

IS YOURS A LEARNING ADMINISTRATION?

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

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on learning organisation indicators**

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Theoretical framework

The concept of the ‘learning organisation’ was popularised and established in management theory by the American systems researcher Peter Senge with the publication of his book **The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation** in 1990.¹ Senge, a lecturer in ‘Leadership and Sustainability’ at MIT, defines the concept of a ‘learning organisation’ as ‘a structure in which most people are committed to continually expanding their capacity to create, more effectively or efficiently, what they wish to create’. This is a company or organisation where new, expansive models of thinking are cultivated and where people are constantly learning how to learn better together. By fostering an organisational culture in which continuous learning is not an additional task but the norm, companies gain the ability to adapt more quickly to market changes through appropriate innovation and to achieve long-term business success. In the dynamic global business environment, constant adaptation is key to survival. Senge’s concept is situated within systems theory not merely as a management methodology, but as a fundamental philosophy for survival and growth. According to its author, ‘the only sustainable competitive advantage an organisation can possess is its ability to learn faster than the competition’. This management paradigm is based on clear cause-and-effect relationships – the dynamic market and the constantly changing challenges in the external environment create a need for continuous adaptation and innovation, whilst organisational learning provides the cultural and structural capacity for this, which ultimately leads to a sustainable competitive advantage.

Senge’s conceptual framework is built upon five interrelated disciplines, which in turn represent classic approaches to developing three key capabilities for organisational learning: fostering a desire to expand knowledge, developing reflective dialogue within the organisation, and understanding the complexity of processes and technological change. In practice, each of the following five disciplines is necessary for an organisation to ‘learn’ and progress.

Systems thinking

Systems thinking is defined by Senge as the ‘cornerstone’ that unites all the other disciplines². It views the organisation as a complex, interconnected whole, rather than as a collection of isolated parts, and focuses on recognising patterns of development and interdependencies. Systems thinking enables leaders to see the long-term consequences of their own actions and drives them to seek more informed and sustainable solutions. Understanding systemic principles is critical to the successful development of organisations. Senge likes to emphasise the asynchrony between

¹ Senge, Peter M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*. New York: Doubleday/Currency

² Senge’s System Thinking Model – Knowledge Train. <https://www.knowledgetrain.co.uk/change-management/change-management-courses/change-management-models/peter-senge>

cause and effect in organisational development, which often distorts interpretation, creating the illusion of learning from experience when, in fact, we do not see the whole picture and reach the wrong conclusions. By applying systems thinking, leaders realise that ‘today’s problems stem from yesterday’s “solutions”’, that the harder they push those below them, the stronger the resistance they encounter, and that the most important problems are usually at the systemic level and cannot be resolved by seeking to blame someone.

The individual pursuit of excellence

The individual pursuit of excellence is the discipline of organisational learning, involving the continuous clarification and deepening of employees’ individual vision, focusing energy on what is most essential, and developing patience and an objective view of reality. Senge emphasises that organisations learn only through individuals who are learning, and that whilst learning at the individual level does not guarantee organisational learning, without it the latter simply cannot happen. The individual pursuit of excellence goes beyond the acquisition of new skills and competencies. It requires a commitment to the truth and a willingness to honestly confront the gap between one’s personal vision and current reality³. The gap between vision and reality creates ‘creative tension’, which is the driving force behind individual growth and learning. Learning organisations create an environment and a culture that encourage the development of personal visions and the desire for self-improvement.

Mental models

Mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalisations or logical frameworks that influence the way we understand the world⁴. This discipline of the learning organisation requires identifying and testing potential limiting biases and gaps that narrow our worldview. This is the first step towards overcoming our limited perception of the world, enabling us to recognise the structures that give rise to it. Openness is essential to make this insight possible and to broaden our conception of the world. Practising this discipline requires balancing the ability to assert boundaries with the ability to explore; the latter becomes vital for examining the perspectives of others and for achieving a deeper understanding of the truth⁵.

³ Systems Thinking, Organisational Change and Agency: A Practice Theory Critique of Senge’s Learning Organisation.

⁴ Leadership Insights from "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation" by Peter M. Senge | IBM Centre for The Business of Government,
<https://www.businessofgovernment.org/blog/leadership-insights-fifth-discipline-art-and-practice-learning-organization-peter-m-senge>

⁵ The Fifth Discipline: A Path to Transformative Growth | Meridian University,
<https://meridianuniversity.edu/content/the-fifth-discipline-a-path-to-transformative-growth>

A shared vision

A shared vision is a practice for developing common, clear and easy-to-understand pictures of the future, which encourage commitment and engage staff in pursuing long-term goals, as opposed to simply carrying out tasks and duties. A shared vision provides a collective identity and ensures focus and energy for learning. It helps people see how their actions contribute to change and to shaping their future, and ensures that these actions are moving in a common direction.

Team learning

Team learning is the discipline within the concept of the learning organisation that aligns and develops the capacity of the team as a whole, building on individual talent and vision to achieve results that individual team members could not achieve on their own. Team learning has three main dimensions:

1. Insightful analysis of complex issues, based on harnessing the potential of many minds.
2. Innovative and coordinated action, based on mutual understanding and trust, in which team members rely on and complement one another.
3. Learning across teams, which leads to the dissemination of knowledge and experience throughout the organisation.

At the heart of team learning lies ‘dialogue’ – the ability of team members to set aside their preconceptions and enter an open and honest space of ‘thinking together’⁶. Leaders in learning organisations create the conditions and encourage these dialogues, enabling team members to explore complex problems in depth, drawing on the ability to engage multiple minds on the basis of mutual trust and respect.

The five disciplines form a cycle of profound, incremental change. If the organisational culture lacks psychological safety and the capacity for an objective view of reality, attempts at team learning will be hampered by power struggles and hidden personal ambitions.

Senge’s ideas are supported by empirical research. A number of scholars have concluded that people and their ability to learn have become the most important competitive advantage of modern organisations. Effective learning is increasingly identified as a key factor on which the prosperity of modern organisations depends in the highly dynamic world of digital technologies and digital transformation (Garvin, 1993). However, a study by Deloitte consultants involving 3,300 organisations worldwide highlights not only the importance of organisational learning, but also the growing dissatisfaction with the difficulties that organisations are widely encountering in their attempts to transform themselves into learning organisations (Deloitte, 2015⁷). According to

⁶ Teams and learning: the agenda has changed - Emerald Insight, <https://www.emerald.com/Teams-and-learning-the-agenda-has-changed-Does-an?searchresult=1>

⁷ Deloitte (2015). Global Human Capital Trends. Deloitte University Press

Harvard University professors Garvin, Edmonson and Gino (Garvin, Edmonson, & Gino, 2008), the main reason for these difficulties is that managers simply do not know how to achieve such a goal. In their view, management requires clear guidance, specific objectives, precisely defined steps, and a tool for feedback, measurement and progress assessment. Guided by this understanding, Professor Garvin and his colleagues developed the ‘Is Your Organisation a Learning Organisation?’ methodology – a tool that assists leaders in companies and public administrations in the process of transforming their traditional organisations into learning organisations.

Methodology

The methodology developed by Garvin, Edmondson and Gino was first published in 2008 in the Harvard Business Review and is used by all types of organisations worldwide to transform traditional organisational cultures into those of learning organisations. The widespread adoption of the method is aided by the fact that it not only sets out the objectives and steps but also offers the opportunity for self-assessment of progress. The methodology comprises three main components:

- Building an organisational culture that supports learning.
- Introducing specific learning processes and mechanisms.
- Establishing a leadership style that encourages critical thinking, teamwork and learning through work and decision-making.

An organisational culture that supports learning

Organisational culture encompasses all the written and unwritten rules by which an organisation operates – its mission, vision, structure, attitude towards the outside world, leadership, internal communications, and so on. With regard to learning, Garvin, Edmondson and Gino identify four key aspects:

Psychological safety. Learning is a mental activity, not merely the acquisition of knowledge. It often involves searching for answers, asking uncomfortable questions, questioning familiar answers, and proposing unexpected or unconventional solutions. Innovative and critical thinking is acceptable and often encouraged in a purely academic environment, but in the world of business and public administration, power hierarchies play an important role, and so it is not customary there to criticise formal authorities or to take failure and mistakes in one’s stride. In most real-

⁸ David A. Garvin, Amy C. Edmondson, and Francesca Gino (2008). Is Yours a Learning Organisation? Harvard Business Review

world organisations, such things are even taboo. People take criticism personally and feel offended; they do not propose new ideas or express differing opinions if they fear they might be wrong, and they are not willing to risk losing more by trying something new than they would gain if they turned out to be right and succeeded. According to Garvin and his colleagues, transforming organisations into learning organisations involves a change in organisational culture. Consequently, the process is complex, uncertain, slow and often accompanied by cyclical returns to the old ways before the new approach finally prevails.

Valuing diversity. Many of the problems faced by modern organisations are complex and would be difficult for a single person to resolve. It is essential to listen to different points of view, as these enable a truly comprehensive and balanced solution to be found, rather than one that creates additional problems or sets the stage for new, even more serious problems in the future. Sometimes even incorrect opinions are valuable, as they stimulate new avenues of inquiry or shed further light on the logic behind decisions already taken. However, for different points of view to exist, there must be not merely tolerance of differences, but also mechanisms and a space that encourage, support and enable the free expression of opinion.

Openness to new ideas. Learning is not only a process of correcting mistakes and solving existing problems, but also of seeking out and discovering new approaches. Although many organisations claim to encourage their staff to be creative and innovative, few are genuinely prepared to test new ideas or implement significant changes proposed from within when there is no external pressure. Recognising and accepting change as a constant, ongoing process poses a serious challenge for many administrations. The dynamic world in which we live often pushes us to the limits of our flexibility and adaptability.

Time for reflection. Every methodology for implementing change highlights the need to reflect on what has been achieved and to evaluate interim results. This is an opportunity to learn from our mistakes and successes, to identify what works and what does not, so that we can change direction or be more effective next time. The problem is that, in practice, this rarely happens. Under the pressure of new, urgent tasks, there is seldom any time left for reflection. In many organisations, people are overworked and stressed by tight deadlines and an excessive workload. They have no time not only for learning, but also to critically consider decisions already made and their long-term consequences. Building an organisational culture that supports learning means setting aside *dedicated* time to review work and work processes, and to consider or rethink future efforts.

Learning mechanisms and processes

In this section of their methodology, Garvin and colleagues set out the elements that make up the ‘infrastructure’ of a learning organisation. These are training, the transfer of knowledge into practice, research and experimentation, and the collection and analysis of information.

Experimenting with new approaches. Learning organisations have rules and procedures in place for experimentation. They do not merely generate new ideas, but manage to test them promptly in

practice and assess their impact. The implementation of innovations in traditional organisations is often delayed because the organisation itself cannot quickly and easily carry out a simulation or pilot study of the proposed changes and evaluate the results of such experiments.

Information gathering. Reviewing work and identifying problems based on subjective assumptions is often ineffective because of a lack of data. The systematic gathering of information is a defining feature of learning organisations. Depending on the company's business or the functions of the administration, the relevance of the information gathered may vary. In most cases, organisations collect data from benchmarking exercises with similar organisations, study best practices, gather data from internal and external customers, and analyse broader economic, political, social and technological trends that could potentially influence their operations.

Analysis. The data collected, the information from work process reviews and the results of experiments must ultimately be analysed. However, due to the complexity of the issues, hasty, subjective or one-sided analysis often leads to erroneous conclusions. It is essential to constantly identify the underlying assumptions being made and to analyse the information gathered from the experience or practice of others from various perspectives. This is the only guarantee that no erroneous or unbalanced decisions will be made. To this end, however, the organisation must establish sustainable and well-functioning two-way horizontal and vertical lines of communication and create spaces for such discussions.

Training. At first glance, this seems to be the least problematic area, as most modern organisations value training. Statistics show that American companies spend over 60 billion dollars annually on short-term, ongoing training programmes within their own organisations. However, whilst the forms of learning are constantly expanding – and today there are flexible and convenient learning options such as distance learning, webinars, video conferences and so on – effective learning in the workplace remains a challenge. Human Resources departments struggle to quickly identify training needs and find the fastest and most effective form of learning in relation to each specific identified need for new knowledge or skills.

Knowledge transfer. One of the major problems associated with training for quite some time now has been the transfer of knowledge and skills into practice. In many cases, staff fail to apply what they have learnt from training or experience in practice because they cannot overcome the resistance of those who have not been trained or have not taken the time to reflect on the issues. In other cases, the information from analyses simply does not reach decision-makers quickly enough. Therefore, learning organisations must establish comprehensive and well-functioning mechanisms for disseminating knowledge and information within the organisations themselves.

A leadership style that encourages learning

The primary responsibility for transforming an organisation into a learning organisation lies with its leaders. Employees themselves can do relatively little to change the organisational culture or to alter work processes within their organisations. Leaders are expected to build an organisational

culture that supports learning, to put in place mechanisms and tools for gathering information, to allow time for reflection, to bring people together to discuss issues, encourage diverse perspectives, challenge implicit assumptions, foster innovative thinking, and not hesitate to implement the necessary changes. The problem is that most traditional leaders do not recognise these activities – or even some of them – as their personal responsibility. Therefore, the results of the organisational culture survey using the questionnaire developed by Garvin and colleagues serve as a means of feedback, enabling top-level managers to understand their role and responsibilities for the sustainable development of their organisations.

The methodology developed by Garvin, Edmondson and Gino is a self-assessment tool. The three main components, along with their various aspects, are operationalised through a set of questions covering the different aspects of organisational culture, learning processes and leadership. The questionnaire must be completed anonymously by staff, and the results should be compared with those of other organisations. Benchmarking enables the identification of the strengths and specific weaknesses that a particular organisation exhibits in its efforts to become a learning organisation, and allows the necessary adjustments to be made.

The sections ‘Organisational culture supporting learning’ and ‘Learning mechanisms and processes’ contain statements to which participants must respond using a 7-point response scale with the following options:

- Extremely inaccurate
- Quite inaccurate
- Somewhat inaccurate
- I cannot say
- Somewhat true
- Quite accurate
- Extremely accurate

Respondents should assess the extent to which each of the statements accurately describes the organisational climate and processes within their organisational unit. According to the methodology of Garvin and colleagues, an organisational unit may be a team, a department, a directorate or an entire organisation.

The third section of the questionnaire, ‘Leadership Style Supporting Learning’, contains statements describing specific behaviours of the leader. Respondents can answer using a 5-point scale with the following options:

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes

- Often
- Always

For each question in the questionnaire, respondents may select only one answer option. The results are totalled for each section and aspect and summarised for the individual organisational unit or organisation.

Studies of organisational culture in the Bulgarian public administration

Empirical studies using the ‘Learning Organisations’ paradigm have been carried out in Bulgaria since 2016, when the methodology developed by Garvin and colleagues was translated and piloted for use in the public administration. In the first study, 70 administrative bodies that had expressed a desire to implement the European quality management model, the ‘Common Assessment Framework’ (CAF), were invited to take part, as the concept of learning organisations effectively builds on the idea of total quality. The questionnaire was uploaded to an online survey platform, which ensured the rapid and convenient administration of the tool and the accurate recording of the responses received. Of the 70 administrations invited, 49 met the requirements for representativeness and quota distribution. Data from the first year of the study were also used to validate the methodology. Statistical analyses showed that the factor structure of the instrument holds true in the Bulgarian context, which made it possible to compare the Bulgarian data with the samples and database of Garvin and colleagues. The initial findings on the organisational culture of learning in Bulgarian administrations were encouraging – although there was some lag behind Western administrations, the differences appeared surmountable. Only in the aspect of ‘Openness to new ideas’ was the deviation significant and seemed difficult to overcome. In 2017 and 2018, two further surveys were conducted; each showed modest progress compared with previous years, and it then began to seem that it was only a matter of time before Bulgarian administrations became as flexible, open to innovation and progressive as their counterparts in the US and Western Europe. Against the backdrop of this data and trend, the IPA decided at the time to conduct the survey every two years rather than annually. In 2021, the fourth national survey was carried out. It involved 81 administrations, which was far more than before the Covid-19 crisis, and with far more participants – nearly 3,000. Quite unexpectedly, however, rather than progress, a regression from the levels achieved in 2018 was recorded, with organisational culture results reverting to the 2016 level. The political crisis that followed the health and economic crises caused by Covid-19 appears to have worsened the organisational climate in a number of administrations, as evidenced not only by this study but also by the national survey of attitudes among civil servants – the Engagement Barometer. The fifth survey, conducted in 2023, showed an even greater decline in results and a further drift away from a culture of learning and innovation. Problem areas became even more problematic, whilst those where average results had previously been recorded began to approach the problem zone.

This sixth national survey was conducted in October 2025 and largely mirrors the results from 2023. Most indicators remain at the same level – there has been no significant deterioration in the working environment within local authorities, but no improvement is evident either. The following sections of this report present the results of this study.

Sample

This year's survey was conducted in October, exactly two years after the previous survey. A total of 84 administrations took part, making it the largest survey to date in terms of this metric. In each administration, staff in expert and managerial roles from both the general and specialised administration were selected at random and in accordance with pre-established quotas to complete the questionnaire. The aim of the quotas is to ensure that the survey is representative of the entire Bulgarian administration. In addition, a minimum number of respondents per administration was set, again with the aim of ensuring better representativeness of the data.

All respondents completed the questionnaire anonymously via the IPA's online platform. Data collection concluded in mid-October, with a total of 3,299 staff members completing the survey. This is fewer than the number of participants in 2023, but more than in any of the previous surveys. Of the 84 administrations that took part, 82 met the requirement for a minimum number of staff to have completed the questionnaire, which is again the highest figure compared with all previous surveys. The 2025 ranking of participating administrations is based on the self-assessments of 82 public administration bodies that met the representativeness requirements. By type of institution, these are:

- 26 central government bodies (ministries, national agencies, commissions, etc.)
- 21 regional branches of central administrations
- 13 regional administrations
- 22 local authority administrations

To assure participants that the anonymity of their responses was guaranteed, the demographic information collected was limited to just three factors – gender, length of service in the administration and job title. Respondents were required to provide a limited set of demographic details about themselves:

- which administration they work for;
- whether they hold a specialist or managerial post;
- their gender;
- which of the following three categories of length of service they fall into – up to 3 years, between 4 and 10 years, and over 10 years.

The following charts show the breakdown of survey respondents according to these demographic variables. The breakdown by gender showed that 75.3 per cent of respondents were women, whilst men accounted for 24.7 per cent. These figures roughly correspond to the gender distribution within the Bulgarian civil service and to the gender distributions found in previous studies.

The survey involved 556 managers (17 per cent)

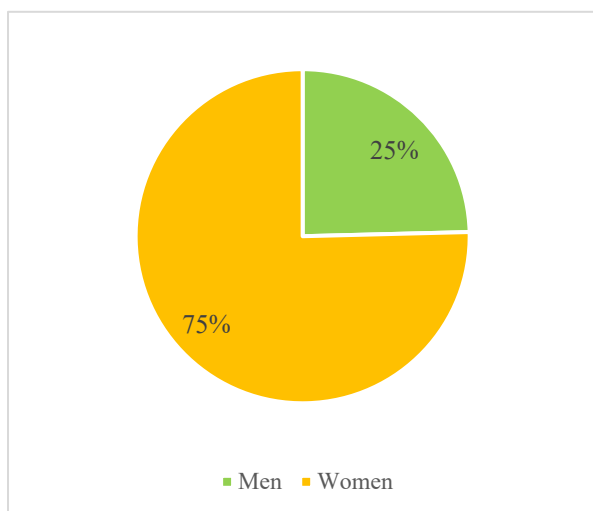


FIGURE2 . DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER

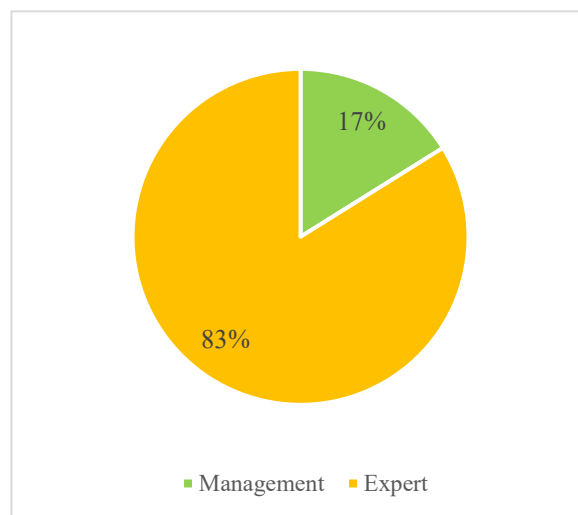


FIGURE1 . DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS BY POSITION

and 2,743 staff in specialist roles (83 per cent). The distribution of respondents by job title also corresponds to the overall distribution of job types within the civil service.

The breakdown of the sample by length of service shows that experienced staff with over 10 years' service in the administration predominate – 1,710 or 52 per cent. New staff – with up to 3 years' service – number 685 (21 per cent), whilst those with between 4 and 10 years' service number 904 (27 per cent). Compared with the previous survey from 2023, the proportion of staff with over 10 years' service has fallen (from 56 to 52 per cent), whilst the proportion of newly appointed staff and those with up to 10 years' service has risen slightly (each of these groups is approximately 2 per cent larger). Overall, however, as can be seen from the data in the graphs, the changes are minimal, which is mainly, of course, due to the quotas and representativeness requirements. The absence of significant differences in the demographic characteristics of the sample makes the results of this study directly comparable with those of previous studies

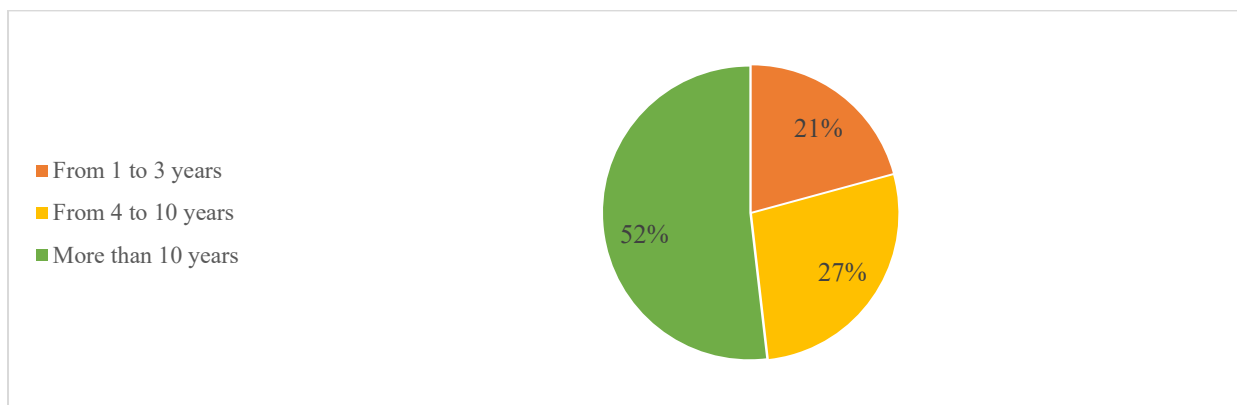


FIGURE3 . DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS BY LENGTH OF SERVICE

Benchmarking of the Bulgarian administration against foreign organisations

The aggregated data from the present study were compared with the benchmarking figures provided by Garvin, Edmondson and Gino (see Garvin, Edmondson and Gino, 2008). When considering these comparisons, it should be borne in mind that:

- 1) The data from Garvin and colleagues include both business organisations and public administrations. The authors note that public administrations score lower on the questionnaire compared with business organisations, but do not provide separate scores for them;
- 2) The maximum score across all dimensions of the learning culture is 100 points;
- 3) The middle zone (the green line in Figure 4) is defined by the median of the distribution of organisations in Garvin's database. For most dimensions, it lies between 65 and 75 points. The exceptions are the indicators 'Openness to new ideas', 'Information gathering' and 'Staff training', where the median values are higher. For 'Openness to New Ideas', the average range is between 81 and 91 points, whilst for the dimensions 'Information Gathering' and 'Staff Training', it is between 71 and 81 points;
- 4) The problem zone (the red line in Figure 4) indicates the 25th percentile threshold. This represents the 25 per cent of organisations in Garvin's database with the lowest scores. Aspects of organisational culture falling within this zone are problematic;
- 5) The blue line in Figure 4 presents the aggregated data for the Bulgarian public administration from this study. These represent the aggregated average results of the 82 Bulgarian public administrations that took part in the study and met the representativeness requirements.

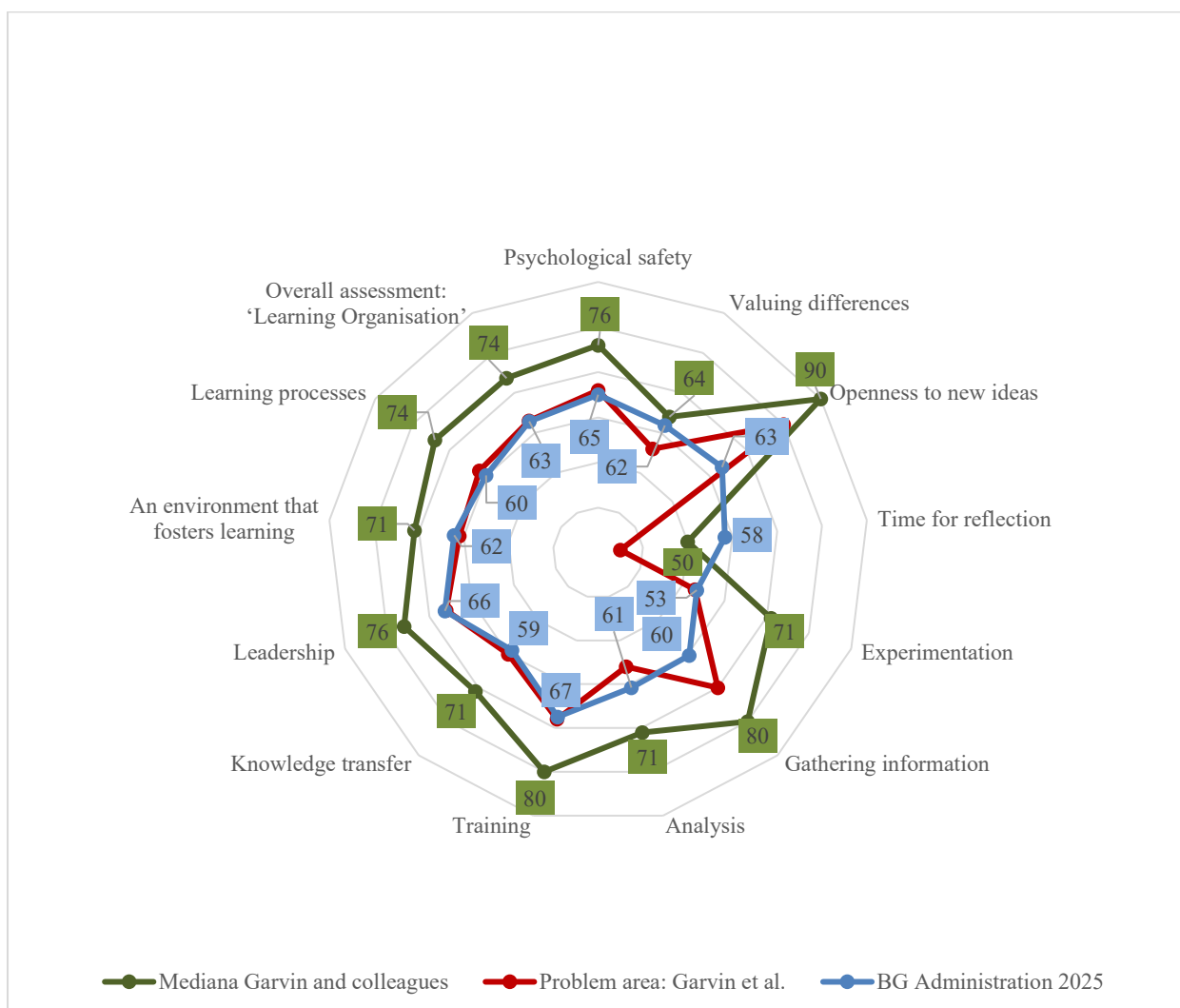


FIGURE4 . AGGREGATED RESULTS FROM THE ‘LEARNING ORGANISATION’ SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR 2025 AND COMPARISONS WITH THE BENCHMARK VALUES OF GARVIN AND COLLEAGUES.

The benchmarking against Western organisations, shown in Figure 4, indicates that, for most average indicators of learning culture, the Bulgarian public administration is closer to Garvin’s problem zone (the red line) than to the average (median) indicators of Western public administrations. The data from 2025 are very similar to the results from 2023, which indicates that over these two years, Bulgarian administrations have not changed significantly and their organisational culture has remained virtually the same. Across five of the 14 indicators, there is a slight improvement of 1 point; in one dimension, the improvement is 2 points; one indicator shows a slight decline of 1 point; and no changes are reported for the remaining seven indicators. Compared with Western organisations, the only area in which the Bulgarian data is better than theirs is ‘Time for Reflection’, which was also the case in all previous studies. Compared with foreign organisations, the Bulgarian administration is, to some extent, under less pressure to act urgently and therefore has slightly more scope to set aside time to analyse the decisions taken or

to assess their impact. However, this is a relatively minor strength, as in absolute terms the results for both Bulgarian and foreign administrations are low. Furthermore, having time for reflection is not equivalent to conducting in-depth analysis and identifying opportunities for improvement. Judging by the other findings of the study, one would rather expect that the time available for reflecting on decisions is not, in fact, used very effectively.

If ‘Time for Reflection’ is excluded, it is easy to see from the data in Figure 4 that the Bulgarian public administration’s results on the other indicators of the ‘Learning Organisation’ methodology are below the median reported by Garvin and colleagues. Even more discouraging is the fact that, with the exception of the ‘Appreciation of Diversity’ and ‘Analysis’ indicators, most other average scores fall within the problem zone, which is defined by the scores of the 25 per cent of foreign organisations with the weakest results.

The overall score for the learning culture of the Bulgarian administration (the global indicator from the questionnaire) is **63 points**, whilst the benchmark median set by Garvin and colleagues is 74 points. This means that around 75 per cent of foreign organisations have a better learning culture than the Bulgarian public administration. The scores across the three main domains of the questionnaire are also significantly below the median. In the ‘Environment that fosters learning’ domain, the Bulgarian public administration scored 62 points, which is just above the 25th percentile in Garvin and colleagues’ distribution. The reference median score for Western organisations in this domain is 71 points, which is 9 points higher. In the ‘Leadership’ domain, the Bulgarian administration’s score is 66 points, which again corresponds to the 25th percentile in Garvin and colleagues’ distribution. The reference median is 76 points, or 10 points above the Bulgarian administration’s score. As in previous studies, the Bulgarian administration’s performance is weakest in the ‘Processes’ domain. The score is 60 points (unchanged from 2023) against a reference median of 74 points, i.e. 14 points below the median reported by Garvin and colleagues. This indicates that the processes of data collection, systematic thinking, analysis and data-driven decision-making within Bulgarian administrations are at a very low level, and that decisions are often ill-considered or poorly balanced.

Figure 5 presents comparisons of the Bulgarian administration’s results in the ‘Learning Organisation’ ranking over the years. These show once again that the results of the new survey are almost identical to those from 2023, with any improvement – where it exists – amounting to just 1 point, which is negligible and within the margin of statistical error. And whilst in the initial surveys only the ‘Openness to New Ideas’ indicator was problematically low, now almost all aspects of the organisational learning culture are around the problem zone in Garvin and colleagues’ database. Over the past seven years, Bulgarian administrations have in fact become even more conservative and closed-minded, whilst team-based learning and data- -based decision-making have not only failed to improve but have actually deteriorated. In addition to these negative findings, the data in Figure 5 show that leaders within the administration now appear to support on-the-job learning and open discussions even less than they did in 2017 and 2018.

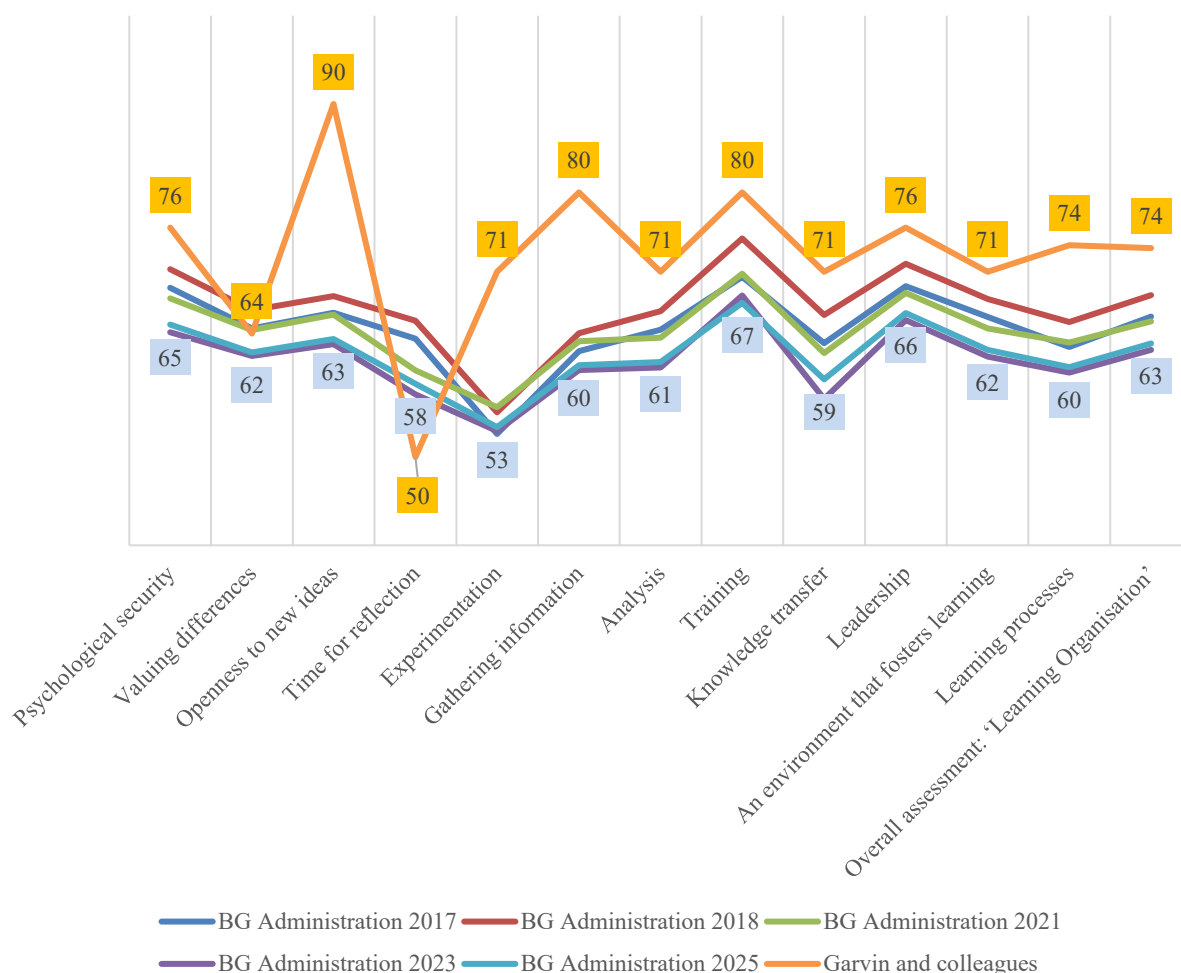


FIGURE 5 . SUMMARY RESULTS FOR 2025 AND COMPARISONS WITH RESULTS FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

The following charts present benchmarking data for the individual indicators of organisational culture in learning organisations. Figure 6 shows the trends in results for the 'Environment that fosters learning' dimension over the years. The highest score for this dimension was recorded in 2018, when the Bulgarian administration came close to the median score of Western administrations. Compared with that year, this year's score for the same dimension is 6 points lower.

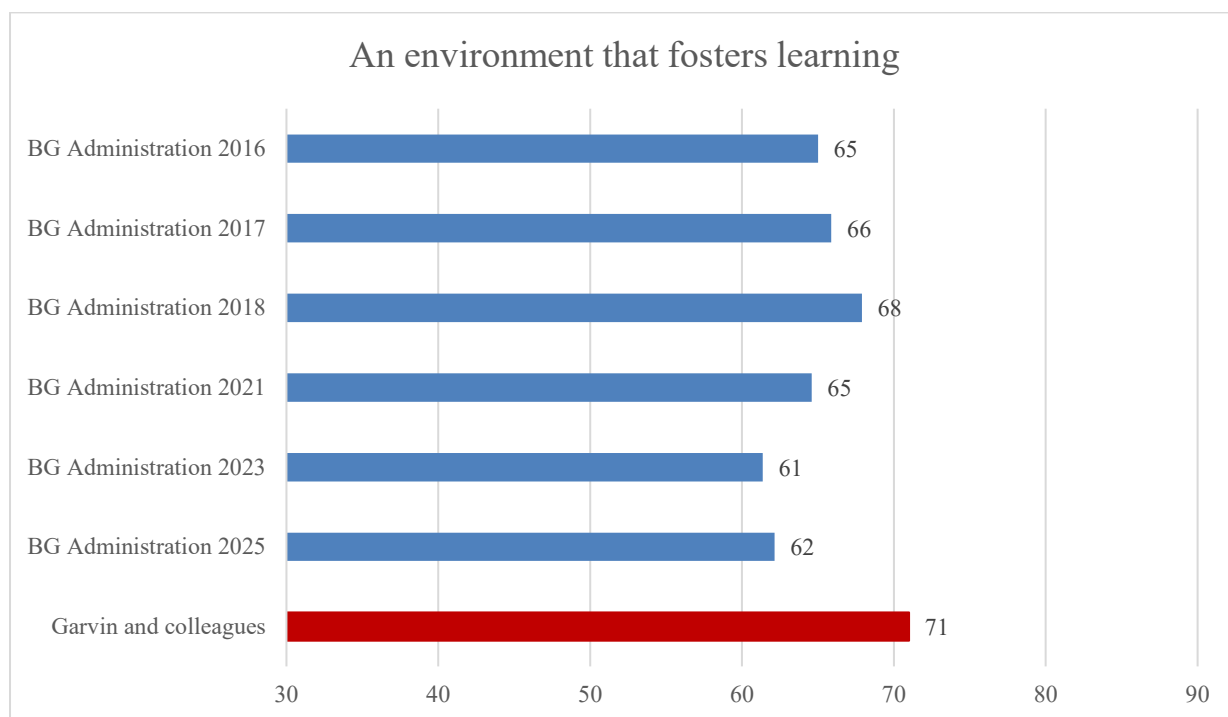


FIGURE6 . ENVIRONMENT CONDUCIVE TO LEARNING

In Garvin’s methodology, as we have already explained in the previous chapter, the learning-supportive environment is operationalised through four indicators – psychological safety, valuing diversity, openness to new ideas, and time for reflection. The results for these indicators are presented in Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10. It is clear from these that Bulgarian administrations rarely encourage internal discussions and that ordinary staff rarely participate in decision-making processes. It appears that in most organisations, strategic objectives and important decisions are ‘imposed’ from above; there is little tolerance for differing opinions, and openness to new ideas is low. In this context, the good result for the ‘time for reflection’ indicator is not particularly significant, as the time is not used for discussions or analysing mistakes.

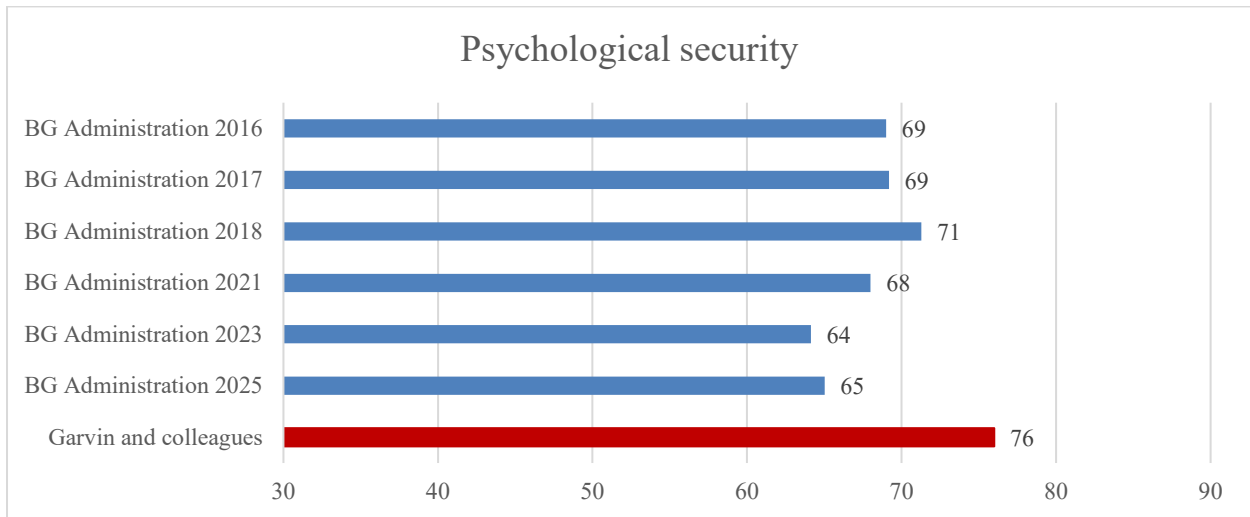


FIGURE7 . PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

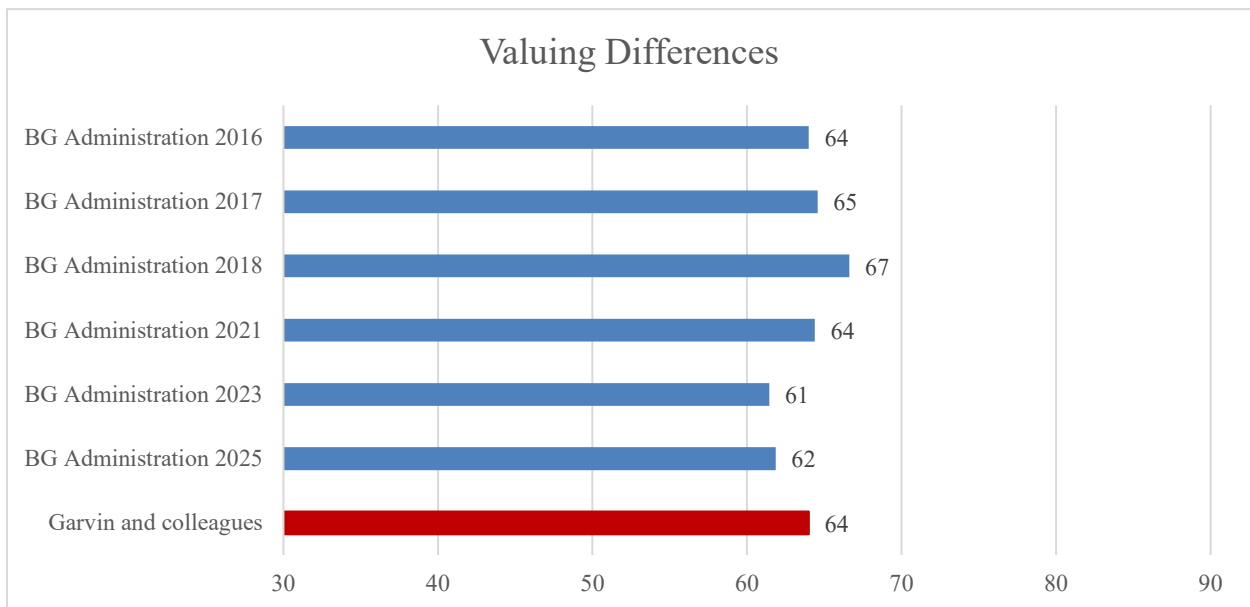


FIGURE8 . VALUING DIFFERENCES

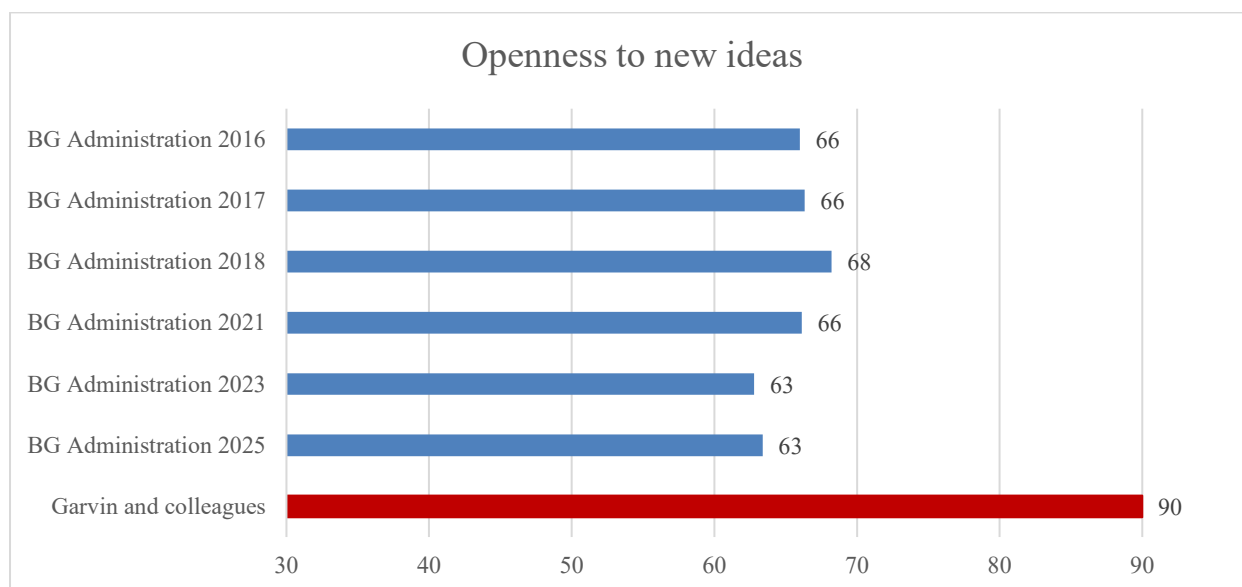


FIGURE9 . OPENNESS TO NEW IDEAS

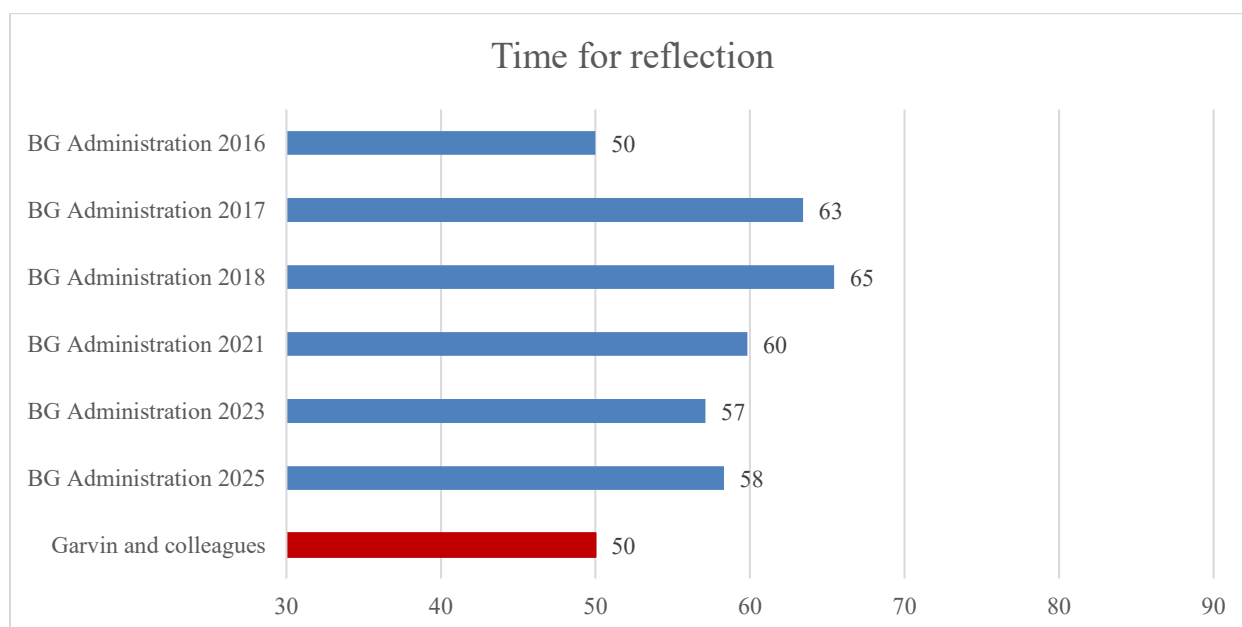


FIGURE10 . TIME FOR REFLECTION

Learning processes form the second key component of Garvin and colleagues' methodology. They are linked to systems thinking and learning. Decision-making must be based on reliable information and data, and on a critical analysis of underlying assumptions, in order to avoid errors and a loss of balance. Training programmes should be used to improve service quality, productivity and efficiency; however, for them to have any real impact on the activities of public

administrations, there must be a successful transfer of what has been learnt into practice. Figure 11 presents the results of the Bulgarian administration on the ‘Learning Processes’ dimension over the years. These show that systematic analysis and data-driven decision-making continue to be a problem area within the organisational culture of the Bulgarian public sector. The result of this study is 60 points – exactly the same as it was two years ago. The scores for the individual factors of learning processes are shown in Figures 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16.

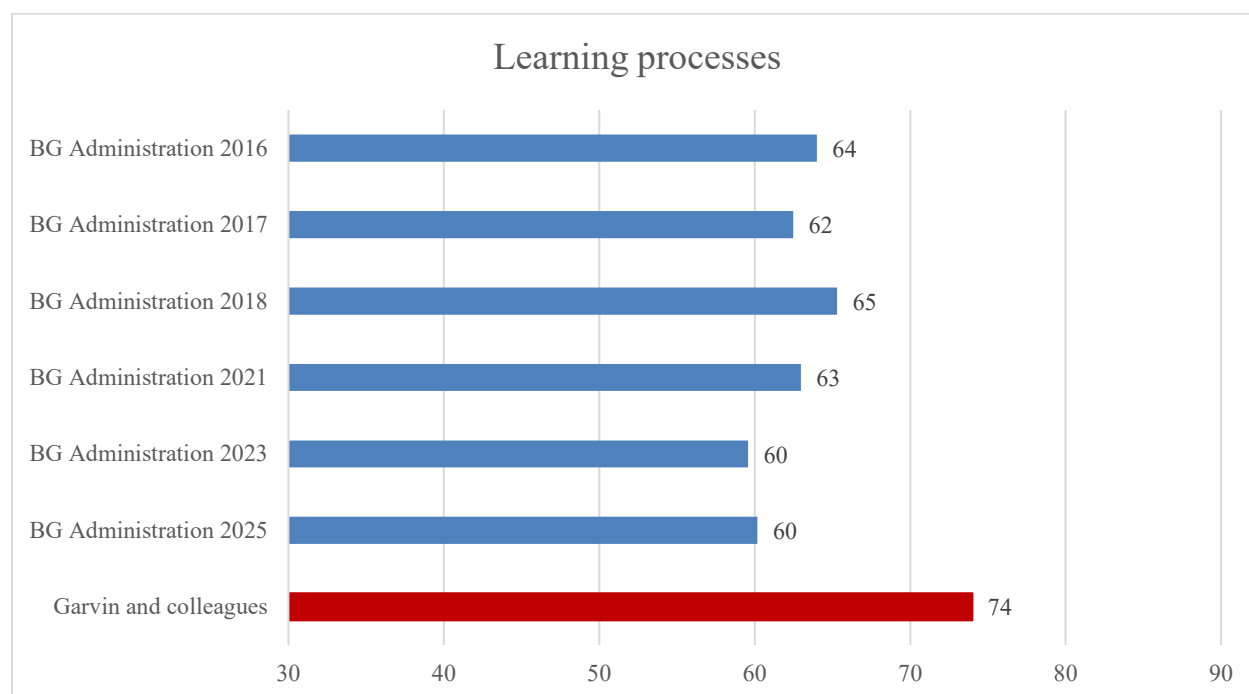


FIGURE 11 . LEARNING PROCESSES

The ‘Experimentation’ indicator is one of the areas in which the Bulgarian administration consistently scores lower than foreign organisations. The Bulgarian administration’s score in 2023 was 53 points, compared with a reference median of 71 points for Western organisations. The difference is 18 points, which represents a very significant lag. This aspect has always been a problem for the Bulgarian public sector, ever since the first study of organisational culture in 2016. The Bulgarian administration clearly lacks sufficient resources and procedures to experiment with new ideas and approaches, as well as to implement changes. It needs methodological support, know-how and training in change management, but above all it must recognise its reluctance to experiment as a weakness and seek to improve it.

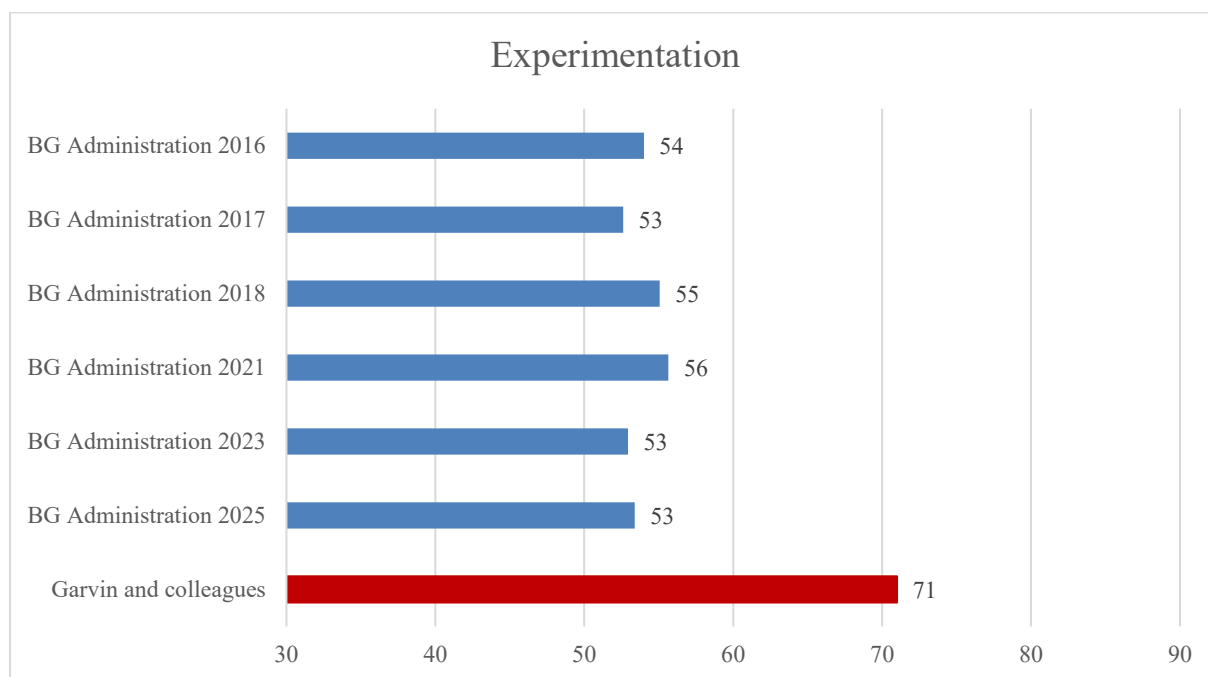


FIGURE12 . EXPERIMENTATION

The score for the ‘Information Gathering’ indicator in 2025 is 60 points, the same as in 2023. This is 20 points lower than the median for Western administrations. Bulgarian administrations continue to fail to collect sufficient data and therefore risk making ill-considered or unbalanced decisions.

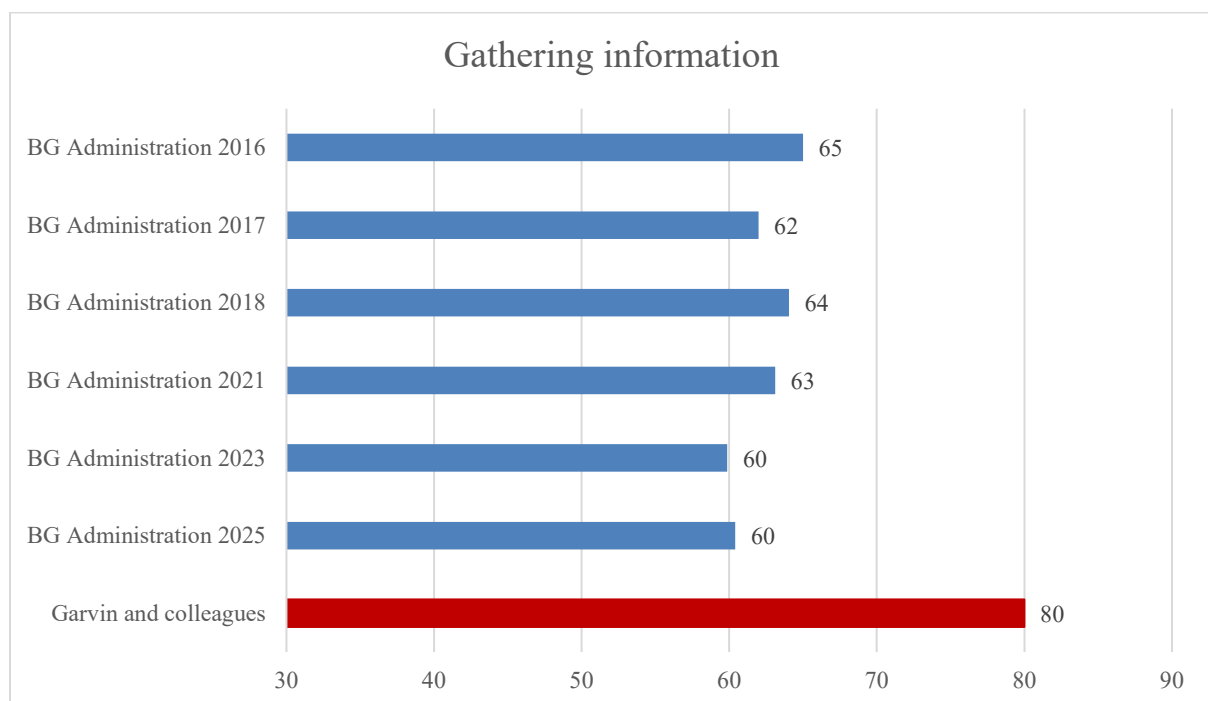


FIGURE13 . INFORMATION GATHERING

The score for the ‘Analysis’ indicator is also below the median for Western organisations. The 10-point difference is mainly due to the fact that the Bulgarian administration rarely ‘tests’ the underlying assumptions on which it bases its decisions. This is a long-standing and well-documented weakness identified in previous studies, and once again no improvement has been observed.

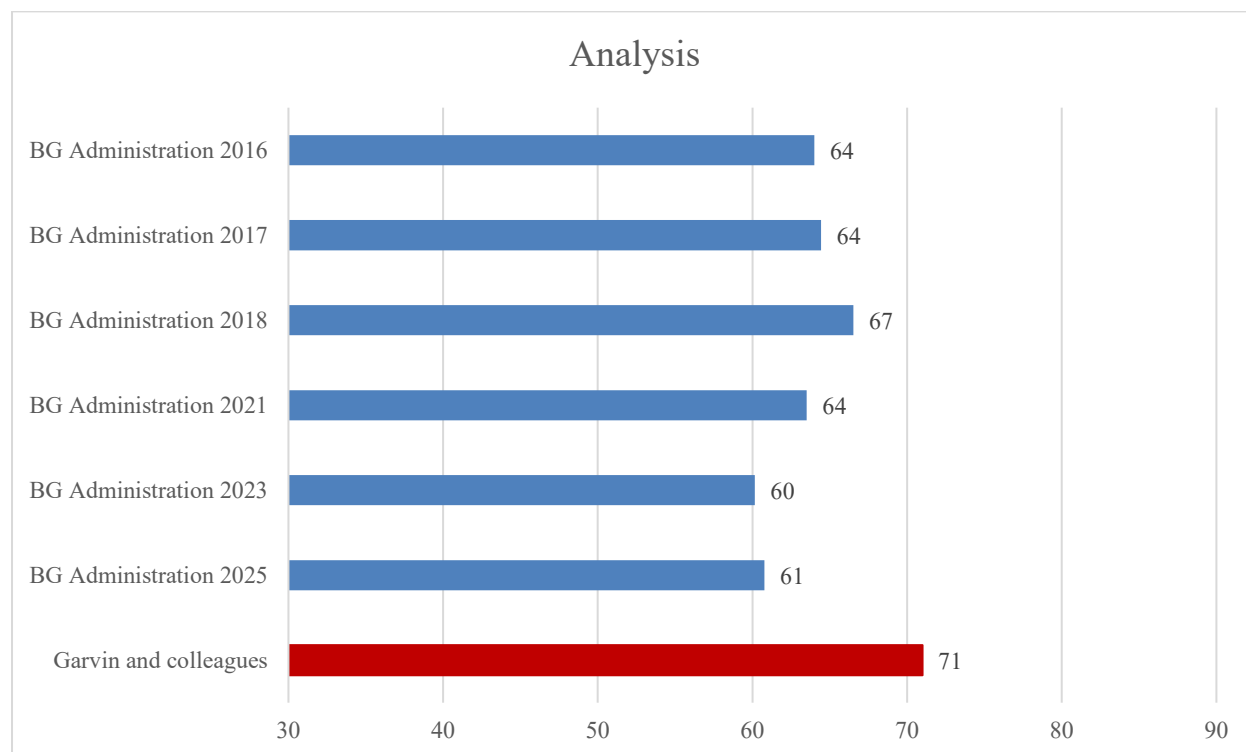


FIGURE14. ANALYSIS

Until recently, the score of Bulgarian administrations in the ‘Training’ category was the only one in this section that came reasonably close to the median of foreign organisations. In 2018, for example, the difference was just 5 points. It now stands at 13 points and is even one point lower than in 2023. The focus is mainly on the training courses offered by the IPA, but very little is being done to encourage non-formal and self-directed learning, as well as learning in the workplace. It is particularly important and urgent to improve the competence of Bulgarian civil servants in the sensible and functional use of artificial intelligence.

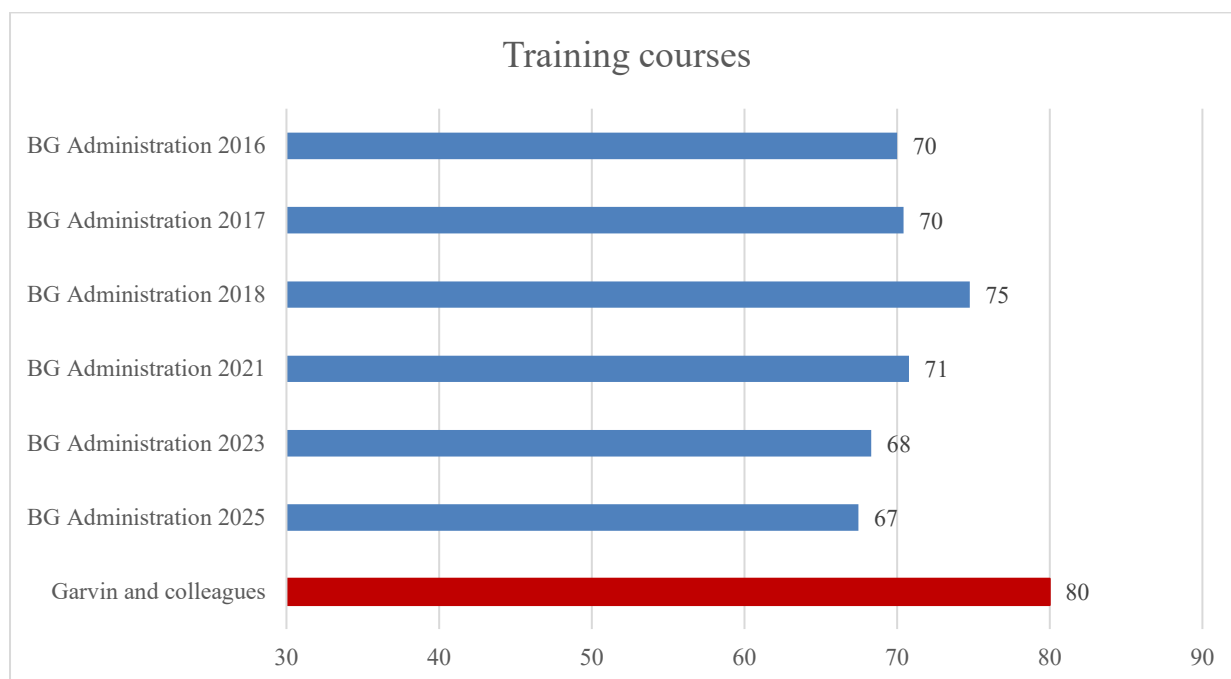


FIGURE15 . TRAINING

This is yet another indicator from the ‘Learning Processes’ domain in which Bulgarian administrations lag behind foreign organisations. The gap is 12 points, but it is the only indicator where a two-point improvement has been observed compared with the 2023 data. However, this is a very modest improvement given the significant gap in this indicator compared with Western administrations.

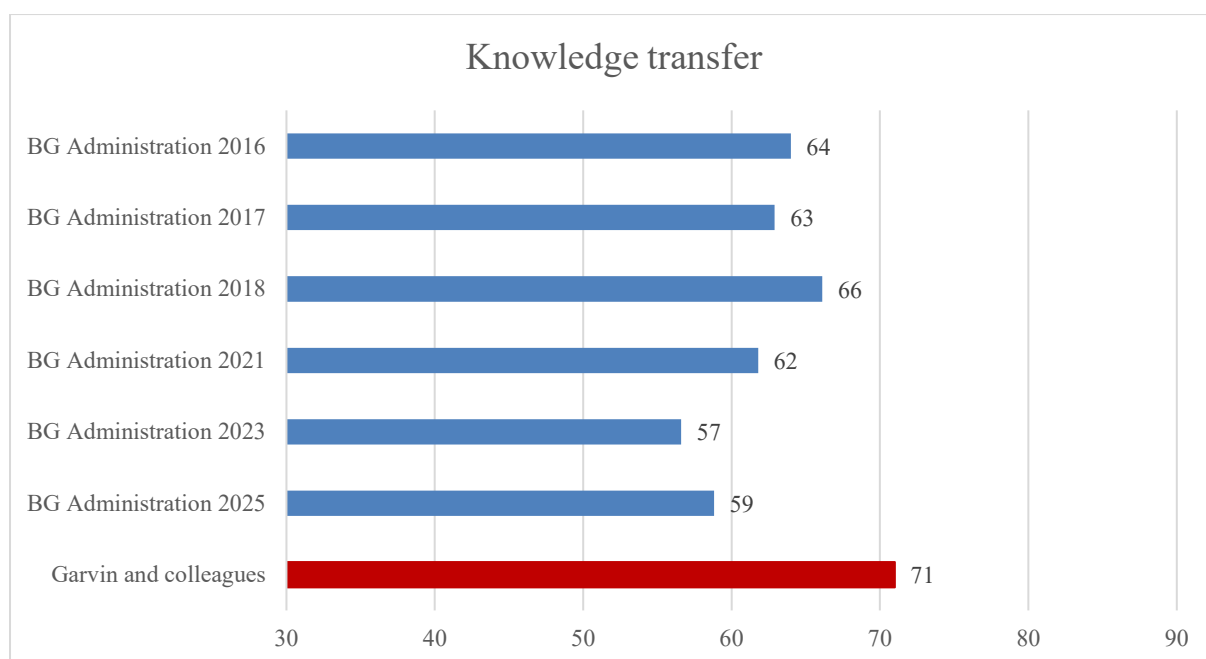


FIGURE16 . KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

‘Leadership’ is the third main component in Garvin and colleagues’ methodology. Unlike the other components, it does not have separate aspects or scales. Unfortunately, it also shows weaker results compared to Western organisations and a significant decline compared to 2016–2018. The average score for the Bulgarian administration on this dimension in 2025 is 66 points, exactly the same as it was two years ago. The gap is 10 points below the median for Western administrations and remains unchanged. Managers in Bulgarian administrations need to improve their ability to create an environment conducive to learning and systematic thinking within their units. They must learn to stimulate in-depth discussions and guide their staff to identify the underlying assumptions they draw upon when proposing solutions.

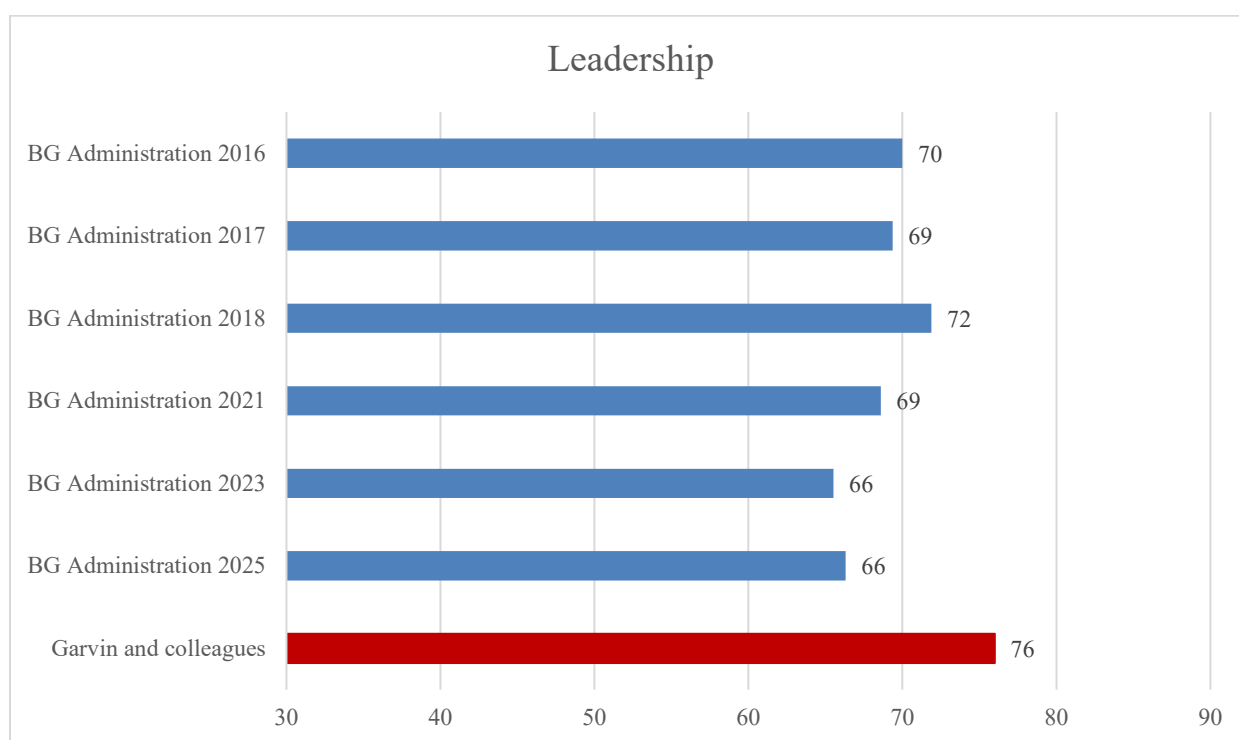


FIGURE17 . LEADERSHIP

Comparisons between the Bulgarian administrations that took part in the study

The ‘Learning Organisation’ questionnaire also allows for benchmarking between the Bulgarian administrations that took part in the survey. As already mentioned, out of a total of 84 administrations, 82 met the requirements for the minimum number of staff and are included in the following rankings.

Table 1 presents the overall ranking of learning administrations for 2025 based on the ‘Learning Administration’ global assessment. The following are shown in separate colours: 1) the average score for Bulgarian administrations, calculated on the basis of all 82 administrations that took part in this study and met the representativeness requirements, 2) the median of Western organisations from the database of Garvin and colleagues, and 3) the problem area, as defined according to the same database.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 present the results for Bulgarian administrations across the three main sections of the questionnaire: ‘An Environment that Supports Learning’, ‘Learning Processes’ and ‘Leadership that Supports Learning’. These tables similarly show the mean scores for Bulgarian administrations, the median, and the problem areas identified for Western administrations according to the database compiled by Garvin and colleagues.

TABLE1 . OVERALL RATING OF LEARNING ADMINISTRATIONS

1	Municipal administration – Smyadovo	76.40
2	Regional Education Authority – Sliven	76.30
3	District Administration – Razgrad	74.23
	Median for western administrations – Garvin et al.	74.00
4	Regional Health Inspectorate – Veliko Tarnovo	73.90
5	Municipal Administration – Troyan	73.84
6	Municipal administration – Chelopech	73.74
7	Regional Administration – Burgas	73.51
8	Regional Health Inspectorate – Silistra	73.50
9	Municipal Administration – Valchedram	73.26
10	Regional Health Inspectorate – Lovech	72.03
11	National Centre for Information and Documentation	71.55
12	Municipal Administration – Nikolaevo	71.32
13	Regional Health Inspectorate – Vratsa	70.63
14	Regional Education Authority – Ruse	70.37
15	Municipal Administration – Ardino	70.10
16	Municipal Administration – Razgrad	69.80
17	Regional Health Inspectorate – Ruse	69.55
18	Financial Supervision Commission	69.21

19	Municipal Administration – Knezha	69.17
20	Regional Health Inspectorate – Blagoevgrad	69.01
21	Regional Education Authority – Vratsa	68.57
22	Executive Agency for e-Government Infrastructure	68.39
23	Regional Health Inspectorate – Montana	68.25
24	Regional Health Inspectorate – Kardzhali	67.84
25	District Administration – Blagoevgrad	67.63
26	Regional Administration – Pleven	67.46
27	Regional Administration – Smolyan	67.34
28	Municipal Administration – Samokov	67.33
29	Regional administration – Pazardzhik	67.27
30	Regional Forestry Directorate – Plovdiv	67.18
31	Institute of Public Administration	67.15
32	Municipal Administration – Kaspichan	67.04
33	Executive Agency ‘Education Programme’	66.46
34	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Plovdiv	66.43
35	Regional Administration – Vidin	66.32
36	Municipal Administration – Balchik	66.21
37	Regional administration – Stara Zagora	66.05
38	Ministry of Youth and Sport	65.96
39	Gabrovo Municipal Administration	65.77
40	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Blagoevgrad	65.62
41	Communications Regulation Commission	65.48
42	Agency for the Quality of Social Services	64.87
43	Regional Education Authority – Shumen	64.87
44	Targovishte District Administration	64.81
45	Regional Education Authority – Razgrad	64.81
46	Municipal Administration – Kozloduy	64.80
47	Employment Agency	64.75
48	National Council on Prices and Reimbursement of Medicinal Products	64.58
49	Regional Health Inspectorate – Gabrovo	64.41
50	Municipal Administration – Miziya	64.21
51	State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers	64.15
52	Municipal Administration – Pavlikeni	63.74
53	Regional Forestry Directorate – Veliko Tarnovo	63.13
	Problem Area – Garvin and colleagues	63.00
54	General Directorate for the Enforcement of Sentences	62.96
	Average for Bulgarian administrations	62.88
55	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	62.85
56	Municipal Administration – Kyustendil	62.41
57	Ministry of Tourism	62.32
58	Gabrovo Regional Administration	62.15
59	Municipal Administration – Avren	62.12
60	Ministry of e-Government	62.01

61	Municipal Administration – Karlovo	61.81
62	Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre	61.78
63	Ruse Municipal Administration	61.59
64	Ministry of Defence	61.50
65	Regional Administration – Veliko Tarnovo	61.36
66	Ministry of Justice	60.49
67	Regional Inspectorate for the Environment and Water – Blagoevgrad	59.91
68	National Social Security Institute	59.88
69	Regional Education Authority – Sofia City	59.14
70	Municipal Administration – Shumen	59.13
71	Ministry of Finance	59.13
72	Sofia Regional Administration	58.28
73	Customs Agency	57.93
74	Ministry of the Environment and Water	57.78
75	Administration of the Council of Ministers	57.59
76	Lovech Regional Administration	57.12
77	Municipal Administration – Iskar	56.89
78	Municipal administration – Tundzha	56.43
79	Directorate-General for Civil Aviation Administration	56.09
80	State Agency “Archives”	55.80
81	Executive Agency “Road Administration”	55.76
82	Regional Health Inspectorate – Varna	55.01

**TABLE2 . RANKING BY THE ‘ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS LEARNING’
INDICATOR**

1	Regional Education Authority – Sliven	75.14
2	Municipal Administration – Smyadovo	74.42
3	Regional administration – Razgrad	74.24
4	Regional Administration – Burgas	73.98
5	Municipal Administration – Troyan	72.13
6	Regional Health Inspectorate – Veliko Tarnovo	71.81
7	National Centre for Information and Documentation	71.21
	Median of Western administrations – Garvin et al.	71.00
8	Municipal administration – Ardino	70.91
9	Municipal Administration – Valchedram	70.55
10	Regional administration – Pleven	69.96
11	Regional Health Inspectorate – Silistra	69.67
12	Regional Health Inspectorate – Lovech	69.49
13	Municipal Administration – Knezha	69.23
14	Municipal administration – Samokov	69.20
15	Municipal administration – Chelopech	69.11
16	Municipal administration – Razgrad	69.05

17	Regional Health Inspectorate – Ruse	68.62
18	Regional Health Inspectorate – Blagoevgrad	68.28
19	Pazardzhik District Administration	68.19
20	Regional Health Inspectorate – Kardzhali	68.05
21	Municipal Administration – Gabrovo	67.82
22	Executive Agency for e-Government Infrastructure	67.79
23	Ministry of Youth and Sport	67.58
24	Regional Education Authority – Ruse	67.47
25	Regional Health Inspectorate – Vratsa	67.33
26	Municipal Administration – Nikolaev	67.24
27	Communications Regulation Commission	67.12
28	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	67.12
29	Regional Education Authority – Vratsa	67.04
30	Financial Supervision Commission	66.55
31	Balchik Municipal Administration	66.51
32	Regional administration – Stara Zagora	66.25
33	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Plovdiv	65.97
34	Regional Health Inspectorate – Montana	65.97
35	Institute of Public Administration	65.90
36	Gabrovo Regional Administration	65.38
37	Executive Agency ‘Education Programme’	65.17
38	Regional Education Authority – Shumen	65.05
39	Municipal Administration – Pavlikeni	64.79
40	Municipal administration – Kozloduy	64.76
41	Regional administration – Targovishte	64.74
42	Regional Education Authority – Razgrad	64.68
43	Smolyan District Administration	64.62
44	State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers	64.27
45	National Council on Prices and Reimbursement of Medicinal Products	64.22
46	Municipal Administration – Kaspichan	64.21
47	Agency for the Quality of Social Services	63.96
48	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Blagoevgrad	63.88
49	Regional Forestry Directorate – Plovdiv	63.77
50	Regional Health Inspectorate – Gabrovo	63.67
51	Vidin District Administration	63.50
52	Municipal Administration – Avren	63.13
53	Ministry of Tourism	63.05
54	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	62.89
55	Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre	62.78
56	Directorate-General for the Enforcement of Sentences	62.27
57	Ministry of Defence	62.23
58	Employment Agency	62.19
	Average for Bulgarian administrations	62.14
59	Municipal administration – Kyustendil	61.48

60	Municipal administration – Miziya	61.34
61	Municipal administration – Ruse	61.11
62	Ministry of e-Government	61.09
	Problem Area – Garvin and colleagues	61.00
63	Municipal administration – Karlovo	60.60
64	Sofia Regional Administration	59.96
65	Regional Administration – Veliko Tarnovo	59.82
66	National Social Security Institute	59.63
67	Regional Education Authority – Sofia City	59.42
68	Ministry of Finance	59.35
69	Ministry of Justice	59.21
70	Administration of the Council of Ministers	59.09
71	State Agency ‘Archives’	58.78
72	Municipal Administration – Tundzha	58.58
73	Customs Agency	58.52
74	Ministry of the Environment and Water	58.11
75	Lovech Regional Administration	57.75
76	Municipal Administration – Iskar	57.60
77	Municipal administration – Shumen	57.45
78	Regional Inspectorate for the Environment and Water – Blagoevgrad	57.37
79	Regional Forestry Directorate – Veliko Tarnovo	56.53
80	Executive Agency “Road Administration”	55.78
81	Regional Health Inspectorate – Varna	55.49
82	Directorate-General for Civil Aviation Administration	52.56

TABLE3 . RANKING BY INDICATOR: LEARNING PROCESSES

1	Regional Health Inspectorate – Veliko Tarnovo	76.01
	Median for western administrations – Garvin et al.	74.00
2	Municipal administration – Valchedram	73.93
3	Municipal Administration – Chelopech	73.15
4	Regional Education Authority – Sliven	71.25
5	Municipal Administration – Troyan	71.06
6	Municipal administration – Smyadovo	70.11
7	Municipal administration – Nikolaevo	69.67
8	Regional Health Inspectorate – Silistra	69.58
9	Regional Health Inspectorate – Lovech	69.36
10	District Administration – Razgrad	69.27
11	Regional Health Inspectorate – Vratsa	69.24
12	Regional Health Inspectorate – Blagoevgrad	68.61
13	Regional Education Authority – Ruse	68.45
14	National Centre for Information and Documentation	67.88
15	Regional Education Authority – Vratsa	67.62

16	Regional Health Inspectorate – Montana	67.20
17	Regional Health Inspectorate – Kardzhali	67.06
18	Municipal Administration – Knezha	67.02
19	Financial Supervision Commission	66.73
20	Ardino Municipal Administration	66.45
21	Municipal administration – Miziya	66.05
22	Municipal administration – Samokov	65.92
23	Regional Health Inspectorate – Ruse	65.46
24	Regional Forestry Directorate – Plovdiv	65.19
25	Municipal Administration – Razgrad	65.16
26	Institute of Public Administration	65.06
27	Burgas Regional Administration	65.06
28	Regional Administration – Pazardzhik	64.26
29	Regional Administration – Smolyan	64.20
30	Regional Administration – Pleven	64.16
31	Regional Administration – Vidin	63.96
32	Employment Agency	63.96
33	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Blagoevgrad	63.70
34	Executive Agency for e-Government Infrastructure	63.63
35	Blagoevgrad Regional Administration	63.62
36	Agency for the Quality of Social Services	63.45
37	Executive Agency ‘Education Programme’	63.37
38	Municipal Administration – Kozloduy	63.36
39	Municipal administration – Kaspichan	63.22
40	Regional administration – Targovishte	63.11
41	National Council on Prices and Reimbursement of Medicinal Products	62.60
42	Regional Health Inspectorate – Gabrovo	62.59
43	Municipal Administration – Kyustendil	62.57
44	Regional administration – Stara Zagora	62.53
45	Municipal Administration – Balchik	62.11
Problem area – Garvin and colleagues		62.00
46	Communications Regulation Commission	61.92
47	Regional Forestry Directorate – Veliko Tarnovo	61.75
48	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Plovdiv	61.61
49	Municipal Administration – Gabrovo	61.23
50	Ministry of Youth and Sport	60.59
Average for Bulgarian administrations		60.17
51	Municipal administration – Karlovo	60.12
52	Regional Education Authority – Shumen	59.91
53	Directorate-General for the Enforcement of Sentences	59.70
54	Ministry of e-Government	59.66
55	Regional Education Authority – Razgrad	59.50
56	State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers	59.23
57	Ministry of Tourism	58.91

58	Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre	58.79
59	Ministry of Justice	58.58
60	Regional Administration – Veliko Tarnovo	58.25
61	Municipal Administration – Avren	58.24
62	Ministry of Defence	58.22
63	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	58.15
64	Municipal Administration – Pavlikeni	57.69
65	Regional Education Authority – Sofia City	57.38
66	Municipal Administration – Ruse	57.00
67	Regional Administration – Lovech	56.95
68	Regional Inspectorate for the Environment and Water – Blagoevgrad	56.85
69	Municipal Administration – Shumen	56.55
70	National Social Security Institute	56.42
71	Customs Agency	56.14
72	Ministry of Finance	55.90
73	Gabrovo Regional Administration	55.72
74	Municipal Administration – Iskar	55.35
75	Directorate-General for Civil Aviation Administration	54.69
76	Sofia Regional Administration	54.58
77	Ministry of the Environment and Water	53.67
78	Executive Agency “Road Administration”	52.88
79	Administration of the Council of Ministers	52.71
80	Regional Health Inspectorate – Varna	52.13
81	Municipal Administration – Tundzha	51.35
82	State Agency ‘Archives’	49.36

TABLE4 . RANKING BY THE ‘LEADERSHIP STYLE THAT STIMULATES LEARNING’ INDICATOR

1	Municipal Administration – Smyadovo	84.69
2	Regional Education Authority – Sliven	82.50
3	Burgas District Administration	81.50
4	Regional Health Inspectorate – Silistra	81.25
5	District Administration – Razgrad	79.17
6	Municipal Administration – Chelopech	78.96
7	Municipal administration – Troyan	78.33
8	Regional Health Inspectorate – Lovech	77.25
9	Municipal Administration – Nikolaev	77.03
Median for western administrations – Garvin et al.		76.00
10	National Centre for Information and Documentation	75.56
11	Regional Health Inspectorate – Vratsa	75.33
12	Municipal Administration – Valchedram	75.31
13	Municipal administration – Razgrad	75.19
14	Regional Education Authority – Ruse	75.18

15	Regional Health Inspectorate – Ruse	74.58
16	Financial Supervision Commission	74.35
17	Regional Health Inspectorate – Veliko Tarnovo	73.88
18	Executive Agency for e-Government Infrastructure	73.75
19	Municipal Administration – Kaspichan	73.68
20	Regional administration – Smolyan	73.21
21	Municipal Administration – Ardino	72.95
22	Regional Forestry Directorate – Plovdiv	72.59
23	Blagoevgrad District Administration	72.16
24	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Plovdiv	71.70
25	Regional Health Inspectorate – Montana	71.58
26	Vidin District Administration	71.50
27	Municipal Administration – Knezha	71.25
28	Regional Forestry Directorate – Veliko Tarnovo	71.11
29	Regional Education Authority – Vratsa	71.04
30	Executive Agency ‘Education Programme’	70.83
31	Institute of Public Administration	70.50
32	Regional Education Authority – Razgrad	70.25
33	Regional Health Inspectorate – Blagoevgrad	70.14
34	Municipal Administration – Balchik	70.00
35	Ministry of Youth and Sport	69.72
36	Regional Education Authority – Shumen	69.64
37	Pazardzhik District Administration	69.38
38	Regional Administration – Stara Zagora	69.38
39	Regional Directorate of Agriculture – Blagoevgrad	69.27
40	State Agency for Refugees under the Council of Ministers	68.96
41	Municipal Administration – Pavlikeni	68.75
42	Regional Health Inspectorate – Kardzhali	68.41
43	Municipal Administration – Gabrovo	68.27
44	Regional administration – Pleven	68.25
45	Employment Agency	68.10
46	Commission for Protection against Discrimination	67.50
47	Communications Regulation Commission	67.40
48	Agency for the Quality of Social Services	67.21
49	Regional Health Inspectorate – Gabrovo	66.96
50	National Council on Prices and Reimbursement of Medicinal Products	66.92
51	Directorate-General for the Enforcement of Sentences	66.92
52	Samokov Municipal Administration	66.88
53	Municipal administration – Ruse	66.67
54	Regional administration – Targovishte	66.59
	Average for Bulgarian administrations	66.32
55	Municipal Administration – Kozloduy	66.29
56	Regional administration – Veliko Tarnovo	66.00
	Problem area – Garvin and colleagues	66.00

57	Regional Inspectorate for the Environment and Water – Blagoevgrad	65.52
58	Gabrovo District Administration	65.36
59	Ministry of e-Government	65.29
60	Municipal Administration – Miziya	65.25
61	Ministry of Tourism	65.00
62	Municipal Administration – Avren	65.00
63	Municipal Administration – Karlovo	64.71
64	Ministry of Defence	64.05
65	Agency for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre	63.79
66	Ministry of Justice	63.66
67	National Social Security Institute	63.58
68	Shumen Municipal Administration	63.40
69	Municipal administration – Kyustendil	63.18
70	Ministry of Finance	62.14
71	Ministry of the Environment and Water	61.57
72	Directorate-General for Civil Aviation Administration	61.02
73	Administration of the Council of Ministers	60.95
74	Regional Education Authority – Sofia City	60.63
75	Sofia Province Administration	60.31
76	Municipal Administration – Tundzha	59.35
77	State Agency ‘Archives’	59.27
78	Customs Agency	59.14
79	Executive Agency “Road Administration”	58.61
80	Iskar Municipal Administration	57.73
81	Regional Health Inspectorate – Varna	57.40
82	Lovech District Administration	56.67

The data presented for Bulgarian administrations once again highlight the decline in the culture of learning and innovation that has occurred in recent years within Bulgarian administrations. In 2016, seven Bulgarian administrations achieved an overall ‘Learning Organisation’ index that was higher than or equal to the median for Western administrations. In 2018, 10 Bulgarian administrations featured in this prestigious ranking, and in 2021, 14 did so. This year, only four administrations achieved such a result, whilst more than half of those participating in the survey fell into the ‘problem zone’.

Comparisons between types of administration

In the ‘Learning Administrations’ study, we traditionally divide administrations into four groups – central, territorial, municipal and regional. Initial expectations were that the organisational culture within them would differ, as each type of administration possesses a different degree of

autonomy and different powers for decision-making and policy formulation. This hypothesis has been confirmed in all previous studies, and has been confirmed in the present one as well – the differences between the results of the four types of administration on the ‘Learning Administration’ global index are statistically significant. These are presented in Figure 18. The highest scores are achieved by the territorial subdivisions of central administrations, whilst the lowest scores are recorded by the central administration itself. This trend is counter-intuitive but consistent, and has remained stable and unchanged in recent years.

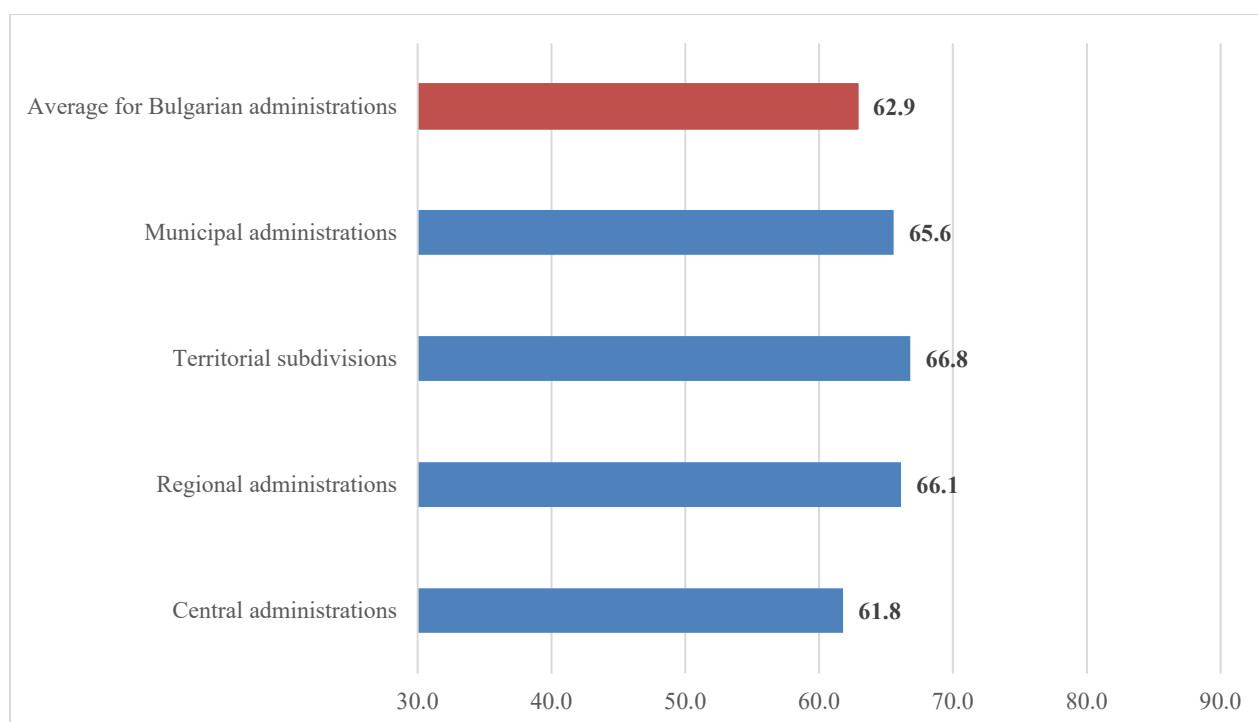


FIGURE 18 . COMPARISON OF RESULTS BY TYPE OF ADMINISTRATION

Comparisons by gender, position and length of service in the administration

Job title and length of service in the administration influence employees’ perceptions of the organisational culture within their administration and, consequently, the questionnaire results. Numerous similar studies have found that managers tend to view the climate in their organisation more positively than their subordinates. For this reason, the sample design includes quotas for the proportion of managers and specialists who may participate from each administration.

The data, presented in Figure 19, show – as expected – that managers have statistically significantly more positive assessments of the organisational culture in their administration compared with the experts.

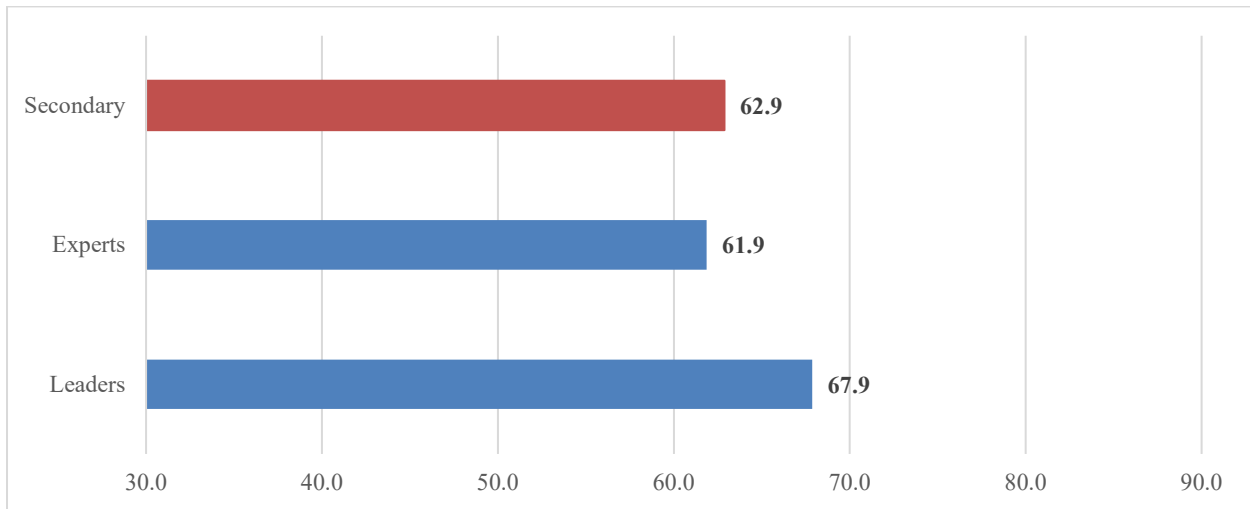


FIGURE19 . COMPARISON OF RESULTS BY POSITION

However, it should be noted that, although statistically different, managers' assessments are not overly optimistic and likely simply reflect their own experience, work, responsibilities and greater opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, rather than any deliberate attempt to boost their administration's rating.

As regards length of service, the expected trends are not so clear. On the one hand, experienced staff should have greater influence within their organisation and are therefore more frequently involved in decision-making and the analysis of information. On the other hand, younger staff members are generally more proactive, more inclined to make suggestions, more likely to push for change, more frequently sent on training courses, and more often assigned tasks that involve learning. It appears that the second trend has a greater influence, as the data presented in Figure 20 show that younger employees have more positive assessments of the organisational culture within their administration. The data from the 2023 survey are similar.

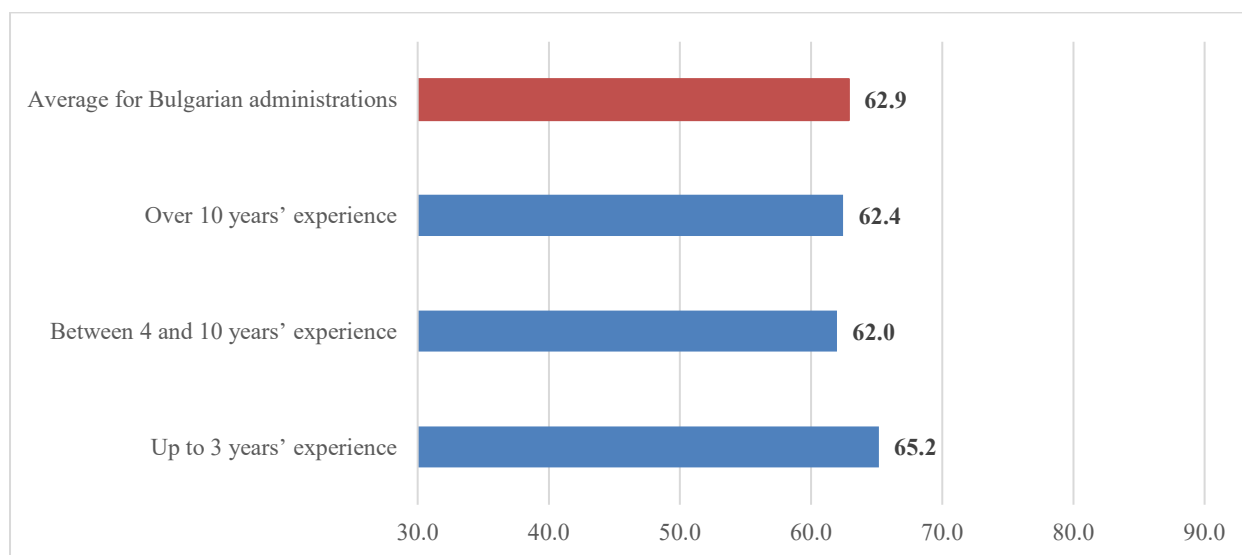


FIGURE20 . COMPARISON OF RESULTS BY LENGTH OF SERVICE

Finally, the results of participants of both genders were compared. As in previous years' studies, no statistically significant differences by gender were found. The average score for men is 62.9, whilst that for women is three tenths lower, which is not a significant difference.

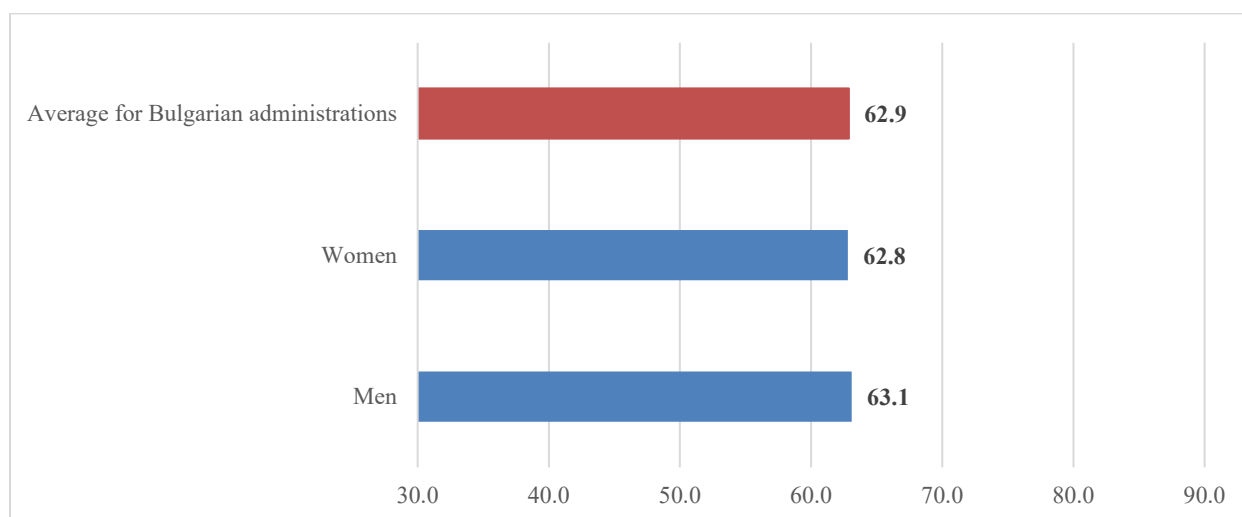


FIGURE21 . COMPARISON OF RESULTS BY GENDER

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this study confirm the trend that, in recent years, the Bulgarian public administration has not been developing a systematic approach or a culture of innovation. The reasons for this can be sought in many directions – in the conservatism of the administration in general, in frequent political changes and instability, in leadership models within the administration, and so on. It appears that civil servants are feeling less and less motivated to express their own professional opinions on important issues concerning the work of their administration. Perhaps in some cases this is because managers, including political cabinets, are either unwilling or unable to listen to them; in many other places, however, it seems that civil servants themselves find it more convenient not to share their views openly. The risk of expressing a definite opinion and being wrong is far greater than the chance of putting forward a valuable idea and having it appreciated. This has a negative impact on the learning and professional development of civil servants themselves.

The results of the current ‘Learning Administrations’ study are among the weakest since the survey began. None of the previously identified weaknesses has been overcome, and the significant gap behind Western administrations, which was recorded in 2023, remains. More than half of the Bulgarian administrations that took part in the survey scored within the ‘problem zone’, which comprises the 25 per cent of organisations with the weakest culture of learning and innovation in Garvin and colleagues’ database. In the ‘Learning Processes’ component, where distinct weaknesses had previously been observed, two-thirds of Bulgarian administrations now fall within the problem zone. Insufficient data is being collected to enable high-quality decision-making and the assessment of long-term risks. Feedback received from users of administrative services is useful for improving administrative service delivery, but to identify problems and opportunities for development at a strategic level, more statistical data, monitoring of business indicators, feedback, cooperation between the administrations themselves, and cooperation between administrations, the business sector and the non-governmental sector. Many administrations have become isolated and inward-looking, focusing too heavily on carrying out their day-to-day functions without sufficiently examining the bigger picture and societal processes, economic and social trends, innovations within their field of activity, and best practices in similar foreign administrations. There is not enough experimentation with new ideas. There is no time for pilot studies, because changes are postponed until the last minute and because the pressure to introduce them comes from outside, rather than from the administrations themselves.

The problems in the ‘Learning Processes’ area stem from issues with the psychological climate and leadership. The results for the ‘Environment that encourages learning’ component are currently 9 points below the median reported by Garvin and colleagues, whereas in 2018 they were only 3 points below it. This shows that when greater political stability is achieved and there is long-term clarity regarding the strategic objectives of public administration, civil servants gain the

psychological security they need to engage in research and analysis, as well as to invest time in learning and their own professional development.

The conservatism of the Bulgarian civil service remains a serious problem. Bulgarian civil servants are often resistant to change and sceptical about the introduction of innovations. Most civil services are not open to new opportunities and find it difficult to implement even the necessary changes. Good ideas float around for years before they are actually put into practice. Even when psychological security and a stable long-term outlook are achieved, the conservatism of civil servants will not disappear of its own accord. Serious leadership efforts will be required to change this mindset and these unwritten but widely held beliefs that it is better to carry out what you are told than to try to think for yourself and form an opinion on the decisions being made or the policies being implemented.

We hope that the findings of this study will serve as a wake-up call to leaders in Bulgarian public administrations, signalling that the situation is not good and that it is time to take action. The world is entering an era of digital transformation for which most civil servants are unprepared. Thousands of operational roles within the civil service are at risk of being lost through the digitalisation of services and/or the introduction of artificial intelligence. Without a strong organisational culture of learning within the administrations, civil servants are not developing their professional competences quickly enough and are likely to find it difficult to take on new, broader or more creative roles, or to remain competitive in the labour market. The administration itself will come under ever-increasing pressure ‘from outside’ to improve its efficiency, as it is currently missing out on the time and opportunities to develop organically. Change must start at the top. Leaders bear the primary responsibility for developing a culture of learning and innovation within Bulgarian administrations. They must seek to involve their staff in decision-making processes, establish and maintain an appropriate infrastructure for data collection, foster systematic and critical thinking, promote the study of international experience and technological innovations, encourage innovative ideas and experimentation, and provide the psychological security necessary for the open and in-depth discussion of differing views, which will ensure that better and more balanced decisions are taken.