

**DISPA Meeting «Learning in the Digital Age»  
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# Rating of Learning administrations



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Bulgarian Presidency of the Council  
of the European Union

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# Main points

1. Background of the case
2. Process/dynamics
3. Results/outcome
4. Lessons learned & key recommendations

## 1.1. Background of the case

In 2016 IPA implemented an internal project *Alternatives of Formal Training in State Administration* with following objectives:

- To study the implementation of up-to-date learning and development methods in state administration as an alternative to formal face-to-face training

*A brief for this study was presented at DISPA meeting in Malta.*

- To carry out trainings on the topic *Learning Organization* intended mainly for managers and HR experts of the administration
- To introduce a self-assessment tool called *Is Yours a Learning Organization* and to establish a rating of the learning administrations in order to promote this organizational culture

## 1.2. Learning organization

- The term was coined by Peter Sage in his book "The Fifth Discipline"
- The learning organizations are those which stimulate their employees to create, acquire, and transfer knowledge, helping in that way the company itself to adapt to the unpredictable future faster than the rivals could
- The most successful companies nowadays have such organizational culture, so this is proved recipe for business how to become a proactive, innovative and successful company
- Could be a recipe also for the public administration, because it is put on a growing pressure to achieve more for less money

## 1.3. The tool

- Despite highly desired the transformation into a learning organization is difficult goal
- Vast majority of organizations fails in their efforts to transform themselves
- The main reason – the management don't know what have to do
- Is Yours a Learning Organization is a self-assessment tool and how-to-do methodology which helps leaders across the world in transforming of their traditional organizations into learning organizations

## 1.4. Three fields for action

- **Supportive learning environment** – the employees feel safe disagreeing with others, asking naive questions and presenting minority viewpoints; the organization recognizes the value of opposing ideas, taking of risks and exploring the unknown; and the employees have time to review organizational processes and their own actions.
- **Concrete learning processes** – formal processes for generating, collecting, interpreting, and disseminating information; experimenting with new ideas; gathering intelligence on competitors, collecting customers' feedback, and exploring the technological trends.
- **Leadership style that stimulates learning** - the organization's leaders demonstrate willingness to entertain alternative viewpoints, signal the importance of spending time on problem identification, knowledge transfer, and reflection, and engage her/himself in active questioning and listening to suggestions of their subordinates.

## 2.1. Process (1)

- In 2016 the questionnaire was translated in Bulgarian and almost 80 administrations were invited to participate in online self-assessment
- All of these 80 administrations were introducing CAF model for the first time under another project of IPA
- We had the intention to use their data for establishing of national standards and points of reference for further benchmarking
- Therefore, we followed strict rules in data collection e.g.:
  - How many employees of each administration may take the questionnaire
  - How should they be selected, considering the requirements for specific quotas for managers and experts, for general and specialized administration and so on.
- 63 administrations fulfilled these requirements and on the basis of their results the first national rating of the learning administrations was created

## 2.2. Process (2)

- The same process was repeated in 2017
  - IPA invited all (more than 500) administrations in Bulgaria to participate in self-assessment with "Is yours a learning organization?"
  - More than 80 administrations took part with 70 of them covering all requirements and the rating for 2017 was drawn up.
- After collection, an individual report (feedback) for each administration and summary report for the Bulgarian public administration were prepared
- The individual report was a 10 page document containing benchmarking based on the Garvin's building blocks, a list with specific organizational strengths and weaknesses and recommendations to the management
- For the benchmarking and rating, two types of reference scales were used – 1) the original Garvin's metric and 2) the national standards that were established in 2016



# 3. Results/outcome

- In the end of each 2016 and 2017 IPA organized special ceremonies for awarding the administrations achieving highest rating results
- At the ceremonies the awarded administrations shared their specific practices through which they encourage learning and development of their employees.
- IPA made video interviews with top managers from some of these administrations and published them on their website to disseminate the good practices
- Furthermore in 2017 a National competition for good practices in the field of Learning and Development was organized by IPA and the best practices were published in a special edition
- In same year a separate module called “Learning organization” was developed as a part of 2-day training course “Contemporary instruments in people management”. IPA continues to deliver this training in 2018

## 4. Lessons learned & key recommendations

- The transformation of the public administrations into learning organizations seems to be even more difficult and time consuming than it is for the business organizations
- The support of the top management is a key factor for transformation of the organizational culture and for establishing of learning environment
- Better awareness and higher expertise of the HR departments is needed
- Results show that the Bulgarian public administration seems to be more conservative and not open to new ideas or experimentations as compared to the business
- The feedback and video interviews with public administration leaders contribute to the dissemination of the learning organization concept and good practices
- The impact of the feedback is greater when the administration has achieved good results
- The administrations that performed poorly in previous self-assessment tend to avoid participation in next one

## 5. Transferability

- IPA shall continue to provide free of charge opportunity for self-assessment through the questionnaire "Is yours a learning organization" for Bulgarian administrations.
- Our experience so far indicates that the learning organization self-assessment is a comparatively easy, inexpensive and suitable way for encouraging learning in the public administration
- We believe it could be of mutual benefit if other institutes/schools of DISPA network join our initiative and accept the idea of using this tool
- This will allow us to make useful comparisons between administrations, to identify strengths and weaknesses, to learn from the experience of others and to discover new opportunities for learning in the administration

# Questions



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