

## REFERENCE

**By:** Prof D.Sc. Zhelyu Vladimirov, professional field 3.7 "Administration and management"

**On:** dissertation work by Denitsa Dimitrova Andonova, on the topic "Corporate strategies and programs for employee well-being - a factor for increasing the effectiveness of the organization", for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.7 "Administration and management", doctoral program Business Administration

**Reason for the review:** Order RD-38-258/25.05.2022 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

### 1. Information about doctoral student

Denitsa Andonova graduated from Plovdiv Language High School in Plovdiv with German. She holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Faculty of Economics of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (SU) (2004-2008) and three master's degrees in "Human Resources Management and Development" from the Faculty of Economics of the SU (2008-2010), "Positive Psychology" from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (2017-2019) and "Work and organizational psychology" from the Faculty of Philosophy of the SU (2017-2019).

Since 2016, Denitsa Andonova is a certified corporate wellness specialist at the Corporate Health and Wellness Association (CHWA). Since 2018, she is the founder of Howthrive, where she provides consulting services for corporate well-being. Since 2019, she is the founder of the "Prosperous Bulgaria" Foundation, providing training on corporate well-being among various groups that do not have access to similar services.

She participated in numerous seminars, international scientific conferences and projects. She went through a number of trainings in Bulgaria and abroad. Holds Foundations of Positive Psychology online specialization certificates from Penn University, University of Pennsylvania, Wellness and Vitality at the International College of Professional Kinesiology Practice; Professional specialization program The Science of Happiness at Work from the University of California, Berkeley and others. She speaks English and German very well.

### 2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation work

The dissertation work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a bibliography and four appendices with a volume of 210 pages, and without the appendices and the bibliography of 170 pages. A total of 234 information sources were used, of which 47 in Cyrillic and the rest in English. The text contains 24 figures and 27 tables.

In the **Introduction**, the relevance of the issues related to the corporate well-being of employees, which directly affects organizational success, is shown. The main **goal** of the dissertation is formulated as revealing the relationship between strategies and programs for corporate well-being and the effectiveness of organizations (p. 7). This goal is specified in three tasks corresponding to the three chapters of the dissertation. The **object** of the research is corporate well-being, and the research **perspective** is corporate employee well-being programs (EPW) as a factor for increasing the effectiveness of organizations. Data for the empirical study are collected through a quantitative questionnaire from 484 respondents. The thesis defended is that perceived corporate well-being has the potential to be a factor in increasing the effectiveness of organizations. Based on the research model, six hypotheses are tested.

### 3. Evaluation of the obtained theoretical and scientific-applied results

**In point 1** of the first chapter, definitions of basic concepts such as corporate well-being (CW), employee assistance programs (EAPs), corporate employee welfare programs (CEWPs), and etc. are given, as well as the extent of the distribution of these programs. Different variations of CEWPs, different types of well-being (Fig. 3, p. 25), the main dimensions of well-being (Fig. 6, p. 30) and different types of CEWPs (Fig. 7, p. 31) are indicated. The benefits of implementing CEWPs policies are revealed such as: better employee health, stress relief, less absenteeism, higher productivity, better work-life balance, and more. Organizations implementing such policies are more often preferred by talented employees as work places. The effects of the implementation of CEWPs are separated into three groups - effects at the organizational and individual level and additional effects that somewhat overlap with the benefits of these programs (Table 1, pp. 43-44). Some criticisms are also presented, which relate to unproven returns on CEWPs programs, modest benefits, or their use more as a means of controlling behavior in the form of employee health care.

The **second point** of chapter one outlines the main characteristics of corporate strategies and CEWPs. The distinction between the two concepts is well visualized in Fig. 9 (p. 54). The external and internal factors affecting the success of CEWPs are revealed, emphasizing the key importance of employee participation. The benefits and implications of participating in an employee health program from the company's perspective are presented in several tables (pp. 63-67). Some indicators are also given to measure the effects of CEWPs. A number of challenges and barriers to CEWPs related to regulations, finances, collecting a lot of data, hidden resistance from employees, etc. are also revealed. The close relationship between CEWPs and CSR of organizations (Fig. 10., p. 75), organizational culture, HRM (Table 4, p. 80-81), health and safety working conditions and organizational results is indicated.

**Point 3** of this chapter examines the essence and characteristics of organizational effectiveness (OE) as a complex construct, the various models and methods of its measurement. It is shown that there is no generally accepted definition of this concept. A number of individual factors affecting OE are tracked, as well as seven indicators for measuring OE, presented in the relevant tables on pp. 98-101. A total 13 OE models are analysed, which also reflect different understandings of this efficiency. It is concluded that OE as a complex construct can be measured with different indicators - financial and non-financial.

The **second chapter** includes the research methodology, containing the theoretical justification, the object and the research perspective, the goals and tasks, the hypotheses, the methods of data collection and processing, the instrument used, the psychometric characteristics of the instrument and the limitations of the study. The study is based on data from 484 respondents with valid questionnaires, with 62 of them pilot testing the questionnaire. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented by gender, age, total work experience and experience in the current organization, hierarchical level, education, family status, size of the organization in terms of number of employees, field of activity, place of residence, workplace in the country or abroad, property of the organization. In summary, the sample includes mostly women, aged between 36-45 years, with 10+ years of total work experience, but up to 5 years in the current organization, in an executive position, with higher education, family. They work in in Bulgarian micro- and small companies or in a large international company, in various fields of activity, mostly from Sofia (p. 126). The research model, research tasks and hypotheses are stated on pp. 126-137. The data are processed by one-dimensional and two-dimensional frequency distributions, regression and correlation analysis.

The questionnaire used in online format contains 32 statements/variables distributed in 6 groups and scaled on 5 and 6 levels. The internal consistency values of the 6 groups and the number

of items composing them are given in Table. 18 (p. 138). The limitations of the study, relating to the social desirability of some responses, the non-representative sample and others, are also indicated here (pp. 140-141).

The **third chapter** presents an analysis of the results. On the basis of factor analysis, 6 factors were obtained, which are respectively: Availability/Awareness; Utility; Level of well-being; Social welfare; Participation; and Positive Affect, all of which have high Cronbach's  $\alpha$ . In the correlation matrix of Tab. 20 (p. 146) the relationships between the factors used are given. Single regressions were made on each of these factors as the independent variable to the positive effects of CEWPs implementation as the dependent variable. All these regressions show a positive and direct influence of the respective factors on the dependent variable, although the adjusted  $R^2$  in all is less than 50%, which is explainable given the single regression. On this basis, it is concluded that all the raised hypotheses are confirmed.

At the same time, multiple regression with these factors as independent and positive effects as a dependent variable shows that one of the factors does not have a statistically significant influence (Table 26.2, p. 161). Hence, it is concluded that the sixth hypothesis is partially confirmed. The connections between the confirmed hypotheses and previous results from other publications are detailed. The constant in the multiple regression is statistically significant, which means that there are other factors not covered by the study that influence the positive effects of the implementation of CEWPs. This is reported in the summary of the third chapter of p. 166.

The conclusion **represents** a recapitulation of the conducted research, and some research perspectives in this area are indicated.

#### **4. Evaluation of theoretical and scientific-applied contributions**

Several contributions are formulated which are the personal achievements of the author. First of all - this is the importance of corporate well-being, strategies for CW and CEWPs to the company efficiency increasing. Second, an author's model for the influence of CEWPs on the effectiveness of organizations is presented. The model examines the influence of six factors (availability/awareness, utility, personal well-being, social well-being, participation and all factors together) on the positive effects of CEWPs implementation. Third, the direct and positive influence of four of these factors is also proven. Fourth, on this basis, the importance of CEWPs and its benefits for employees and organizations is justified. Fifth, practical-oriented approaches and guidelines for increasing the effectiveness of organizations based on the use of the CW toolkit are indicated.

#### **5. Evaluation of dissertation publications**

On the topic of the dissertation, the candidate has 8 publications, one of which is co-authored, two are in English and the rest in Bulgarian. The review shows that most of the content of the dissertation has been approved in these publications.

#### **6. Evaluation of the summary (autoreferat)**

The abstract of the dissertation has a volume of 49 pages, reveals the main points of the dissertation work in a synthesized form and as such meets the requirements.

#### **7. Critical notes, recommendations and questions**

Some technical notes refer to text left over from previous versions of the dissertation, such as the volume of pages and number of sources used (p. 7); Table 2 should be Table. 1 (pp. 43-44); incomplete sentence on p. 168 etc.

The essential notes refer to the factor analysis on which the rotated matrix is not shown. This does not allow to see the percentage of variance explained by each factor, the coefficients of inclusion of the individual variables to the respective factors, and it is not clear whether the dependent variable "positive effects" participates in the factor analysis, which in principle should not be done.

There is some ambiguity about which hypotheses are confirmed and which are not. Multiple regression shows that 4 of the hypotheses are confirmed and one is not confirmed, while on the basis of single regressions all hypotheses are confirmed.

## **8. Conclusion**

Regardless of these remarks, the dissertation shows that the doctoral student has done considerable work in analyzing the literature, conducting her own empirical research, summarizing and verifying the results. The problems investigated are relevant and the conclusions drawn add value to the available knowledge on the subject. The text testifies to a very good knowledge of the researched issues, accuracy in the presentation of the theoretical approaches and correctness in referring to the information sources. She demonstrated good skills in processing and interpreting quantitative research data. The obtained results contribute to the understanding of the significance of the identified factors for a wider application of CEWPs in organizations. The conclusions drawn are a consequence of the analysis. With this work, the doctoral student emerges as a serious researcher with a responsible attitude to scientific activity.

All this gives me the reason to propose to the esteemed jury to award Denitsa Dimitrova Andonova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.7 "Administration and management", doctoral program Economic management.

14/08/2022  
Sofia

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