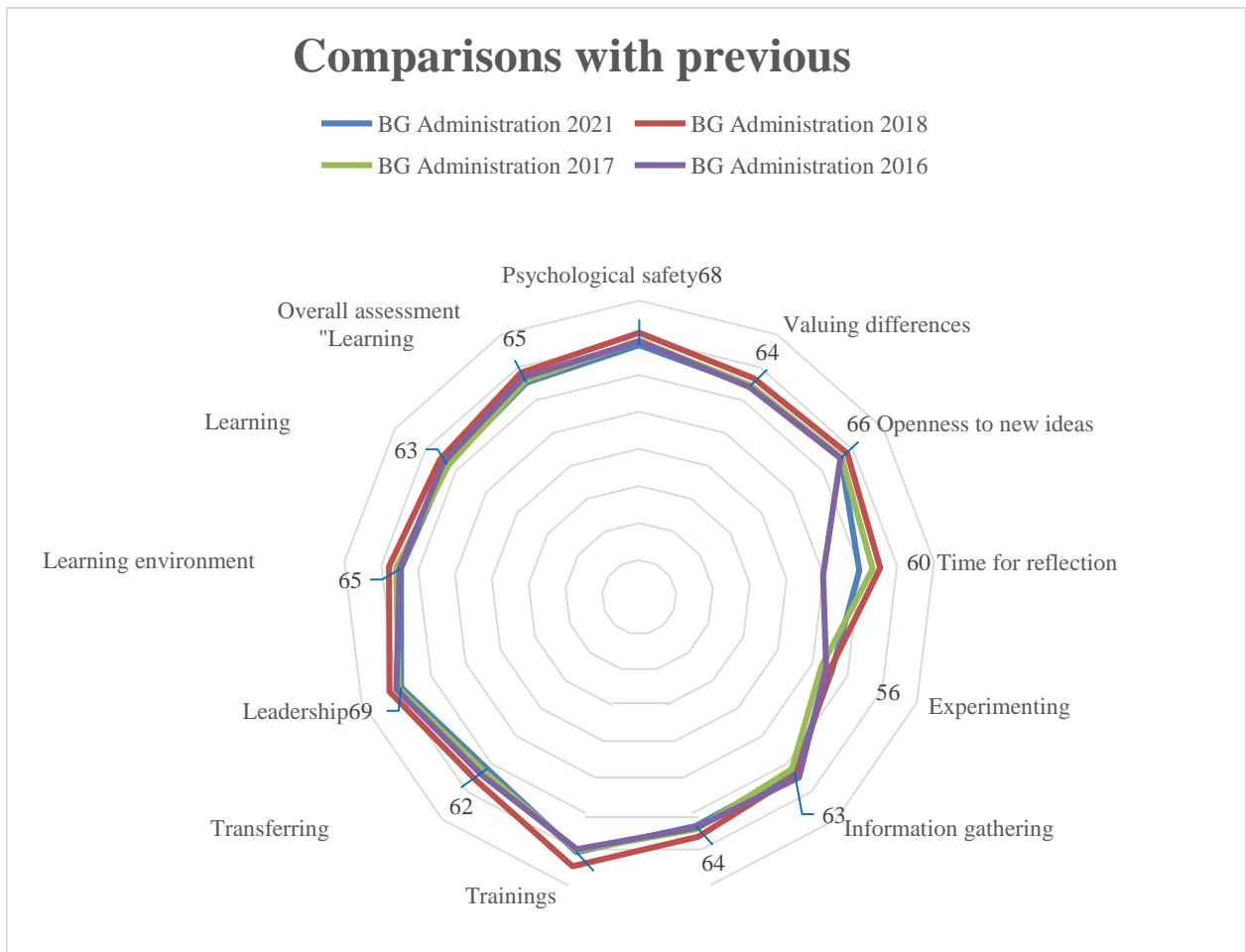
The overall score for the learning culture of the Bulgarian administration (the global indicator of the questionnaire) is 65 points, while the benchmark value of Garvin et al. is 74 points. This means that about 65% of foreign organizations have a better learning culture compared to the Bulgarian administration. However, this result is not as weak as it seems at first sight, since, as we have already pointed out, administrations generally show a slightly weaker learning culture compared to business organizations.

Scores on two of the three main domains of the questionnaire, Leadership and Learning Environment, are also below the median. The score of the Bulgarian administration on "Learning Environment" is 65, while the benchmark is 71. On 'Leadership', the Bulgarian administration's score is 69 points, while the benchmark is 76 points. On both dimensions, the difference is 6-7 points in favor of foreign organizations, which means approximately 60% of them have a better organizational environment as well as better leadership stimulating learning and development in organizations.

The weakest performance of the Bulgarian administration is in the Processes domain. Its score is 63 points against a benchmark of 74 points or 11 points below the median of Garvin et al. This score corresponds to the 25th percentile, which means that only 25% of foreign organizations have weaker processes related to learning compared to the Bulgarian administration. Learning processes in Bulgarian administrations are an area that requires change and development.

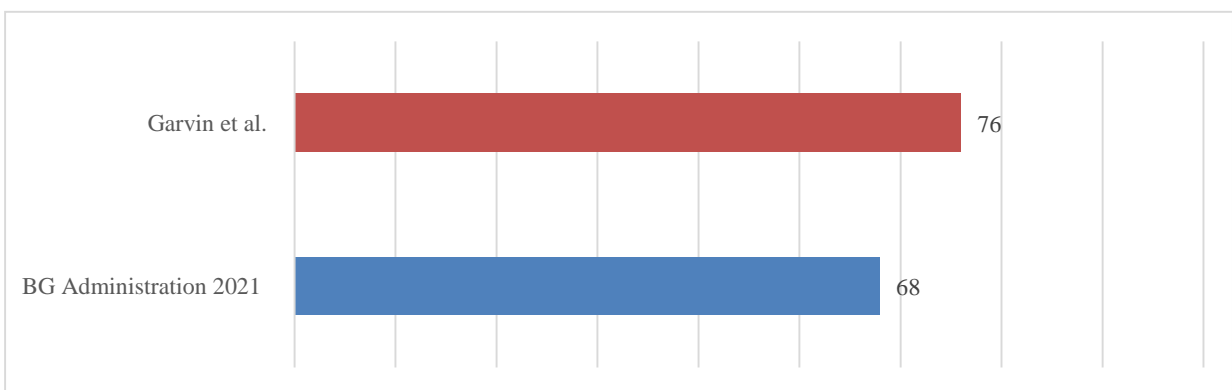
Figure 5 presents comparisons between survey results over the years. Before 2021, the survey was conducted in 2016, 2017, and 2018. In each of the previous surveys, there was a slight improvement in values and the expectation was that we would now see a more significant increase. Unfortunately, the data in the graph indicates otherwise - a lack of progress. In the five years since the survey was launched, Bulgarian administrations have not become more learning, flexible and innovative. The COVID-19 epidemic and working from home may have hindered the establishment of a culture of learning organizations, as discussing and sharing experiences and knowledge is much more difficult in an online environment.

Figure 5 Aggregated results of the Bulgarian administration on the questionnaire "Learning Organization" compared with aggregated results over the years.

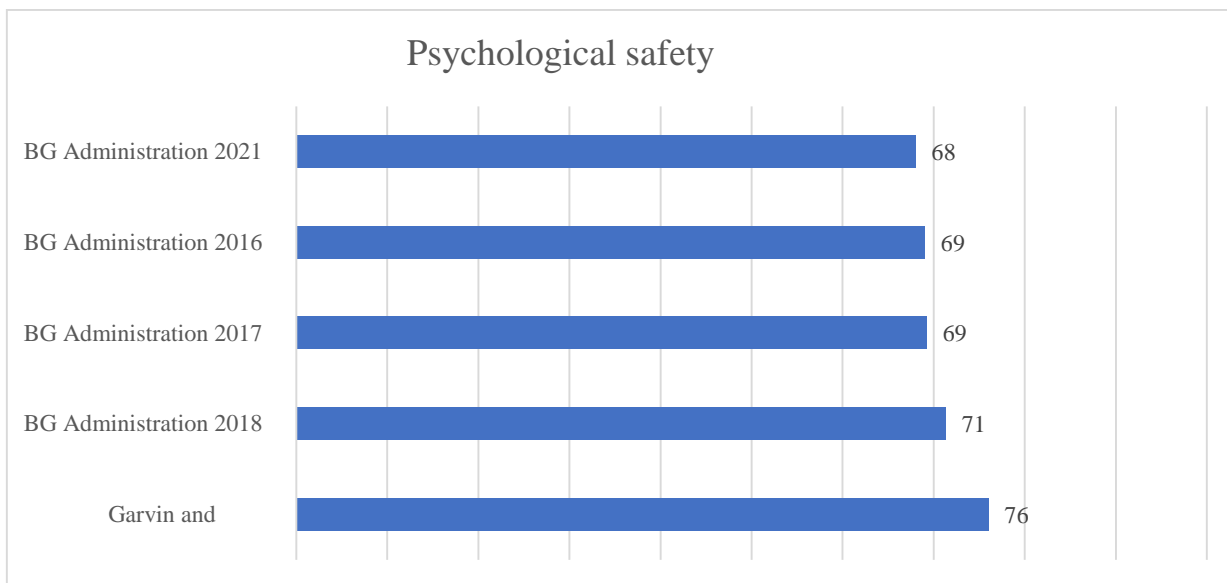


The following analyses present the benchmarking on the individual indicators of the learning organizations. They can show more specifically which are the priority areas for improvement.

**Fig. 6 Psychological safety**



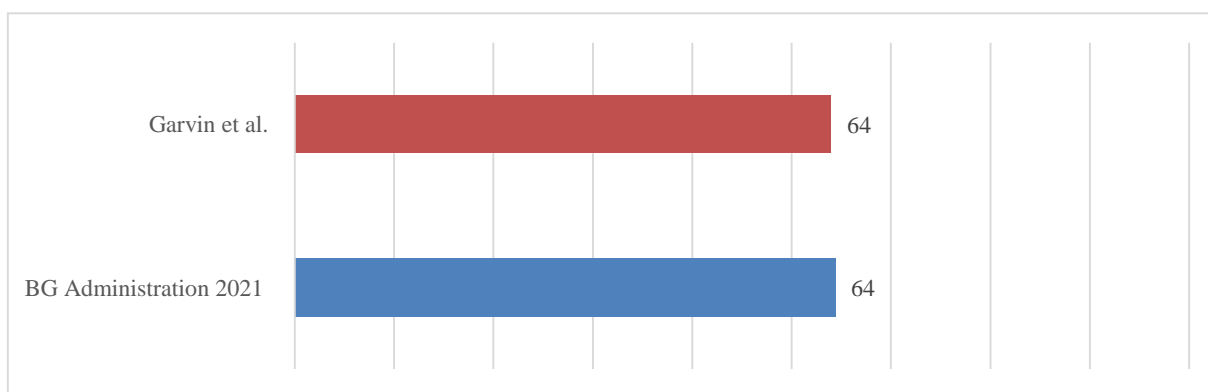
The Psychological safety score of the Bulgarian administration is in the second quarter of the distribution and below the median of foreign organizations. A review of the results on the individual items shows that employees in Bulgarian administrations hesitate to openly express their disagreement.



Comparisons with previous surveys show that employee perceptions of psychological safety this year are at their lowest level in 5 years.

**Fig. 7 Valuing differences**

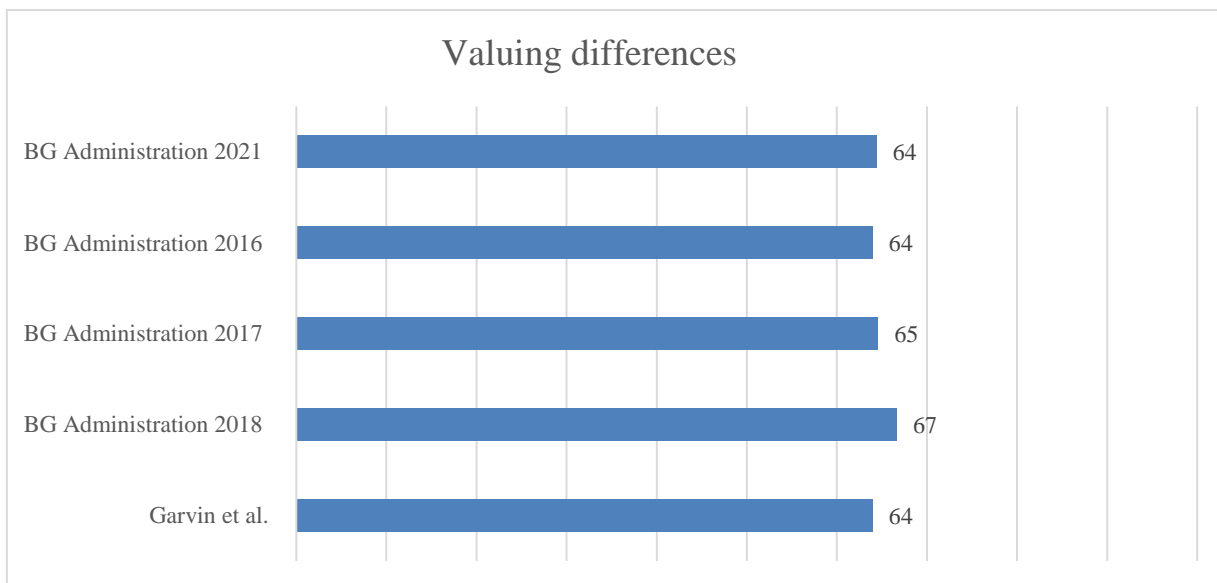
This indicator is related to the previous one but also has its specificity. While psychological safety reflects the general climate and tolerance of differences, "Valuing differences" covers only the narrow aspect of employee participation in organized discussions on given issues. However, the very fact that they are invited to participate in a discussion at all means that they are already involved in the decision-making process.



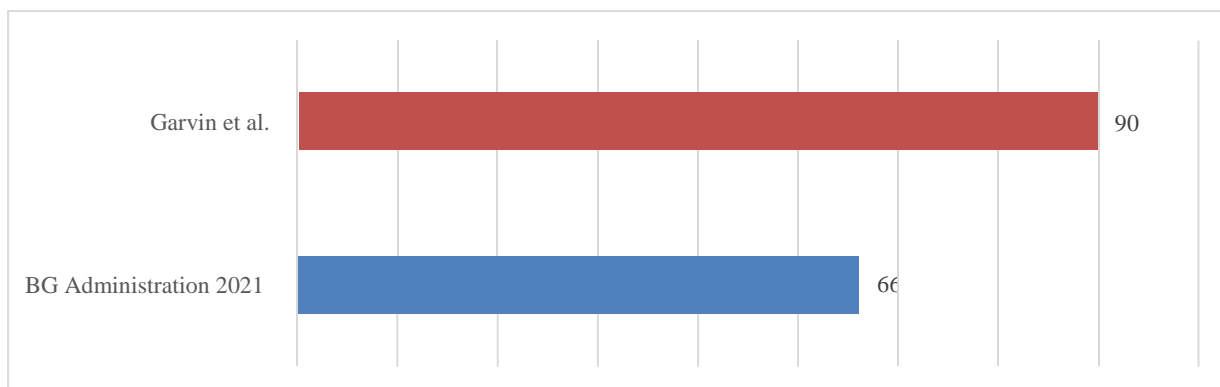
On "Valuing Differences", no differences were found between the Bulgarian administration and foreign organizations. It can be concluded that when employees in the Bulgarian administration are invited to participate in decision-making processes, they feel at ease to express their own opinion.

Comparisons with data from previous years show that organizational culture is stable on this indicator.

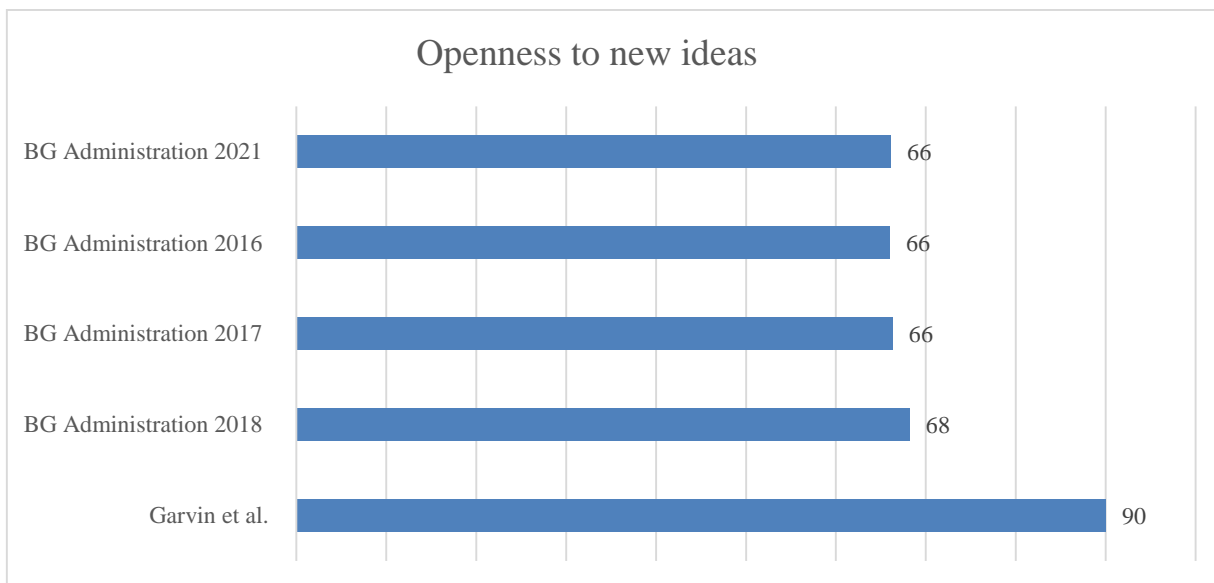




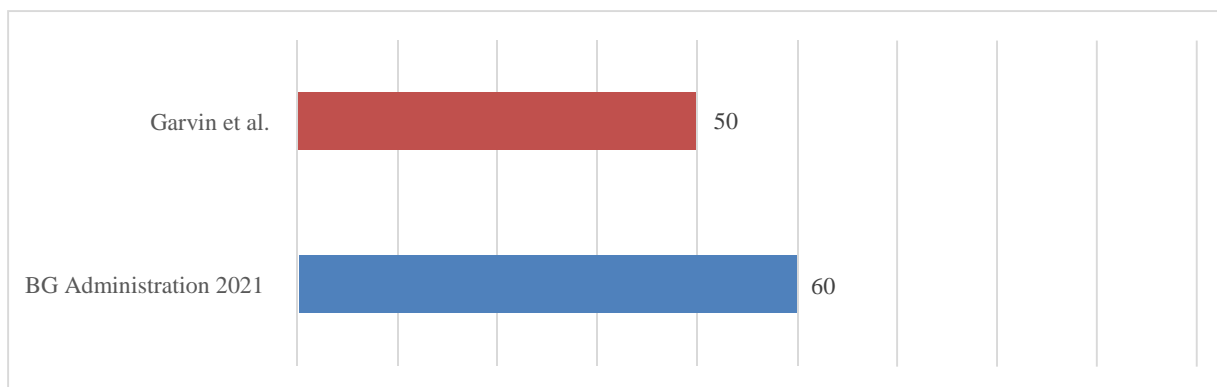
**Fig. 8 Openness to new ideas**



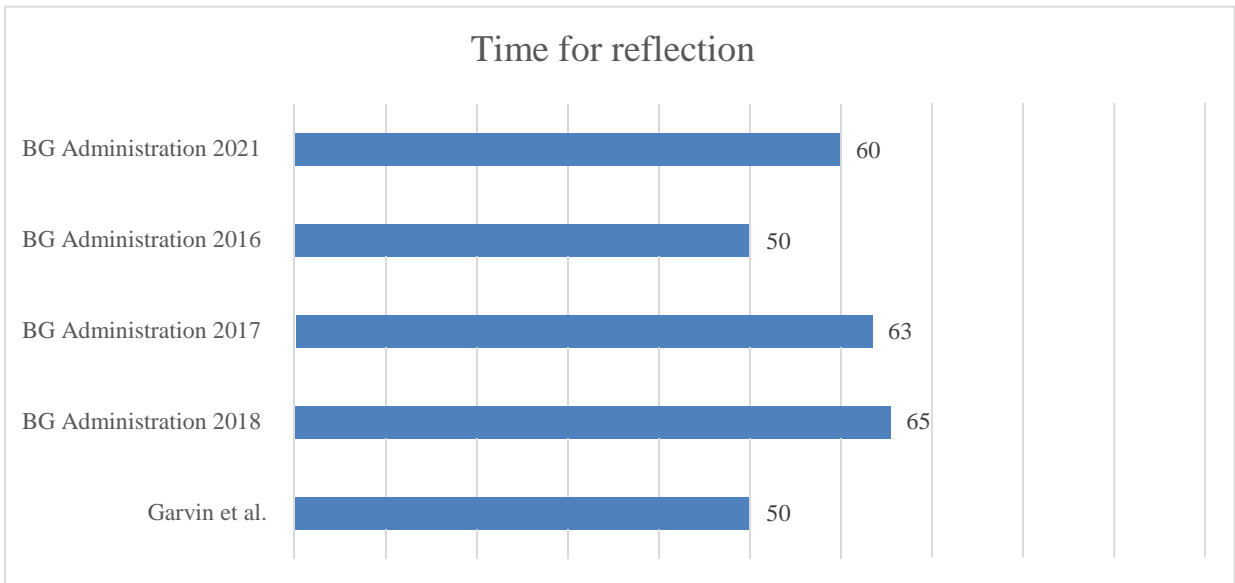
The indicator "Openness to new ideas" is the "Achilles heel" of the Bulgarian administration. Its score in 2021 is 66 points against a benchmark of 90 points. This corresponds to the 8th percentile in the Garvin et al. distribution and means that only 8% of foreign organizations are more conservative and negative towards change than the Bulgarian administration. The results for this indicator were similar in previous studies. Low openness to change and new ideas is a problem that Bulgarian administrations still fail to solve.



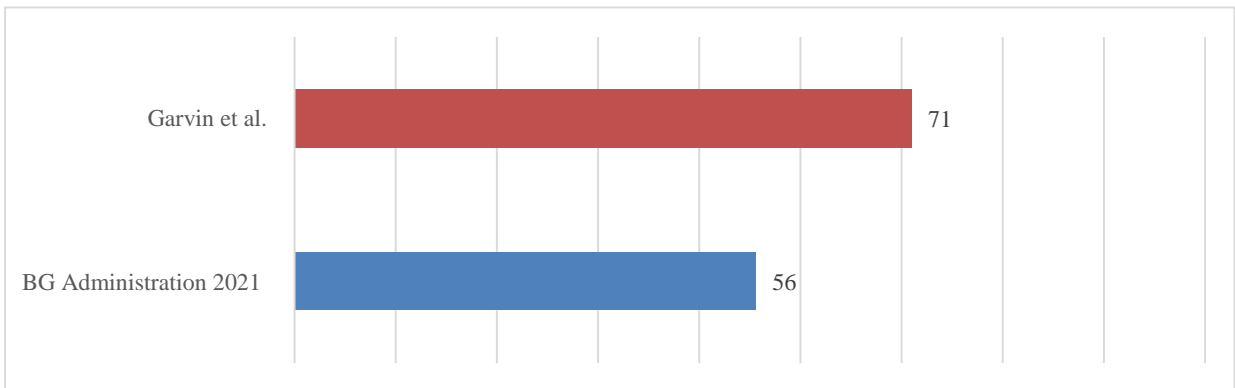
**Fig. 9 Time for reflection**



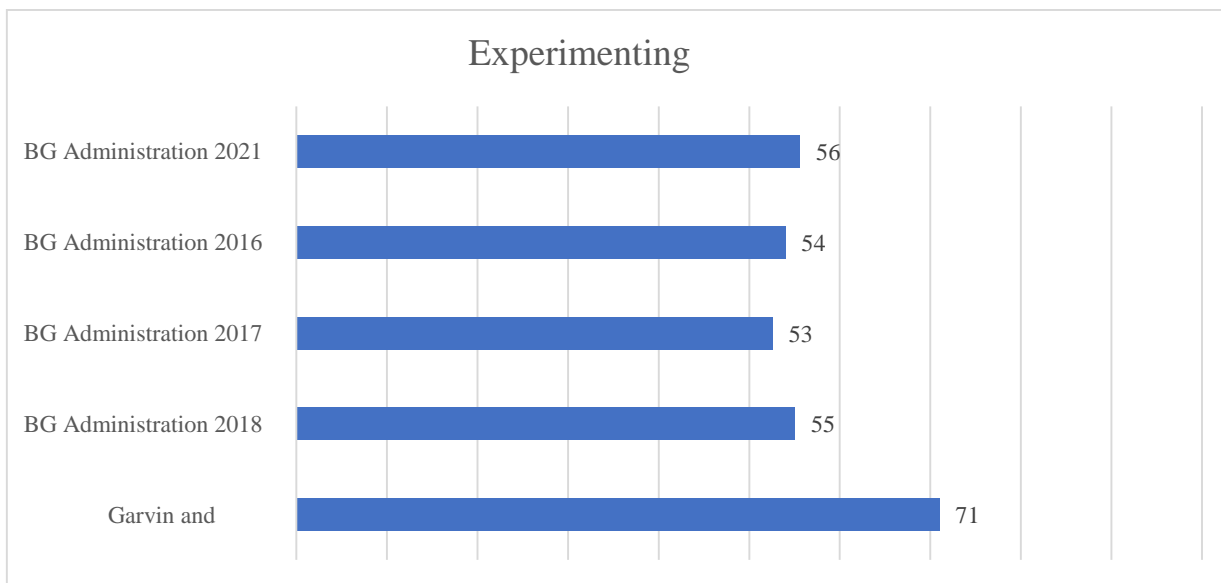
"Time for reflection" is the only indicator on which the Bulgarian administration significantly outperforms foreign organizations. It is good that many administrations take the time to analyze their processes and try to improve them. Comparisons with previous years show that this is a sustainable trend.



**Fig.10 Experimenting**

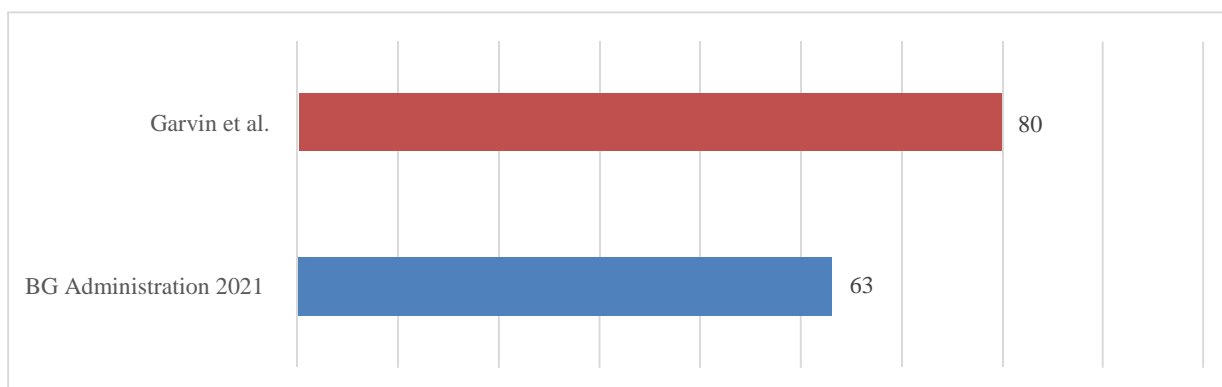


The Experimenting indicator is an area where the Bulgarian administration shows a significant lag compared to foreign organizations. The score of the Bulgarian administration is 56 points against a benchmark of 71 points. This corresponds to the 25th percentile of the Garvin et al. distribution and shows that the Bulgarian administration does not have sufficient resources and procedures to experiment with new ideas and approaches and to introduce changes. It needs methodological support, know-how, and change management training. Comparisons with previous years show that there may be a slight improvement, but more substantial progress is needed.

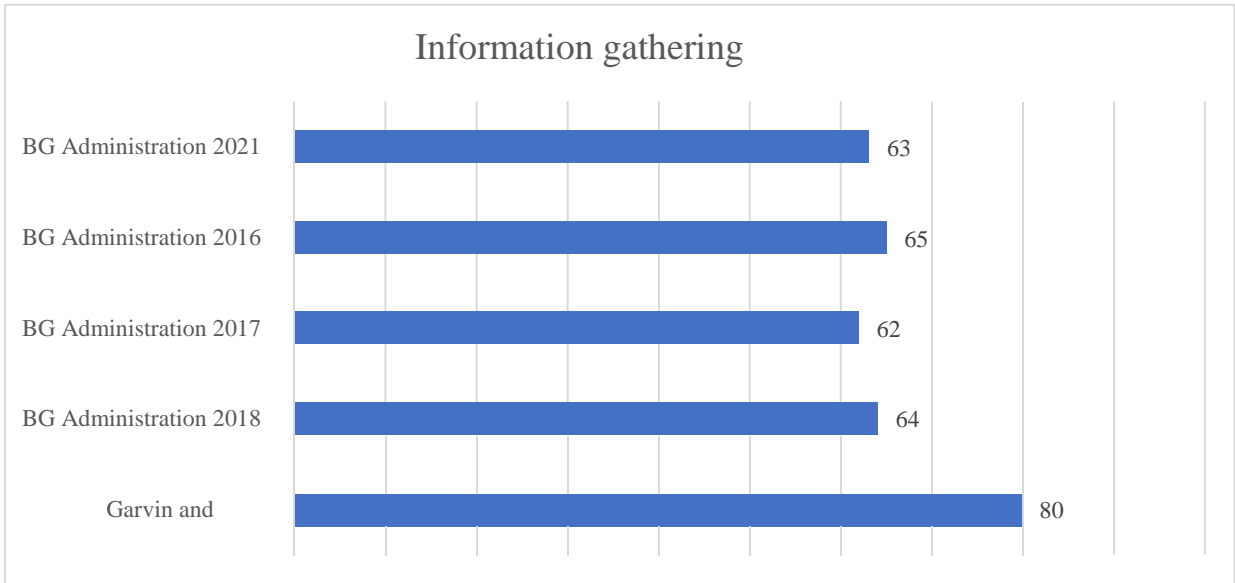


**Fig.11 Information gathering**

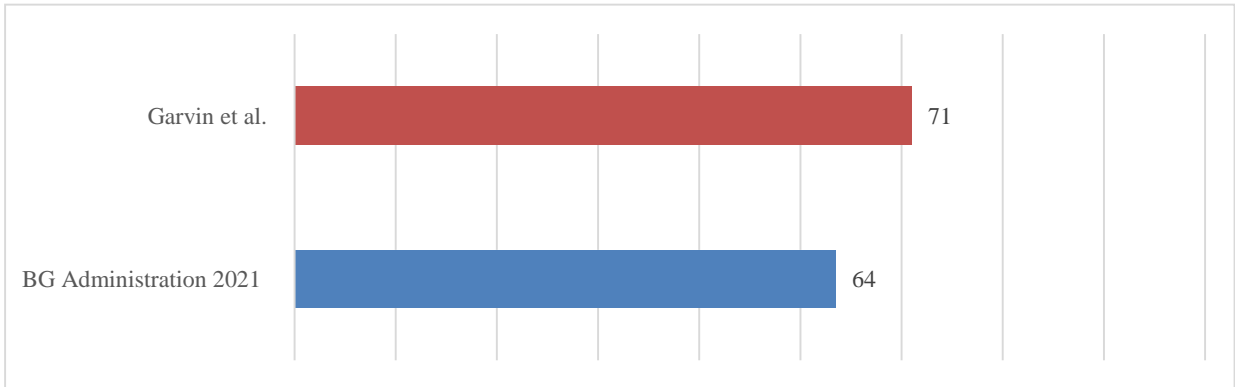
The score on the Information Gathering indicator is only 63 and 17 index points lower than the median of foreign organizations. This value falls in the lowest quarter of Garvin's distribution. Only 15% of foreign organizations are weaker in collecting information than the Bulgarian administration.



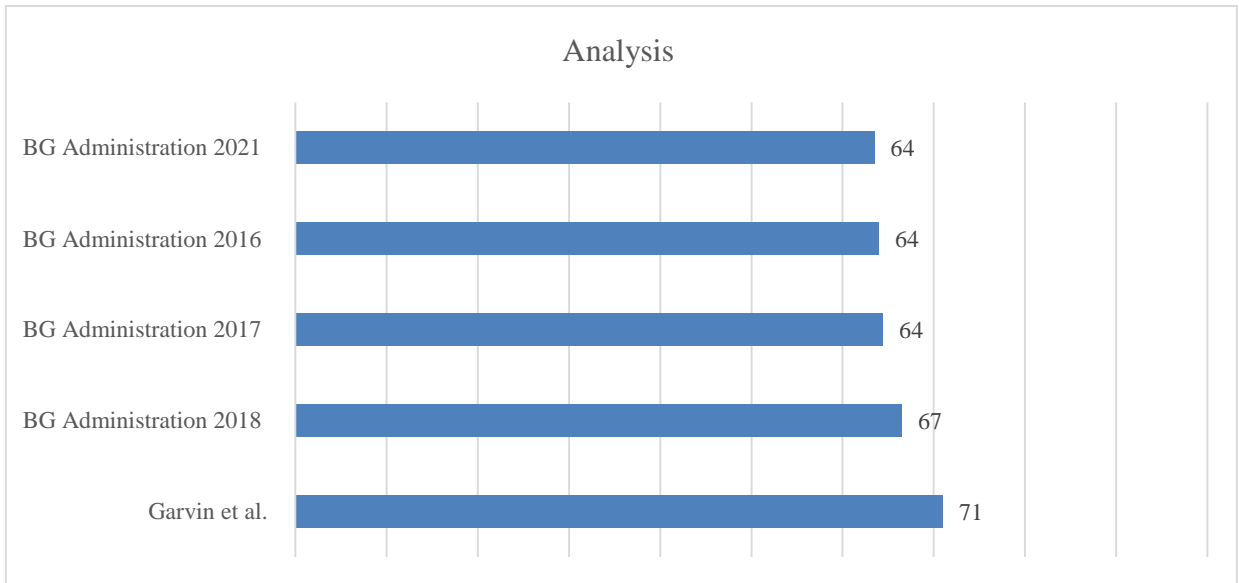
A review of the individual responses shows that Bulgarian administrations mainly collect and analyze information from their clients, while they have little knowledge of best practices and innovations in their field of activity and have not built extensive networks for knowledge and information exchange with the NGO sector and experts from other administrations. There has been no improvement in this respect in recent years.



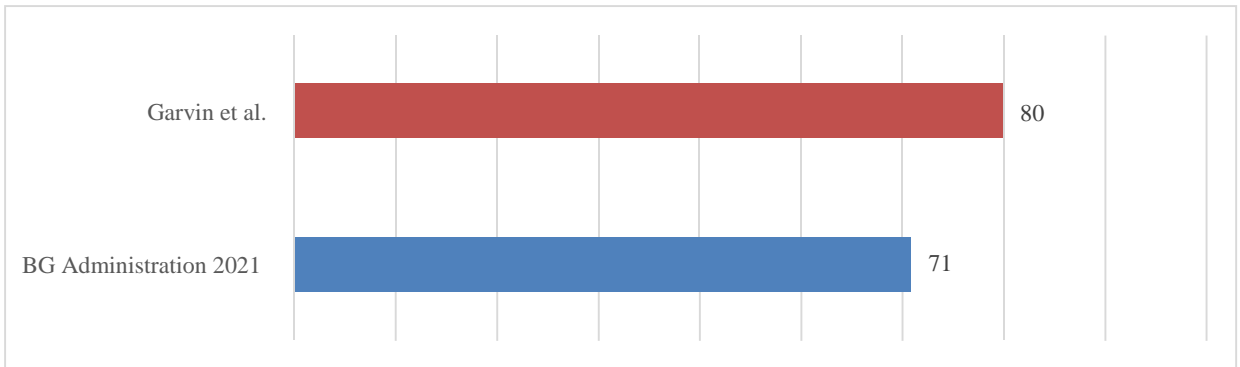
**Fig. 12 Analysis**



The score on the Analysis indicator is also below the median of foreign organizations. The difference of 7 points is mainly because the Bulgarian administration rarely "tests" the hidden assumptions on which it bases its decisions. However, this is important because, as Senge points out, only organizations that deeply test their decisions make the right changes. It is concerning that there has been no improvement in this area in recent years.



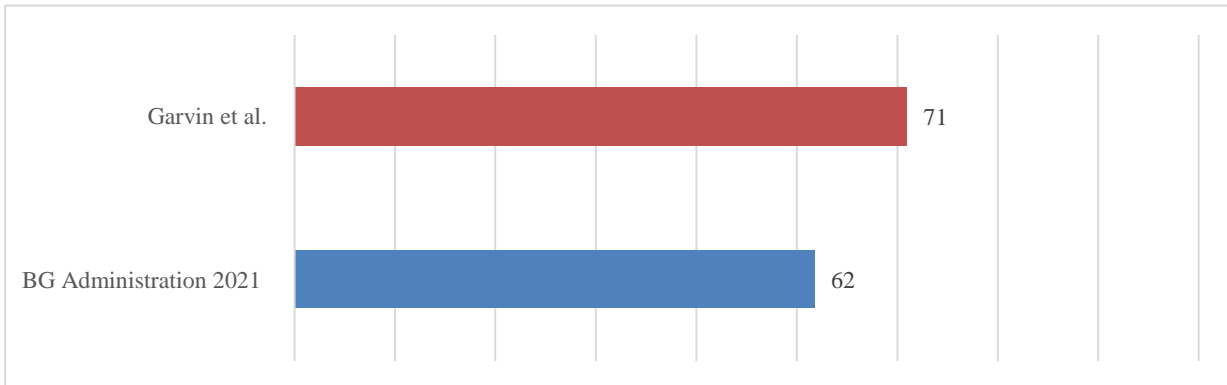
**Fig.13 Training**



The score of the Bulgarian administration on the Training indicator is 71 points against a benchmark of 80 points. This is also significantly lower than the median of foreign organizations and corresponds to approximately the 25th percentile in the Garvin distribution. The 9-point gap has persisted over the years despite IPA's efforts to offer many training courses, including remote learning.

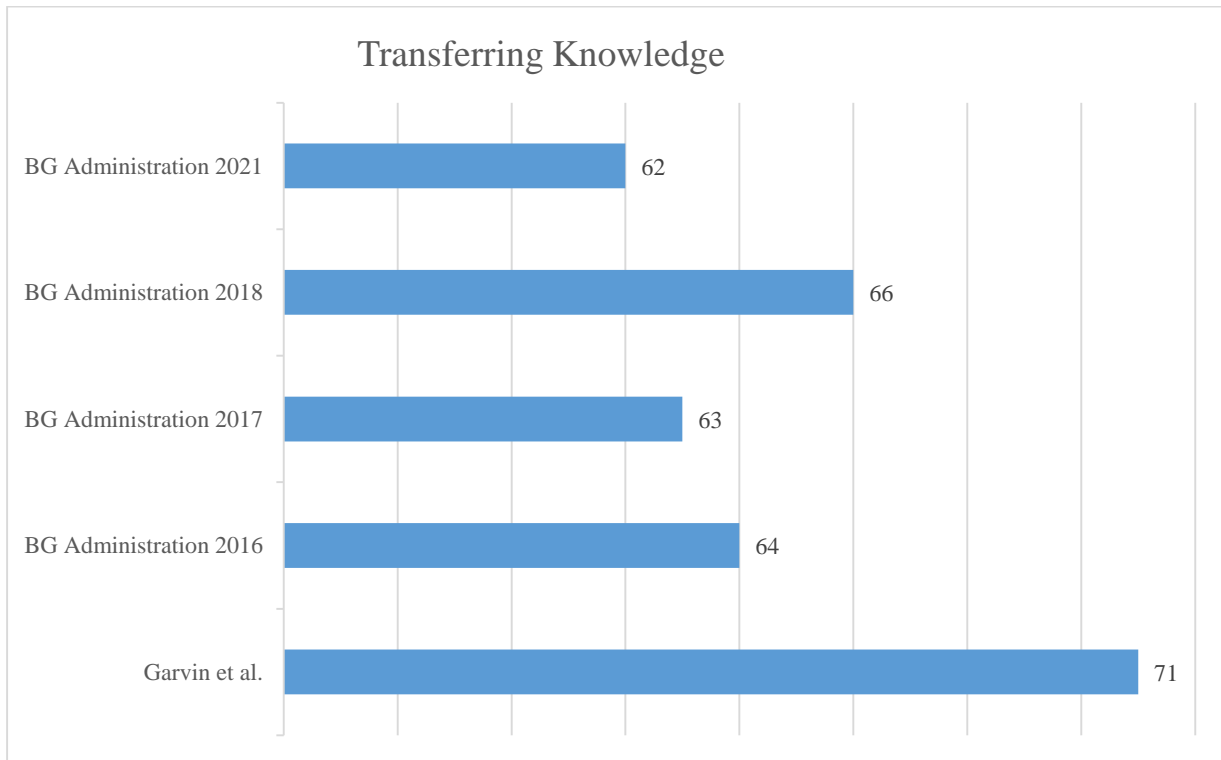


**Fig. 14 Transferring knowledge**

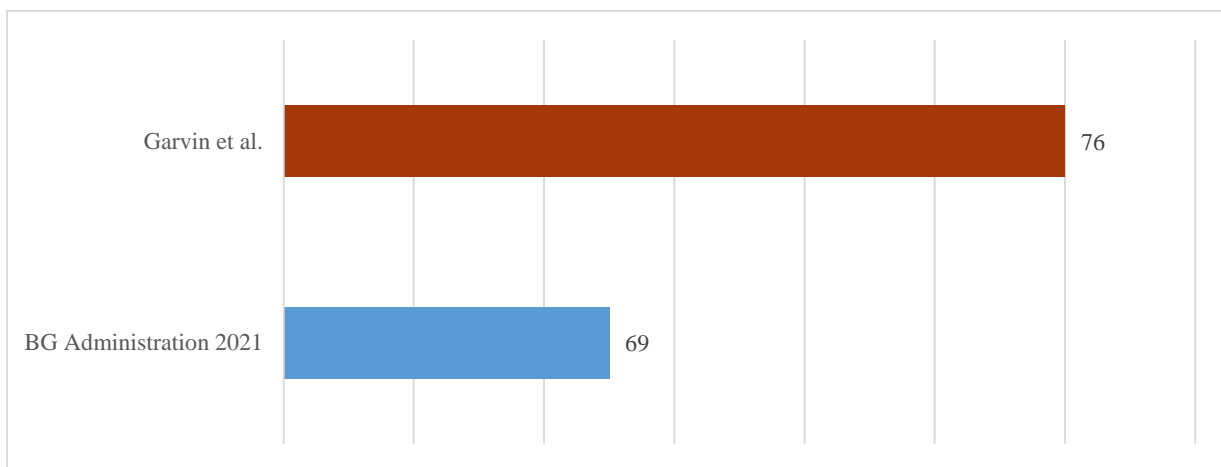


This is another indicator on which Bulgarian administrations are inferior to foreign organizations. The difference of 9 points is because Bulgarian administrations are still quite isolated from the business and NGO sectors and rarely exchange knowledge and experience with them. There is a need to build knowledge management systems between the different administrations, as well as to increase meetings and cooperation between experts from the administration and those working in the business and NGO sectors.

There has been no improvement in this respect in recent years



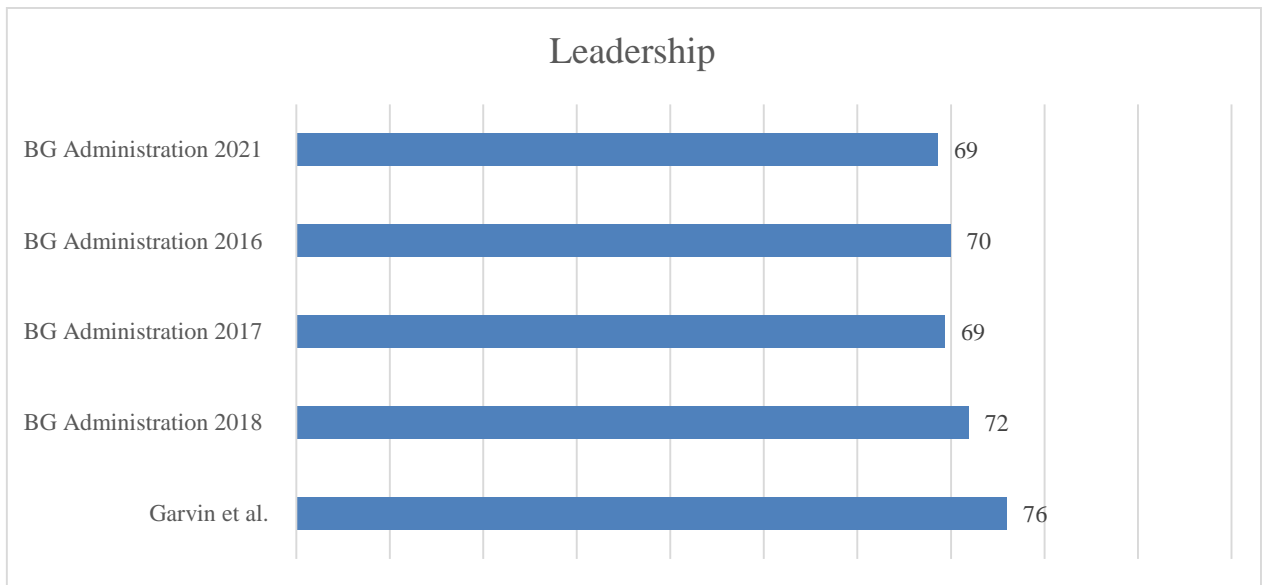
**Fig 15. Leadership**



On Leadership, we also find lower scores relative to the Garvin et al. sample. The difference of 7 points is mainly due to the lack of sufficient deliberation in decision-making. Bulgarian administration leaders need to improve their skills to provoke in-depth discussions and to guide their collaborators to identify the hidden assumptions they make when proposing solutions.

Comparisons with data from previous studies show no improvement for this indicator.





### COMPARISONS BETWEEN BULGARIAN ADMINISTRATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY

The Learning Organization Questionnaire also allows benchmarking between Bulgarian administrations. As already mentioned, out of the 81 administrations that participated in the self-assessment in 2021, only 56 met the minimum number of employees who completed the questionnaire. The rating of the learning administrations for 2021 is based on the self-assessments of these 56 public administration structures.

Table 1 presents the overall rating of learning administrations for 2021 by global assessment. The average score of Bulgarian administrations, calculated based on all 81 administrations participating in this study, is shown in red. Again, the average of the Western organizations from the Garvin et al. study is also given in red.

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the results of the administrations in the three main areas of the questionnaire: Learning-Friendly Environment, Processes, and Learning-Friendly Leadership. The benchmarks for Bulgarian administrations and Western organizations are similarly indicated (Garvin)

**Table 1. Overall rating of learning administrations 2021**

1	Ruse Regional Administration	88.7	29	Razgrad Regional Administration	66.0
2	Yambol Regional Administration	86.8	30	Ministry of Health	66.0
3	Kardzhali Regional Health Inspectorate	83.2	31	Levski Municipal Administration	65.8
4	Executive Agency "Certification audit of EU agricultural funds"	83.0	32	Karlovo Municipal Administration	65.7
5	Avren Municipal Administration	81.9	33	Vratsa Regional Health Inspectorate	65.5
6	Vratsa Regional Directorate of Education	79.4	34	Ministry of Energetics	65.5
7	Moesia Municipal Administration	79.4		<b>Bulgarian administration average</b>	<b>65.4</b>
8	Government Agency for Research and Innovation	76.6	35	Employment Agency	65.3
9	National Institute for Conciliation and Arbitration	75.6	36	Varna Regional Administration	65.0
10	Targovishte Regional Administration	74.9	37	Burgas Municipal Administration	64.9
11	Ruse Regional Directorate of Education	74.1	38	Silistra Regional Health Inspectorate	64.8
	<b>Western organizations average</b>	<b>74.0</b>	39	Municipality Capital	64.3
12	Montana Regional Health Inspectorate	73.5	40	Sofia area Regional Directorate of Education	64.0
13	NATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE	70.4	41	Gabrovo Regional Directorate of Education	63.8
14	Chelopech Municipal Administration	69.9	42	Sandanski Municipal Administration	63.0
15	Geodesy, Cartography, and Cadastral Agency	69.8	43	Agency for People with Disabilities	63.0
16	Nuclear Regulatory Agency	69.7	44	Ministry of Defense	62.6
17	Executive Agency "Education Programme"	69.6	45	Military Clubs and Military Recreation Executive Agency	62.4
18	Lovech Regional Administration	68.2	46	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	62.0
19	Sliven Regional Administration	67.3	47	Executive Agency "General Labor Inspectorate"	62.0
20	Troyan Municipal Administration	67.3	48	Bansko Municipal Administration	61.0
21	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	67.1	49	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	60.7
22	Council of Ministers Administration	67.0	50	Government Agency "Archives"	60.4
23	Pernik Municipal Administration	66.8	51	Strumyani Municipal Administration	60.3
24	East Aegean region Water Basin Directorate	66.8	52	Ministry of Environment and Water	60.1
25	Kaspichan Municipal Administration	66.6	53	Customs Agency	60.1
26	Veliko Tarnovo Regional Administration	66.3	54	Blagoevgrad Regional Directorate Agriculture	59.9
27	Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate	66.2	55	Vidin Regional Administration	59.7
28	National Education Inspectorate	66.2	56	Vratsa Regional Administration	53.1

**Table 2. Rating on indicator Learning-friendly Organizational Culture**

1	Ruse Regional Administration	88.0	29	Veliko Tarnovo Regional Administration	65.8
2	Yambol Regional Administration	86.4	30	Sandanski Municipal Administration	65.4
3	Avren Municipal Administration	81.8	31	Pernik Municipal Administration	65.4
4	Regional Health Inspectorate - Kardzhali	79.8	32	Ministry of Energetics	65.2
5	Executive Agency Certification Audit of European Agricultural Funds	79.1	33	Municipality Capital	65.2
6	Vratsa Regional Directorate of Education	78.5	34	Sofia area Regional Directorate of Education	64.9
7	Government Agency for Research and Innovation	77.6	35	Razgrad Regional Administration	64.8
8	Moesia Municipal Administration	77.5	36	Ministry of Health	64.8
9	Targovishte Regional Administration	75.6		<b>Bulgarian administration average</b>	<b>64.6</b>
10	Ruse Regional Directorate of Education	73.8	37	Varna Regional Administration	64.6
11	Regional Health Inspectorate - Montana	71.8	38	Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate	64.1
12	National Institute for Conciliation and Arbitration	71.5	39	Chelopech Municipal Administration	64.1
	<b>Western organizations average (Garvin)</b>	<b>71.0</b>	40	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	63.9
13	Nuclear Regulatory Agency	70.9	41	Government Agency "Archives"	63.8
14	Lovech Regional Administration	69.7	42	Military Clubs and Military Recreation Executive Agency	63.2
15	National Social Security Institute	68.8	43	Gabrovo Regional Directorate of Education	63.1
16	Agency for People with Disabilities	68.3	44	Regional Health Inspectorate - Vratsa	62.6
17	Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency	68.3	45	Employment Agency	62.6
18	Executive Agency "Education Programme"	68.1	46	Bansko Municipal Administration	62.4
19	Council of Ministers Administration	68.0	47	Regional Health Inspectorate - Silistra	62.3
20	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	67.2	48	Ministry of Defense	62.2
21	Levski Municipal Administration	66.7	49	Ministry of Environment and Water	61.8
22	Karlovo Municipal Administration	66.4	50	Customs Agency	60.8
23	Burgas Municipal Administration	66.3	51	Blagoevgrad Regional Directorate Agriculture	60.4
24	National Education Inspectorate	66.1	52	Executive Agency "General Labour Inspectorate"	60.2
25	Kaspichan Municipal Administration	66.0	53	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	60.0
26	Sliven Regional Administration	65.9	54	Strumyani Municipal Administration	59.8
27	Troyan Municipal Administration	65.9	55	Vidin Regional Administration	57.4
28	East Aegean region Water Basin Directorate	65.9	56	Vratsa Regional Administration	52.1

**Table 3. Rating by indicator Learning processes**

1	Ruse Regional Administration	87.1		29	Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate	63.2
2	Regional Health Inspectorate - Kardzhali	81.7			<b>Bulgarian administration average</b>	<b>63.0</b>
3	Executive Agency Certification Audit of EU Agricultural Funds	80.4		30	Karlovo Municipal Administration	63.0
4	Yambol Regional Administration	80.1		31	East Aegean region Water Basin Directorate	62.5
5	Vratsa Regional Directorate of Education	76.3		32	Kaspichan Municipal Administration	62.4
6	Avren Municipal Administration	76.2		33	Levski Municipal Administration	62.4
7	Moesia Municipal Administration	75.2		34	Ministry of Health	61.5
	<b>Western organizations average</b>	<b>74.0</b>		35	Burgas Municipal Administration	61.3
8	Chelopech Municipal Administration	73.2		36	Municipality Capital	60.9
9	National Institute for Conciliation and Arbitration	73.2		37	Ministry of Defense	60.9
10	Regional Health Inspectorate - Montana	72.6		38	Council of Ministers Administration	60.9
11	Government Agency for Research and Innovation	71.8		39	Ministry of Energetics	60.9
12	Regional Directorate of Education - Ruse	69.7		40	Sofia area Regional Directorate of Education	60.3
13	Targovishte Regional Administration	68.0		41	Gabrovo Regional Directorate of Education	59.9
14	Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency	67.3		42	Executive Agency "General Labour Inspectorate"	59.9
15	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	66.9		43	Varna Regional Administration	59.2
16	Executive Agency "Education Programme"	66.6		44	Bansko Municipal Administration	59.0
17	National Social Security Institute	66.6		45	Sandanski Municipal Administration	58.5
18	Employment Agency	65.3		46	Strumyani Municipal Administration	58.3
19	Troyan Municipal Administration	65.2		47	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	58.2
20	Regional Health Inspectorate - Vratsa	64.9		48	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	58.2
21	Nuclear Regulatory Agency	64.8		49	Vidin Regional Administration	57.9
22	Lovech Regional Administration	64.7		50	Military Clubs and Military Recreation Executive Agency	57.9
23	Veliko Tarnovo Regional Administration	64.5		51	Blagoevgrad Regional Directorate Agriculture	57.9
24	Regional Health Inspectorate - Silistra	64.4		52	Customs Agency	57.4
25	Pernik Municipal Administration	64.4		53	Agency for People with Disabilities	57.1
26	Razgrad Regional Administration	64.3		54	Ministry of Environment and Water	56.6
27	Sliven Regional Administration	63.8		55	Government Agency "Archives"	54.3
28	National Education Inspectorate	63.8		56	Vratsa Regional Administration	52.1

**Table 4. Rating according to indicator Learning-friendly leadership style**

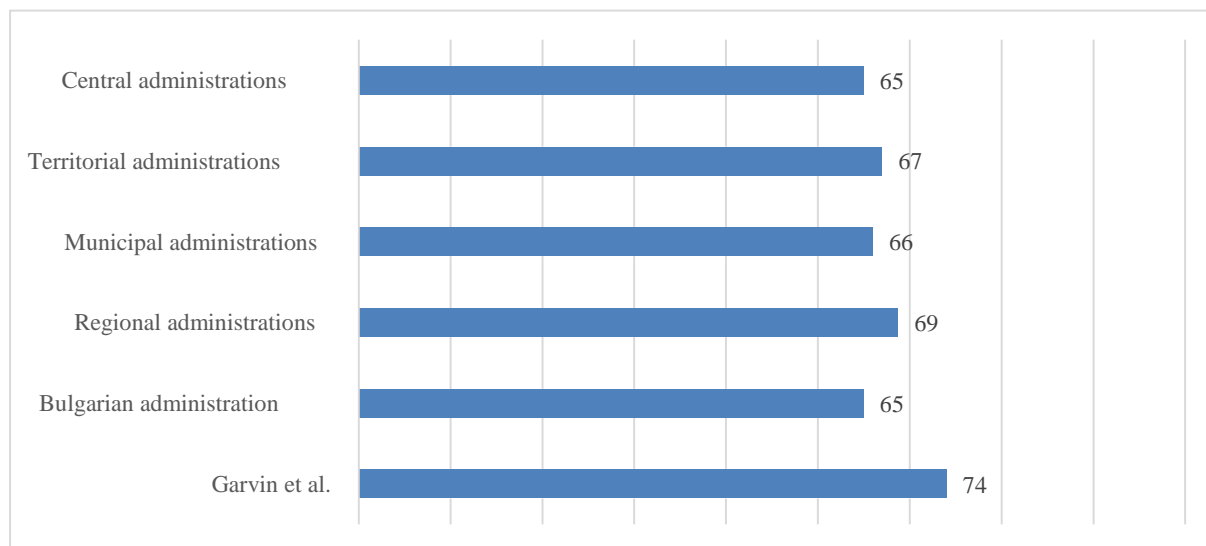
1	Yambol Regional Administration	94.0	29	Regional Health Inspectorate - Vratsa	69.1
2	Ruse Regional Administration	91.1	30	Razgrad Regional Administration	68.9
3	Executive Agency Certification Audit of EU Agricultural Funds	89.5	31	Veliko Tarnovo Regional Administration	68.8
4	Regional Health Inspectorate - Kardzhali	88.2	32	National Education Inspectorate	68.6
5	Avren Municipal Administration	87.8		<b>Bulgarian administration average</b>	<b>68.6</b>
6	Moesia Municipal Administration	85.6	33	Gabrovo Regional Directorate of Education	68.4
7	Vratsa Regional Directorate of Education	83.5	34	Levski Municipal Administration	68.4
8	National Institute for Conciliation and Arbitration	82.2	35	Karlovo Municipal Administration	67.9
9	Targovishte Regional Administration	81.0	36	Employment Agency	67.9
10	Government Agency for Research and Innovation	80.4	37	Silistra Regional Health Inspectorate	67.7
11	Ruse Regional Directorate of Education	78.8	38	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	67.2
12	Regional Health Inspectorate - Montana	76.3	39	Burgas Municipal Administration	67.1
	<b>Western organizations average (Garvin)</b>	<b>76.0</b>	40	Sofia area Regional Directorate of Education	66.9
13	National Social Security Institute	75.7	41	Municipality Capital	66.7
14	Executive Agency "Education Programme"	74.1	42	Military Clubs and Military Recreation Executive Agency	66.0
15	Geodesy, Cartography, and Cadastral Agency	73.9	43	Executive Agency "General Labor Inspectorate"	65.9
16	Nuclear Regulatory Agency	73.3	44	Sandanski Municipal Administration	65.2
17	Chelopech Municipal Administration	72.4	45	Ministry of Defense	64.7
18	Sliven Regional Administration	72.3	46	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works	64.0
19	Council of Ministers Administration	72.0	47	Vidin Regional Administration	63.9
20	East Aegean region Water Basin Directorate	71.9	48	Bulgarian Food Safety Agency	63.8
21	Ministry of Health	71.5	49	Agency for People with Disabilities	63.6
22	Kaspichan Municipal Administration	71.4	50	Government Agency "Archives"	63.1
23	Varna Regional Administration	71.3	51	Strumyani Municipal Administration	62.8
24	Sofia Regional Health Inspectorate	71.2	52	Customs Agency	62.0
25	Troyan Municipal Administration	70.8	53	Ministry of Environment and Water	61.9
26	Pernik Municipal Administration	70.7	54	Bansko Municipal Administration	61.8
27	Ministry of Energetics	70.3	55	Blagoevgrad Regional Directorate Agriculture	61.5
28	Lovech Regional Administration	70.2	56	Vratsa Regional Administration	55.3

The presented data for Bulgarian administrations show very significant differences between them. They are statistically significant on all indicators measured by the questionnaire. Interestingly, regional and municipal administrations are among both the strongest and the weakest performing organizations, which undoubtedly shows how important leadership is for organizational culture.

### COMPARISONS BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION TYPES

In research, we traditionally divide administrations into three groups - central, territorial and local. Preliminary expectations were that the organizational culture would differ across them, as each type of administration has a different degree of autonomy and different decision-making and policy formulation powers. Data are presented in Figure 2.10.

**Figure 16.** Comparison between types of administrations according to the Learning Organization Questionnaire

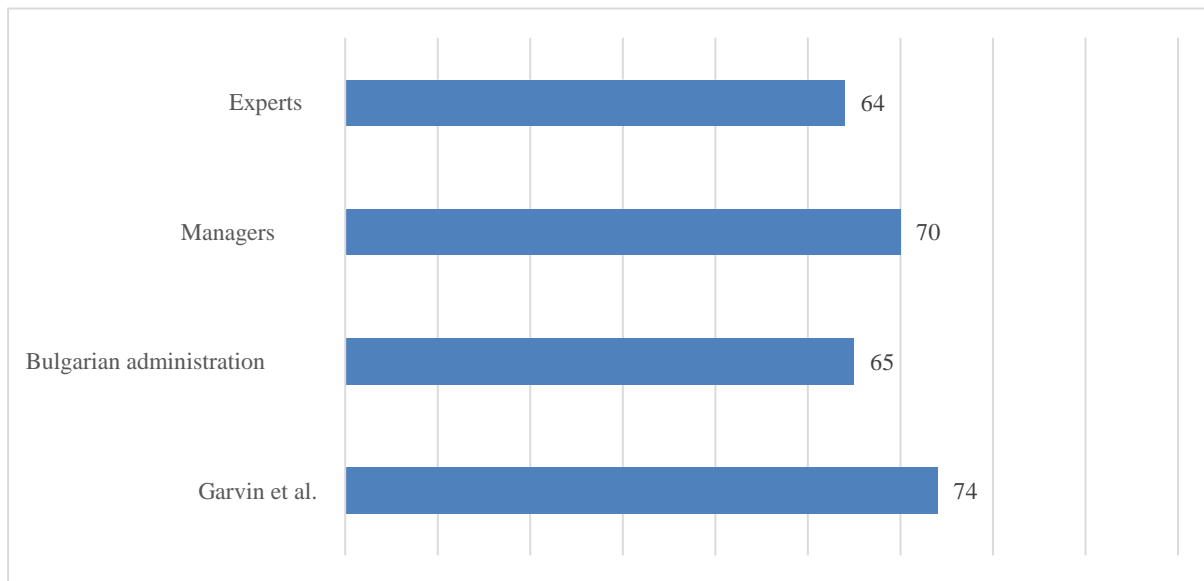


### COMPARISONS BY GENDER, POSITION, AND LENGTH OF SERVICE IN THE ADMINISTRATION

Job title and length of service in the administration influence employees' views of the organizational culture in their administration and therefore the questionnaire results. In several similar studies, it has been found that supervisors tend to view the climate in their organization more positively than their subordinates. The survey design, therefore, set quotas for the proportion of managers and experts who could participate from each administration.

The data presented in Figure 8.11 predictably show that supervisors have statically significantly more positive evaluations of the organizational culture in their administration compared to experts.

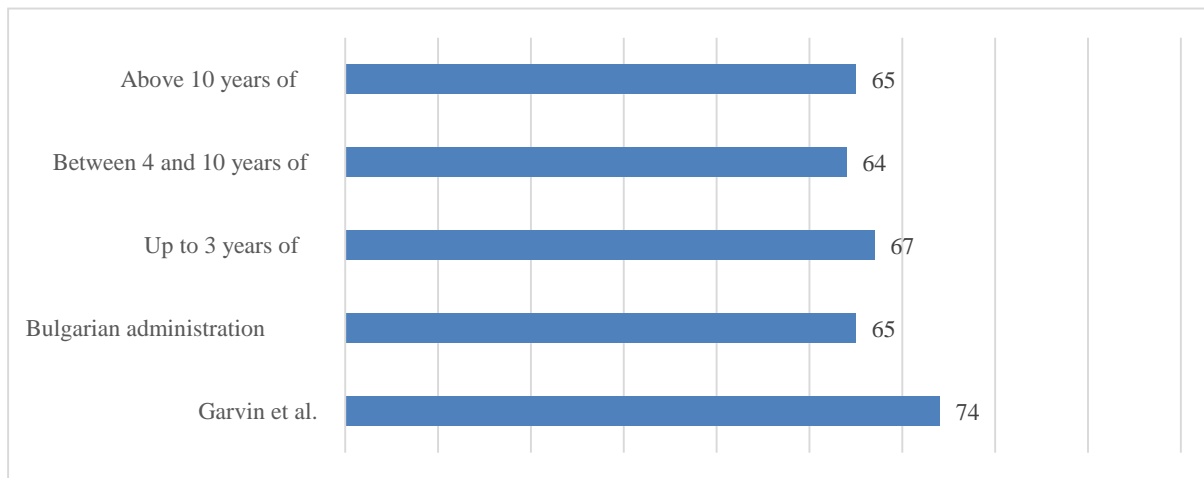
**Figure 17.** Comparison between managers and experts on the results of the Learning Organization Questionnaire



However, it should be noted that, although statistically different, managers' ratings are not overly optimistic and probably simply reflect their own experience, work, responsibilities, and greater ability to participate in decision-making processes rather than any purposeful drive to raise the rating of their administration.

In terms of seniority, the direction of influence is less clear. On the one hand, experienced employees have more influence in their organization and are therefore more often involved in decision-making processes and analyzing information. On the other hand, younger employees tend to be more proactive, more willing to give suggestions, more likely to push for changes, more likely to be sent for training, and more likely to be given tasks that involve learning elements. This seems to have an impact, as the data presented in Figure 8.12 shows that young employees have more positive evaluations of the organizational culture in their administration.

**Figure 18.** Comparison between the Learning Organization Questionnaire results of individuals with different lengths of service in administration.



Finally, the results of participants of both sexes were compared. As in previous years' studies, no statistically significant differences were found by gender. The mean for males was 65, while the mean for females was half a point higher, not a significant difference.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the present study largely replicate the results of previous studies on organizational culture in Bulgarian administrations. As there was weak but steady progress in three consecutive years between 2016 and 2018, the expectation was that in 2021 we would see a more significant improvement compared to 2018. However, the data suggest otherwise - instead of improvement, there is deterioration. None of the weaknesses has been addressed. The Bulgarian civil service remains conservative, negative towards change, and skeptical of innovation. Most Bulgarian administrations are not sufficiently open to new opportunities and find it difficult to implement even the necessary changes. Good ideas circulate the space for years before they are implemented. Resources, processes, infrastructure, and procedures for gathering information and experimenting with new ideas are lacking or insufficient. In addition, many administrations have become isolated and inward-looking and have focused too much on the performance of their day-to-day functions without sufficiently examining the overall picture and societal processes, economic and social trends, innovations in their field of activity, and best practices of similar Bulgarian and foreign administrations.

Knowledge management systems in administrations are lacking or underdeveloped. There are few and irregular forms of exchange of experience and information with businesses, NGOs, and other administrations. It is relatively rare for administrations to test the hidden assumptions underlying their decisions and



therefore, difficult to initiate radical change from within. Questionnaire results show something quite obvious to the outside observer - the Bulgarian administration rarely initiates changes on its own and usually changes under external pressure. More analysis and evaluation of performance, a more proactive stance, and more change initiatives generated by the administrations themselves based on their experience are needed.

Changes are needed not only in the area of processes but also in the learning-friendly environment. Certain administrations have leadership and processes that support exploration and learning, but the staff relationships themselves block these processes. Many employees do not feel stimulated to speak critically and provide alternative suggestions, either because of authoritarian leaders or because of the conservatism of their colleagues. Changing organizational culture is not such a simple and easy process - it is necessary to change values and attitudes, address fears and learning needs, provide procedures and opportunities for learning and experimentation, gather the necessary information, and ensure a wide exchange of ideas, experiences and information with experts from other administrations, business and the NGO sector.

*The 2021 Is Yours a Learning Organization? self-assessment and its reports are the results of the work of an IPA team composed of Gergana Georgieva, IPA Senior Expert, Sava Stefanov, IPA Junior Expert, and Nikolay Nikolov (external consultant)*