

## REVIEWER'S OPINION

by **Prof. Daniela Vassileva Sotirova, PhD**

Professor in 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Cultural Studies

**Competition procedure for the position of Associate Professor**  
in the professional field **3.7 ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT**  
**(MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR, LEADERSHIP)**

for the needs of the Department of Business Administration,  
Faculty of Economics, Sofia University "St. Cl. Ohridski",  
announced in *The State Gazette*, Issue 21/13.03.2020.

### **1. Grounds for further review**

I am a member of the Scientific Jury for the competition according to Order № RD-38-195 dated May,21, 2020, issued by the Rector of Sofia University "St. Cl. Ohridski". I am the author of this opinion according to the decision of the first meeting of the Scientific Jury, held on July, 21, 2020.

On July, 24, 2020 I received a set of competition documents, which was sent to me electronically.

### **2. Information about the applicant and general description of the submitted materials**

The only applicant in this competition procedure for Associate Professor is **Mrs. Iya Todorova Petkova - Gurbalova**. In accordance with the rules, I received 19 documents and electronic copies of the texts submitted.

Presented documents demonstrate that the applicant meets the requirements for receiving this position. I. Gurbalova has been an Assistant in the Department of Business Administration since 2010, and since 2016 she has been a Senior Assistant. Mrs. Gurbalova has two master's degrees - in Strategic Management and Political Management and Public Policy. In 2013 she defended a dissertation on "*Leadership style of men and women leaders in Bulgaria*", and received a doctorate in 3.7. Administration and Management (Social

Management). All this indicates that the applicant has the appropriate educational background and expertise for the position in this competition.

Iya Gurbalova has proposed two lists of publications: one with a total of 20 scientific texts, not counting her dissertation, and a second list with additional text (*Iya Petkova-Gurbalova. Lobbying - a decision making mean. Lobbying as an instrument in the EU environment. Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski Yearbook / FEBA vol. 7 2008, pp. 83-95. UI "St. Kliment Ohridski" ISSN 1311-8420*).

This last list includes:

- 1 monograph,
- 19 articles or papers,
- 9 of which are co-authored,
- 6 works have been reported and published in the Proceedings of the International Conference of the Faculty of Business Administration, Technical University - Sofia.

One of those mentioned papers (*Litsova I., Petkova-Gurbalova I. Training and Leadership Development*) is actually accepted, and is due to be published after being presented at the XVIIIth International Conference «*Management and Engineering'20*», postponed due to the pandemic till September 2020.

Information for fulfilment of the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law for the area of Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management (Management, Organizational Behavior, Leadership - in Bulgarian and English) makes it clear that the candidate applies in this competition with one monograph and 11 other publications. It means, that Ms. Gurbalova covers the necessary points in all groups of indicators for holding this academic position.

The candidate has been involved in five research projects funded by the Ministry of Education, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski", and the Faculty of Economics. Among them I would like to highlight the last chronologically and significant project for the profile of the competition - "*Working life in Bulgarian organizations in the period 1995-2014 (Value Optics)*". Contract from 2015.

### **3. General characteristics of applicant's research field and work**

The research interests, activities, and publications of I. Gurbalova fall within and are developed in the research field, located on the border of organizational studies (behaviour and culture), axiology (study of values and valuation), social psychology, and sociology. The issue of leadership and the styles in it is a kind of centre in the outlined interdisciplinary "terrain".



The actuality of leadership and its challenges hardly needs argumentation - it is a fairly attractive vast topic<sup>1</sup>.

Among the presented texts stands out the monograph *Leadership - current trends: the example of Bulgaria*"(2019). (Annex 10B / 2). The author focuses on two basic models - authentic and transformational leadership embodied in key normative theories of leadership. The closeness of the integrative model to the transformational leadership is conclusively shown. Particularly interesting and appreciating are ideas and results on authentic leadership. Exactly it contains a strong "ethical component" - authentic leaders are those who recognize and evaluate moral issues, and take moral actions that are grounded in their beliefs. Authentic leaders are not just leaders with good image or "good PR". It is about leadership presence and internalized moral perspective, and not a list of traits and competencies. Gurbalova presented data from quantitative and qualitative research. A tool was used to measure the authenticity of leadership through four components: self-awareness, inner moral perspective, balanced processing, a moral perspective based on internal standards, and relational transparency. The data obtained are representative and intriguing.

Among them I will mention only the following: the relational transparency dimension is relatively low. I accept Gurbalova's conclusion that here is a horizon for the development of leadership skills in the direction of learning how to share in an appropriate way emotions and thoughts. It would be also relevant to interpret the result in the context of low transparency of experience as a Bulgarian cultural feature, as well as in the context of virtual team leadership, and digital leadership<sup>2</sup>. Gurbalova points out that the qualitative study of the stories told during in-depth interviews highlights the attitude of managers to learn from experience and especially from the positive role model of their direct supervisors, whose behaviour they often apply. The results of this qualitative study gave her the opportunity to draw a pyramid model of leadership with several "floors", each of which is "filled" by the answers of the respondents. The basis of the pyramid (with the most accumulated answers) is trust; followed by the "floor" of team building skills. Above it is the work provision and care; on the fourth "floor" is the description of a leader who generates ideas and initiatives, and on the top are the behavioural characteristics and personal role model. This pyramid model, as well as other ideas, allow to make creative

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<sup>1</sup> I will mention as confirmation the titles of three new bachelor's and master's programs for the upcoming 2020/21 academic year in Bulgarian universities, i.e. "Smart Leadership", "Leadership in a Global Environment", "Leadership and Coaching".

<sup>2</sup> Qualman, E. (2012). *Digital leader: 5 simple keys to success and influence*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. In one of the presented papers "E-leadership: challenges and opportunities" (Appendix 10B / 3) Gurbalova proposes a general framework for the study of leadership when the leader and the followers are "geographically dispersed".

concretizations and applications for training and coaching. Gurbalova has developed a similar pedagogical and consulting perspective in one of her latest articles *Training and Leadership: Aspects in the Development of Leadership Skills* (2020).

I would define the scientific and applied activity of the candidate as clearly focused, team-oriented and completely adequate for the academic position which claimed.

#### **4. Lecturing and educational activities**

Based on presented reports as well as on the impressions of my colleagues - teachers and students - I consider Gurbalova's academic activity as intensive and innovative. She has been the supervisor of 54 diploma theses. Iya Gurbalova is the Faculty Lecturer of the discipline *Leadership in a multicultural environment* and assistant in 4 other courses in the field of organizational behaviour and organizational culture.

As part of his work as an assistant, the candidate has introduced new teaching methods, including elements of group dynamics training, access to virtual training modules, as well as inviting Visiting Lecturers from companies with experience in middle and higher management (Hewlett Packard, Citibank, Deloitte Bulgaria and others). Such efforts to strengthen the university-business relationship are part of the effective academic work today, and should be highly valued, although not being part of any scientometric index.

#### **5. Contribution to research and evaluation of enriching the existing knowledge and its application**

The author's contribution report is credible and comprehensive summary. The contributions are formulated reliably and concisely - the theoretical and applied achievements are specified with 3-4 points. Here I dwell on two ideas, which are noticeable (in my opinion).

The first contribution is that many theoretical formulations and conceptual models are systematized in the space between knowledge of social management, organizational behaviour and leadership. This is a place for theorists and practitioners with different background, education and "calibre". Gurbalova justifiably focuses on the basic role of the factors of socio-cultural environment, size of the organization, company branch, and spheres of activity. I believe that amid the growing array of literature on leadership it is needed to maintain renovated higher education in the field, enabling cultivation of leaders by conceptualizing new ideas about business leadership. Dr. Gurbalova has done this successfully.



Secondly, I would like to highlight one of the applied and practical guidelines in the presented texts, related to the important concept tool, often used in the presented research, i.e. *orientation*. Based on data obtained from surveys, the candidate offers new comprehension about the orientation of Bulgarian business leaders to particular leadership styles. Thus she specifies the role of organizational context, its levels, formation, and "manipulation" as means of self-development and improvement of leadership behaviour.

#### **6. References and citations as a reflection of the applicant's scientific contribution**

Based on the attached reference for citations of applicant's publications in the period after 2007 the following have been established:

- 11 citations in total,
- 9 of them are in English language publications in local or international proceedings and journals;
- 5 of the references are of publications included in the attached official reference of NACID in the Report for the implementation of the minimum requirements for the position of Associate Professor.

These data illustrate the publicity of Iya Gurbalova's work as a researcher. The citations are within the Bulgarian academic papers, but also within papers of scholars from Nigeria, India and other countries. This is a sign of adequate recognition of the value of publications in the scientific community, corresponding to the usual rank of Bulgarian researchers in social sciences.

#### **7. Remarks on the submitted texts**

Undoubtedly, the candidate knows very well the research on leadership in organizational behaviour, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Of course, *one can always do more* - its inevitable conclusion if we mean "sea" of scientific literature on the topic. I would welcome Gurbalova's future efforts to publish her texts in English or another European language in leading scientific journals on organizational leadership and cross-cultural business communication. Thus, the results for Bulgarian entrepreneurs and managers would become part of an international academic dialogue in a comparative cultural context.

#### **8. Conclusion**

The only candidate in the competition for Associate Professor in the professional field  
3.7 ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL

BEHAVIOR, AND LEADERSHIP) meets all the requirements for this academic position. Sufficient evidence has been provided that the minimum national requirements are met. The research space and the quality of the presented texts of Ms. Iya Petkova-Gurbalova, whom I do not know personally, completely fit into the professional field.

All that provides me with solid reasons to support her for the academic position of Associate Professor.

August 18, 2020

Member of the scientific jury: 

Prof. PhD. Daniela Sotirova