

R E V I E W

on the dissertation BENEFITS OF EXECUTIVE COACHING FOR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SELF-REALIZATION

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The review is prepared by Prof. Dr. D. S. Tsvetan Parvanov Davidkov on the basis of the Order of the Rector of Sofia University RD 38 - 123 /13-03-2023.

The submitted dissertation is a claim for the award of the Educational and Scientific degree of Doctor in Professional Field 3.7 ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (Business Administration).

Introduction of the candidate. Zornitsa Stefanova - Ivanova is a doctoral candidate in independent study at the Department of Business Administration (Business Administration, Sofia University). She has met all curriculum requirements and has been admitted with the right to a defence. Ms. Stefanova - Ivanova is a graduate of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at the University. As an entrepreneur with a significant quantity of professional experience. A coach with international credibility and substantial experience. The developed topic correlates with her career progression and interests.

Brief outline of the dissertation. There are 215 pages total in the dissertation. An introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion comprise its structure. Chapter I - Executive coaching: fundamental theoretical concepts (14 - 129) and Chapter II - Research methodology. Analysis of results (130 to 187); Concluding remarks (188 to 191). Also included in the text are the table of contents (3 - 4), the list of figures (5), the list of tables (6), the list of terms used (7), the appendices (192 - 201), and the bibliography (202 - 215).

- In the Introduction, along with the topic's relevance, the purpose and objectives of the dissertation, the research thesis, hypotheses, research methodology, and dissertation structure are graded.

- In Chapter I - EXECUTIVE COACHING: BASIC THEORETICAL CONCEPTS, the author introduces the research context, discusses executive coaching as a method of development, clarifies the nature of executive coaching (including specifics and approaches), and concentrates on the anticipated (possible) benefits. The research hypotheses and research design are presented at the conclusion of this chapter (128-129). This chapter's content is informative; the author investigates an impressive corpus of information sources in a systematic manner. There is an attentive reading. The sources are properly managed. This chapter serves as a standalone introduction to the nature and methodology of coaching.

- Chapter II - RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES for conducting research. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS - is composed of the following two sections: 2.1 Research Methodology; 2.2 Empirical Research Results Analysis. The Research Methodology section has been "narrowly" interpreted; it includes the design and content of the questionnaire used to collect primary empirical data; the coding of the data; a measurement key (such as the correspondence between empirical indicators and their "participation" in solving specific research tasks); and a description of the subjects. In the section entitled Analysis of Empirical Research Results, the obtained results are presented as follows: descriptive statistics; factor analysis; structural modelling to investigate the relationships between factors; limitations of the empirical study, etc. This structure can be defended (although the logic in presenting the results could be determined by the expressed hypotheses and/or research questions and not by the nature of the treatments).

- The appendix contains the following: appendix 1 - Questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of executive coaching; appendix 2 - Working agreement.

- There are 315 entries in the bibliography, 12 of which are written in Bulgarian.

Assessment of the dissertation. My overall assessment of the dissertation is favourable. In support of this assertion, I present the following arguments:

- The subject is timely. There is substantial interest in coaching, although its evaluation as a strategy/method/technique is ambiguous.

- The author is familiar with an extensive portion of the dissertation's bibliography; in interpreting the topic, she combines a solid theoretical foundation with extensive professional coaching experience.

- Overall, the chosen research apparatus can withstand criticism. The primary empirical data collected (though not remarkable in terms of the number of

participants) enables the proposed hypotheses to be tested (thus proving the formulated thesis).

- The statistical analyses performed (and the interpretation of the results) demonstrate that the author has mastered fundamental research techniques (in preparation for independent research). In light of the obtained results and their presentation, it is possible to conclude that one of the most essential goals of the PhD programme has been met: the acquisition of skills for independent research.

- The author demonstrates scientific integrity, as well as a willingness to ruminate on the feedback of peers and to learn. These are essential attributes for the development of any scientist or researcher's career.

- Clearly, the study's findings have heuristic value; they demonstrate the approach's potential for individual growth and positive organisational outcomes.

Critical Notes. Recommendations. The refereed version of the thesis is the fourth (or fifth) version of the text; discussion of each (formal or informal) version was linked to discussion - recommendations - reflection on these - and further development of the text. This gives me reason to highlight specific details, particularly in light of Zornitsa's future work.

- As stated, this dissertation contains a comprehensive review of a vast corpus of literature (and this alone can be evaluated as a major strength of the text). In this section, the author can elaborate on her reflective and critical perspective.

- The results are based on 169 executives' (managers') responses to a questionnaire; this is essentially their self-evaluation. The strategy is defensible. Simultaneously, methods of controlling and validating the results can be pursued (e.g., by capturing the coaching professionals' perspectives)¹.

- The author will undoubtedly continue to hone her research skills. It necessitates not only knowledge of fundamental research procedures, but also the ability to construct a comprehensive and well-grounded research strategy (including the exploration of various options and their selection).

- Possible enhancements to the use of language, etc.

In the spirit of reviewing stylistics, the above suggestions should be regarded less as criticism and more as potential guidelines for Ms. Zornitsa Stefanova-Ivanova's professional development.

¹ Already, Bulgaria has a core group of internationally certified professionals with sound practises.

Assessment of scientific contributions. The claim for scientific contributions is stated on page 42 of the abstract (page 187 of the dissertation). This assertion is defensible. At the level of theory, the contributions may be evaluated as follows: A) systematisation and conceptualization of coaching theory and practise (especially executive coaching); a successful endeavour to present the potential benefits and their relationship in a systematic manner. B) justification and validation of an instrument for research. C) Validated hypotheses (or a supported thesis) concerning patterns in the area of research interest - these are new facts and knowledge that are thematically embedded within existing knowledge and contribute to the development of new knowledge. Research findings (can) serve as practical guides in the work of a large number of professionals, thereby motivating efforts to devise and implement effective training and development programmes for managers.

Abstract. Overall, the abstract is well-written and provides an overview of the dissertation's content and organisation. The relevant pages are not listed alongside the headings in the abstract table of contents (at the outset of the text) in order to better orient the reader.

Publications. Regarding the subject of the dissertation, the author cites three publications (one in English) and five papers presented at conferences of varying standing. The Bulgarian publications can be found in SU and BSU yearbooks, while the English publication is published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Through these publications and presentations, substantial results of the thesis are made available to the public. The candidate's publication activity can be judged to be completely commensurate with the requirements for publications of a PhD candidate. There are reasons to recommend Ms. Stefanova - Ivanova for publication in journals with a high reputation in the professional community and a greater influence on the advancement of science, in light of her abilities and the results she has obtained.

Personal observations. I've known Ms. Zornitsa Stefanova - Ivanova for decades (we've collaborated on a number of initiatives through the FEBA Alumni Club; we maintain a cordial relationship). She is a person with tremendous potential, a successful professional career, and her own mission in work, relationships, and life, in my estimation. Regardless of her substantial accumulation, I admire her eagerness to learn. I perceive her to be ambitious, intent, and well-meaning. These are a few of the personal reasons why I support her and continue to provide her with constructive criticism.

Conclusion. Ms. Zornitsa Georgieva Stefanova - Ivanova satisfies the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LADSAB), the Regulations for the Application of LADSAB, and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedure for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and the Occupation of Academic Positions at Sofia University. I will support the esteemed scientific panel's decision to grant the candidate the Educational and Scientific degree of Doctor in Professional Field 3.7 ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (Business Administration).

Sofia, 21-04-2023

Signature: