

## REVIEW

By Prof. Dr. Dimitar Hristov Tenchev,

University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy - Sofia, 3.8 Economics and Management, appointed a member of the Scientific Jury by order of the Rector of Sofia University "St Kliment Ohridski" ПД 38-123/13.03.2023

On Dissertation work: **BENEFITS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING FOR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SELF-REALIZATION,**

For obtaining the degree of Doctor of Science in the professional field 3.7. Administration and Management, scientific specialty Economic Management

Autor: PhD student: Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova ;

Scientific consultant. Prof. Dr. Zhelyu Vladimirov

### **1. Brief biographical data about postdoctoral student**

The author of the dissertation has the necessary qualifications, work experience, education and experience, which is evident from the presented CV. 1991-1996 Master of Economics, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Cl. Ohridski, 1997-1998 Master of Political Science, Central European University, 2001-2003 Training series: Trainer of trainers, Sales, Team building, Human Resources, Strategy, KPMG, USAID, since 2013 Certified professional Master coach and mentor, since 2015 Mediator at the Ministry of Justice, since 2017 Certified NLP Master Practitioner. In addition, she has specialized further in areas such as Business Management, Coaching and Consulting Managers, Business and Personal Training, Business Mediation.

She has held a number of managerial positions in various organizations where she has successfully practiced specialized knowledge and skills.

Scientific supervisor is Professor D.Sc. Zhelyo Vladimirov. She has also published 8 scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation.

The publication activity of the PhD student can be judged for a systematic interest in a very topical issue of our time, namely coaching of business leaders. In my opinion, Zornitsa Stefanova's interest and research have made a significant contribution to revealing the bottlenecks and problematic aspects of this contemporary challenge.

### **2. Review of the dissertation and analysis of the results**

The dissertation presented for review is developed and structured in two chapters, Introduction, Conclusion, Annexes in a total volume of 215 pages. There are 315 sources of information and scientific research, of which 12 in Bulgarian and

303 in a foreign language. The paper presents 33 figures, 23 tables, 3 graphs that visualize key aspects of the content. The annexes present a Questionnaire that underpins research and an Agreement on Collaborative Work.

The dissertation is developed and shaped professionally, according to BDS with logical traceability of the development of the reasoning and supported by appropriate comments, examples and arguments.

In the introduction are formulated the purpose, tasks, subject, object and scientific thesis of the development. They define its relevance in a categorical way and support the consistent exposure of the studies and studies carried out, the analysis of the results, the summaries on each topic and form the basis for the development of relevant recommendations for improvement of the processes and problems under consideration.

The subject of the paper is the study of the impact of coaching on the personal and professional development of managers in order to improve their performance.

The object of research is executive coaching as an approach to the development of managers in a personal and organizational context.

An exploratory thesis is that executive coaching influences the personal growth of leaders who have used the executive coaching method, and personal development influences effective management, career development, teamwork, and organizational performance.

To confirm the mentioned thesis, 8 research hypotheses were formulated, structured in the introduction of the dissertation.

The main objective of the dissertation is to explore to what extent executive coaching is useful for the development of the personal potential of leaders and how personal development affects effective management, career development, teamwork and organizational performance.

To achieve this goal, 5 tasks have been formulated, the most significant of which is Development. Developing a theoretical model for the influence of coaching on personal and professional self-realization of leaders. It is a logical consequence of the formulated remaining studies and tools.

**2.1.** The topicality of the issues under consideration, as mentioned, is adequately justified. Increasing the "soft" skills of managers through traditional trainings and trainings is difficult to achieve the expected result, partly due to low efficiency, partly due to lack of time for thorough fruitful participation of people. On-the-job training (coaching) is a highly effective approach for managers with high workload and naturally with high personal commitment and desire for self-development and self-improvement.

This is what defines the topicality of the thesis.

## **2.2. Level of knowledge of the problem.**

The author demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and related problems.

The first chapter is devoted to the study of theoretical concepts and the development of coaching for senior executives. The general characteristic of the approach is outlined quite adequately, namely that it is aimed at the personal and professional development of the person (coachee) through close cooperation with a coach with a view to „unlocking“ the potential and achieving higher levels of competence in a personal and professional context.

To justify the need for executive coaching, current global trends describing the new business environment and working conditions are given. It has been proven that the whole „bouquet“ of forms of training in combination with actual coaching gives even better results for the growth of leaders.

In this part of the work, the main challenges facing leaders are defined. Structured are insufficient engagement, low self-confidence, fear of taking responsibility, weak self-discipline, personal unconsciousness, low emotional intelligence, limited perceptions, difficulty identifying the psychological profile of the people with whom the manager communicates, ineffective communication with them, lack of calm and peace of mind, etc. The highlighted accents are well argued through the applied research and studies.

**Let me say that the dissertation would have earned more if the author had done a more specific definition of the differences between manager and leader. The modern view of the two categories is that there is actually no difference, but this is not fully supported by all researchers and practitioners. What is the doctor's opinion on this?**

Along with the challenges facing the leaders, those faced by the organizations themselves are also presented. In a similar, supported by adequate arguments, the existing challenges before them are systematized. The following accents are outlined - low leadership engagement; low productivity; divergent influences on leaders; appointing the wrong leaders; Leaders unprepared for change.

The main aspects of the leaders' development programs are examined and the significant weaknesses in their planning and implementation are justified. In my opinion, the most significant weakness of these programs is the achievement of understanding between employer, manager and service provider coaching (Drama Triangle) regarding the objectives, benefits and necessity of the process for each of the stakeholders. This in the development is established and outlined quite adequately.

Justifying the need to implement executive coaching for senior managers also goes through assessing current trends in the development of managers/leaders.

In the dissertation, coaching is logically discussed as a method of leadership development. I dare to disagree with the statement on page 42 that coaching is extremely new for Bulgaria. I think the adjective was used exaggeratedly. From my experience and from the author's practice, it is clear that it has been applied in companies in Bulgaria for at least 15 years.

I appreciate as an essential and meaningful contribution the author's definition of the coaching process on p. 43. At the same time, the three categories of application areas – personal, business and executive – have been identified in a correct way, defining the characteristics of each group.

On the basis of these statistical data, the positive effect on the business as a result of EC (executive coaching) is justified. Fig. 6, p. 45.

A worthy place of the coaching implementation process is given in the dissertation (pp. 50 – 53). The strong critical thinking of the author on all analyzed areas in the development and in particular on the implementation process is impressive. This gives it an extra high value.

The systematized models and types of coaching further enrich the knowledge in this area.

On the basis of an analysis of typical human perceptions, representing obstacles and opportunities in relation to the process of implementing the coaching process, it is logically reached to the meaning and content of the EC as a highly effective and useful approach to the development of senior managers in organizations. Here is a very positive impression given by the author on p. 69 definition of the EC. In continuation of the identified features the specificities of the EC have been derived, by a relevant author's interpretation Fig. 13, pp. 72.

In my opinion, various methods used for the development of leaders pp.73 – 78 have been very successfully presented, compared and analyzed in terms of application, result and effectiveness.

In addition, the approaches to the implementation of the EC are thoroughly systematized, assessing advantages and disadvantages that would increase its holistic effect.

A good approach in refining the subsequent study was applied by the author. On the basis of systematization and objective screening of the significant from the less significant, five significant benefits for the development of the leaders resulting from the implementation of the EC are selected, point 1.4, p. 96. Completely exhaustively and on the basis of adequate interpretation of various theories and

results of practice, the eight hypotheses defined in the introduction to the dissertation are considered.

**I would like to point out that in the dissertation once again is numbered item 1.4 .on p. 128 – "Research hypotheses and model of the study", which brings some confusion to the reader. I assume that this is a technical omission in the final formation of the development.**

**In fact, it is this part of Chapter One that is, in my opinion, a brief summary of what has been done so far and should create a bridge to the next part of the work – the actual research and its results.**

A second chapter of the dissertation describes the research carried out on the interrelationships and strength of correlation between EC activities and the five key areas of development of managers and proof of validity of the defined eight working hypotheses integrated into the applied conceptual model.

For the purpose of the study, a relevantly justified methodology was applied, including the development of an appropriate questionnaire for systematizing the responses. Given the "free" nature of the survey, no specific focus groups were identified, but a wide range of respondents were covered, differing according to the type of business, size, form of management, age and gender. The only filter for accepting or rejecting participants' responses is whether they have been subject to coaching or other support in their lives and/or work.

It can be assumed that the representativeness of the sample is significant and the results obtained reflect the real trends in the management functions and development of people.

Several analyses were carried out for the purpose of the study: Analysis of the results of onedimensional distributions; Analysis from twodimensional distributions; Factor analysis (based on software products) and Structural modeling. In my opinion, the mathematical apparatus used and the analyses applied are relevant to the purpose of the study.

The comments and conclusions made are objective and confirm to a high degree the generated 8 hypotheses about the interconnections and the interinfluence between the identified factors. The dropping of some of the expected benefits of the Commission prove to a large extent the credibility of the analyses and logically the author defines them as a subject of her future scientific research.

These limitations of empirical research demonstrate the enormous work of the author in her quest to adequately integrate her practical experience with the experience of other specialists in the field. This has, in my opinion, a significant scientific-practical contribution to improving and increasing the efficiency of the EC implementation process for managers

### **3. Correspondence between the abstract and the dissertation**

The abstract is presented in the form required by the school. It reflects all the important accents and achievements of the dissertation presented in an adequate way, allowing the logical perception of the development of the thesis. In this sense, there is a correspondence between the content of the dissertation and the content presented in the abstract.

**I would note the discrepancy between the numbering of the points in the abstract and those in the dissertation. For example: point 3.3.4. Limitations of empirical investigation, p. 41 in the abstract with point 2.2.2. Limitations of empirical investigation, p. 184 in the dissertation.**

#### **4. Contributions**

Five contributions are presented, which in my opinion can be classified as follows:

##### Scientific contributions

1. A conceptual connection between the personal and professional benefits of coaching for the self-realization of leaders is outlined.

##### Scientific and applied contributions

2. A serious review of the literature related to the essence and specifics of the EC is made.
3. Systematization of the effects of the EC, both benefits and undesirable effects
4. A tool (questionnaire) has been created and tested to quantify the benefits of the EC for the personal and professional self-realization of leaders.
5. The positive links between personal self-realization and effective management, career development, teamwork and organizational performance are revealed.

#### **5. Publications on the dissertation.**

Eight scientific publications are presented, entirely in the context of the development, which are published at prestigious scientific forums in the country. They definitively shape the idea of in-depth research and knowledge of the topics under consideration in the dissertation and demonstrate the specific interests of the author.

No citations to the author from scientific or other backgrounds have been presented at this time.

#### **6. Critical notes and questions.**

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the dissertation is a completely independent product of Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova and I have not noticed any elements of plagiarism in this sense.

The development is actual, objective and confirms to a significant extent my personal impressions of my practice as a personal coach of senior and middle level managers.

I would like to recommend to the author to continue with an even stronger commitment to identify the challenges facing the coaching process and to contribute to increasing its effectiveness, because managers need such selfless, systematic and positive help given their strong employment, stress, huge daily challenges and difficult balance between professional and personal commitments.

Other remarks and recommendations are presented in the text of the review above, and I do not think it appropriate to repeat them.

I would like to ask the following question. **The advent of artificial intelligence in all aspects of life how would it affect and in what direction the processes of coaching and executive coaching in particular?**

### **7. Personal impressions**

I do not know the PhD student Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova and I have no direct impressions of her performance within and outside Sofia University.

### **8. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I would like to declare my **positive assessment** of the dissertation work presented by Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova. It meets the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" and covers the scientometric indicators for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

I take the liberty of proposing to the honorable Scientific Jury to **vote positively and award** Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 3.7. Administration and Management; ".

Sofia  
April, 2023

Reviewer's signature:.....  
(Prof. d-r Dimitar Tenchev)