

REVIEW OF DOCTORAL THESIS

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Title: Organizational Performance and Quality of Public Administration: Evaluation and Improvement through Human Recourse Management Practices
Prof. field: 3.3 “Political Sciences (Public Administration)”
Academic advisor: assoc. prof. Tatyana Tomova, PhD

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1. General description of the doctoral thesis

1.1. Structure and volume

The dissertation consists of 266 textual pages, 14 pages of bibliography and 26 pages of appendices. It is structured in **three parts** – theoretical (with four chapters), methodological (one chapter) and analytical (two chapters). The structure and volume are quite heavy but they represent very clearly the ideas and searches of the author. The text flows logically from the theoretical bases, reasoning and limitations to the actual field study performed by the doctoral student. The structure of thesis conforms to the general principles and requests for dissertations. The first two chapters represent the foundations of the several pillars of the dissertation. They summarize theoretical and checked by the practical experience regarding strategic management, strategic management of human resources and total quality management. Mrs. Maria Oikonomidou has successfully explored, summarized and synthesized the most important features of these topics. Keeping in mind the volume of the text, it would be interesting to try and include that primary stage of theoretical research not as chapters but as a thesaurus at the end of the dissertation. Chapter 3 depicts the same concepts but this time

through the prism of public sector management. According to me that is the real starting point of the dissertation. Chapter 4 presents both the process of reforms of public administration and the system of education in Greece (explained further in paragraph 5.3. in Chapter 5). There, one can find the motives for choosing the Directorates of Primary and Secondary Education as the intersection between (1) staff that has the right attitudes and accepts quality as a mission, (2) administrative structures that implement TQM and understand that this cannot be done without the support of the employees, (3) the wider society benefits of a well-managed administration that can sustain a better working educational system. All these complex relationships are logically organized and have become the basis for the research methodology thoroughly presented in Chapter 5. The last two chapters meticulously describes the statistical reliability of the results from the four field studies done to test the hypotheses of the dissertation.

The dissertation contains 24 figures and 4 tables that additionally illustrate, summarize or supplement the flow of ideas and evidences. There are minor problems in the numbering of some of the figures but all sources are cited as requested.

The construct of the doctoral thesis can be characterized as **logical and comprehensive**. It clearly demonstrates that Mrs. Oikonomidou has a great deal of practical experience in the Greek system of educational administration as well as very high research skills. She has successfully depicted the complex and dynamic interrelationships between organizational performance, quality management and employee satisfaction.

1.2. Topicality

The impact of a well-functioning, efficient and effective **educational system** on the welfare of societies is always a relevant and fresh area of study. So is the capability of the **regulatory and administrative structures** to stimulate or hinder any societal substructure. In other words, the topicality of the dissertation is unquestionable. More interesting is the selection of focal points and their interceptions. The role of a motivated administrative staff as a driver for quality assurance and therefore – building better public educational institutions is slightly researched in the Bulgarian literature. So the topic is relevant not only for the Greek society but also for the one in our country. By choosing to study the relation TQM – HRM in the context of the good governance concept, the doctoral student demonstrates **deep understanding of the contemporary public administration reform obstacles and challenges**.

1.3. Research infrastructure

The consistent, logical and very clear **research infrastructure** should be outlined as one of the strongest elements of the doctoral study. It is presented in detail in the introduction (and even better summarized in the abstract) and in the 5th chapter of the dissertation.

As **object** of the thesis Mrs. Oikonomidou indicates “the quality of public administration and its influence on organizational performance” and as **subjects** – (1) attaining quality through strategic HRM and (2) HR innovative practices measurement under a TQM framework (see p.10). While I agree with the formulation of the object, I would add to the subjects the interrelationship between individual characteristics, motivation and performance of the individual employee on the one hand and the overall performance of the administrative structures from the other. The latter is not studied but is implied in the thesis and hypothesis 7 and later proved by the field study.

The main **goal**: “to provide innovative model for top managers to improve HRM” in public administration (see p.10), is attained by compiling and organizing the results of the four field studies. The goal is further decomposed in objectives and seven corresponding **hypotheses**. They predetermine the structure of the field studies. Due to the complex character of the independent and dependent variables, the hypothesis testing is done by four different studies. The latter are not completely original – they use parts of existing CAF questionnaires. In my opinion this is a plus of the research approach. Any existing and applied instrument that has proved valuable should be creatively used to verify data, gather new information and make conclusions without burdening further the operative jobs of public administrators and their managers. A clear statement of the leading research thesis is not clearly stated in the dissertation but the idea is presented in the abstract.

The high degree of coherence in the research infrastructure is even more clear in **Chapter 5**. There the author follows the “general to specific” logic and defends the research strategy, purpose and goals, the links between hypotheses and research methods and tools. The **statistical methods** are carefully chosen and fully adequate. There is no doubt in the quality of the conclusions based of the field study results.

The field research is of high quality and is the core of the dissertation. Its applicability is the strongest element of the doctoral study and stands out by itself. I recommend the author to publish that part of the study as a monograph as soon as possible.

1.4. Bibliography

The author has studied and used appropriate number of bibliography sources used and quoted in the thesis. The bibliography consists of 283 sources – entirely in English and covering the wide array of topics that are discussed in the dissertation like total quality management, strategic management, human resource management, new public management, good governance, etc. This is an evidence of the deep theoretical knowledge and very good orientation in the problem discussed in the thesis. Most of the sources are published in the new century (74 per cent) and 11 per cent are from the last 5 years. I would recommend the list of the sources to be subdivided into the traditional categories of monographies, articles, reports, government sources, etc.

All the sources are registered according to the official requirements and are quoted in the text earnestly and according to the rules.

2. Results and contributions

The aims of the dissertation are fulfilled, the methods of research work are appropriate to the aims and the hypotheses. Mrs. Oikonomidou states that as a result of the field studies the dissertation has contributed in several dimensions:

- The influence of HR innovative practices introduced by CAF on employee satisfaction is proved (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3). The relevancy of CAF is proved without a doubt;
- There is a statistical significance of the relation degree of HR practices implementation – degree of employee satisfaction (Hypothesis 4);
- The employees' perception of TQM is a strong predictor of individual satisfaction elements (Hypotheses 5 and 6);
- Individual characteristics significantly affect employees' satisfaction (Hypothesis 7).

The author presents very detailed picture of the complex relationship personal attitudes – organizational performance – total quality management. Among the strengths of the proposed **managerial model** are its embeddedness in CAF, statistical significance and predictability, and not least – its flexibility.

The doctoral student has performed very active research work and has demonstrated her ability to link existing theoretical concepts with field results. So there is a contribution to the research of the theory and practice of implementing TQM in the field of HRM.

I accept all abovementioned contributions that are **practice-oriented and applicable**.

3. Assessment of the publications and the abstract

The PhD research of Mrs. Oikonomidou has resulted in several publications. The abstract lists three papers presented at scientific conferences and four articles. The ones from 2019 show the lasting interest of the doctoral student in the area of sustaining quality in primary and secondary education. The publications from 2020 present intermediary results of the empirical studies done to test the hypotheses of the dissertation. A positive fact is that one of the research papers has been later published as an article. All publications demonstrate the sustainable and purposeful efforts invested in the area of the thesis.

The abstract summarizes precisely and clearly (in 40 pages in Bulgarian) the main ideas and theses of the author. The emphasis is on the research infrastructure and methodology, the main results and conclusions. The achievements of the dissertation are accurately presented.

4. Notes, questions and recommendations

Given the research abilities of Mrs. Oikonomidou I would propose several **recommendations** for her future studies:

- Use introductory and closing paragraphs at the chapter and separate points levels. Especially when the topics are so intertwined and complex, some conclusions would help the reader.
- Mix more of the national research literature on the topic. The bibliography cites only texts in English. I have no doubt that there are interesting findings of Greek scientists and practitioners. The “Greek point of view” would be especially enriching in chapters 1-3 that rely mostly on Western European and North American sources.
- Work harder on the limitations of the study. All selected inner factors are thoroughly examined but some of the external factors (competitive advantages of CAF organizations – see p. 9) and broader concepts (e.g. social capital – p. 10, culture of trust – p. 75) are just mentioned and no longer discussed in the text.
- The model derived from the field studies needs to be developed further. To turn it to some easily read “how-to” guide could be very useful for the administrators who are concerned with the quality of performance of their institutions.

The main recommendation to the author is to reorganize and edit very quickly parts 2 and 3 of the dissertation and to publish them as a monograph.

Keeping in mind the high quality of the entire dissertation, I have several questions and a challenge. The **questions** are:

- 1) Do you consider applicable the managerial model to other public services administrations (e.g. in healthcare, social services, etc.)? Is there the necessary political will and inner drive to start implementing the suggested approach? Who and how should “sell” the results of your research to the public managers?
- 2) Which definition of “quality in public administration” do you accept and apply in the research?

The **challenge** is as follows: in many parts of the dissertation and the abstract the idea how the three main pillars of the research intertwine and affect each other is very well stated. The 7 hypotheses are logical and well-versed. Would you try to formulate the thesis of your dissertation in **one sentence**?

V. Conclusion

The doctoral thesis “Organizational Performance and Quality of Public Administration: Evaluation and Improvement through Human Resource Management Practices” prepared by Maria Oikonomidou under the scientific supervision of assoc. prof. Tatyana Tomova, PhD **meets all the requirements** for gaining a PhD degree in “Public Administration”. Therefore, I would recommend the members of the honorable scientific jury to vote positive and **to adjudicate a doctoral degree to Maria Oikonomidou.**

Reviewer:

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Sofia

