

## **REVIEW**

by competition for the academic position of " Associate Professor" in professional direction 3.2 Psychology (Work Psychology), for the needs of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy, announced in SG no. 30 of 15.04.2022 and on the website of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

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### **GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE MATERIALS FOR THE COMPETITION AND OF THE CANDIDATE FOR DOCENT**

The competition for the academic position "Associate Professor" in 3.2 Psychology (Work Psychology) has been announced for the needs of the Department "Social, Organizational, Clinical and Pedagogical Psychology", Faculty of Philosophy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The basis for preparing the review is the RD order 38-239/16.05.2022 of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The only candidate in the competition is Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova from SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". The submitted documents meet the basic requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for its Application and the Rules for the Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Vihra Naydenova graduated with a degree in " Psychology" from "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2002 with excellent grades and obtained the degree of "Master". She has two specializations during her studies: Work and Organizational Psychology and Clinical and Counseling Psychology. Vihra Naydenova was a doctoral student at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, where she defended her doctoral dissertation on the topic: "Stress and health among Eastern European immigrants in Germany" and obtained the scientific and educational degree "doctor" in 2008. The diploma was recognized by "St. Kliment Ohridski" by professional direction 3.2. Psychology .

In 2007, Vihra Naydenova was elected as a part-time assistant in Work psychology to the Department of Social, Work and Pedagogical Psychology of FF, SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", leading the exercises of Bachelors majoring in Psychology. From 2015, after a competition, V.

Naydenova joined as a full-time chief assistant in professional direction 3.2. Psychology (Work Psychology). She has 7 years of work experience as a full-time lecturer in the Department of Social, Organizational, Clinical and Pedagogical Psychology of the Faculty of Philosophy of "St. Kliment Ohridski".

The submitted report on Dr. Naydenova's workload shows that the courses she leads as a full-time lecturer in bachelor's and master's programs are entirely on the topic of the competition. The teaching workload of chief assistant Dr. Vihra Naydenova includes the seminar classes in Work Psychology - second part for undergraduate students majoring in "Psychology" at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". She leads a lecture course on Work and Organizational Psychology in the Sociology major, as well as mandatory and elective courses for the master's programs of the Psychology major at SU: MP in Work and Organizational Psychology (Stress, Health and Safety at the Workplace, Management of talent and succession planning, Human Resource Management); MP in Organizational Psychology and Cross-Cultural Management in English (Work health and safety at workplace, Human Resources Management). In the master's programs in which she teaches, Chief Associate Professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova is the academic supervisor of 30 graduate students, and the topics of the diploma theses fall within the sphere of her scientific interests and competencies in the field of human resources management, stress management, selection and evaluation, and work performance.

The teaching workload and the conducted lecture courses provide grounds for establishing the candidate's readiness to occupy the academic position of "associate professor" in the scientific specialty and show the correspondence of the candidate's academic competence with the specifics of the competition in the field of work psychology.

**FULFILLMENT OF THE MINIMUM NATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR HOLDING THE ACADEMIC  
POSITION " DOCENT"**

From the presented reference with the relevant evidentiary material, it is established that Chief assistant professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position "associate professor". She participated in the competition with 33 scientific papers, of which one monograph, which is a habilitation thesis, one study aid co-authored, 23 reports and articles in Bulgarian, of which 10 were independent and 13 were co-

authored, 2 articles in English in edited collective works, as well as 6 co-authored articles in refereed and indexed scientific publications.

A reference is presented for the noted citations, which contain, in addition to the citations of Bulgarian sources, a significant number of citations, including in SCOPUS and Web of Science of co-authored articles published in refereed and indexed scientific publications.

The attached references and evidence show that Chief assistant professor V. Naydenova, PhD, *fulfills the minimum national requirements* according to the Regulations for the Implementation of the ZRASRB (amendment and supplement SG No. 15 of 19.02.2019, table 1, Area 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, 3.2. Psychology). She has the required 150 points for the requirements of groups A, B and C, indicator 1, indicator 2 and indicator 3, respectively, since she holds the degree of "doctor", which carries 50 points, and also presents a habilitation thesis, which carries 100 pts. Group D (P4 to P10) of the Regulations for the Application of ŽARASRB sets a requirement for the publications for associate professor, according to which the applicant must have at least 200 points. Based on the reference provided by Dr. V. Naydenova, her publications number 211 pts. According to the Regulations for the implementation of ZRASRB, the candidate for associate professor must also have 50 pts from the cited ones. The report on citations presented by Chief assistant professor Vihra Naydenova, PhD, shows citations, including in SCOPUS and Web of Science, which amount to 2645 pts. With regard to indicator E - participation in scientific projects, the attached reference establishes participation in one international scientific project - 20 pts.

The overall research and teaching activity of Dr. Vihra Naydenova, as well as her professional experience in various organizations as an expert in human resources management, correspond to the profile of the competition and cover the necessary requirements for occupying the academic position "associate professor" in professional direction 3.2. Psychology (Work Psychology), according to Art. 53, para. (1), item 1 and item 2 of the Regulations for the implementation of ŽRASRB and art. 105 of the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

## **GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND EVALUATION OF THE CANDIDATE'S SCIENTIFIC PRODUCTION**

The habilitation thesis, with which Chief assistant professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova participated in the competition, is the monograph " Employee engagement and training. People in organizations - potential, development and contribution ", East-West publishing house, 2022. The monograph is dedicated to an extremely important problem for modern work and organizational psychology from a theoretical and empirical point of view. Although this issue has been developed intensively in recent years and is of interest to a number of researchers abroad and in our country, the questions that researchers ask themselves exceed the number of answers and solutions that can be implemented in practice in order to increase employee engagement. Precisely because of this, the ambition of Chief assistant professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova to undertake a study of employee engagement should be highly appreciated, as not only empirical evidence is sought for the causes and factors that influence the formation of engagement, but also possible practical actions and interventions by side of the organizations and, in particular, of the specialists in human resource management. The engagement research problem under consideration becomes even more significant and pressing against the backdrop of changes in the nature of work during the COVID-pandemic and in the post-COVID period. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee engagement has been found globally and poses a number of challenges for researchers, experts and consultants in human resource management and organizational development.

In terms of content, the monograph integrates and seeks a balance between theory, established empirical regularities and trends, and guidelines for the application of theoretical and empirical achievements in the practice of work psychologists and human resources specialists. A systematized presentation of the various theoretical approaches to the study of engagement has been made, such as Chief Associate Professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova does not limit herself to the presentation of individual theories and concepts about engagement, but traces the chronology of the problem's emergence, the development of different research perspectives and the search for factors and variables that influence engagement. The presented text shows a high scientific engagement and thoroughness in considering the totality of previous studies, as they are integrated according to the concept and searches of the author. The complex reasons for the formation of engagement are examined, emphasizing both personal factors and organizational prerequisites and factors that determine employee engagement.

In particular, it should be emphasized that when considering the factors and causes of engagement both theoretically and in applied terms, the role of leadership, workplace relationships and human resource management policies and practices is emphasized. In the second chapter, which is aimed at analyzing engagement in the context of human resources development, Chief assistant professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova substantiates and consistently proves the leading role of human resources management and, more specifically, traces the ways in which the selection, introduction of new employees, employee evaluation, management of work performance, learning and development, the development of leadership competencies contribute to the formation of engagement.

Based on the theoretical approaches discussed in the first and second chapters of the monograph and empirical data from other studies to date, the research concept of Chief Assistant Professor Vihra Naydenova, Ph.D., who focuses on the study of motivational factors and employee satisfaction as prerequisites for the formation of engagement. A separate chapter is dedicated, in which the results are described and discussed, and practically significant and applicable in practice conclusions and findings are made. The presented results are from several empirical studies, made by the researcher, of employee engagement and its associated or determining factors in various types of organizations, including the banking and IT sectors, as well as in a government organization. Emphasis is placed on the leading importance of meaningfulness and significance of work as a main predictor of employee engagement. The determining role of social relationships and the formation of connections at work is taken into account, as well as the motivating importance of learning , development and innovation for increasing employee engagement .

I would like to emphasize that the monograph proves not only the professional interest, but also the real achievements of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova and deserves a high evaluation. The attempt to capture different perspectives in the study of engagement and to argue for the leading importance of approaches to human resource management is of interest to a wide range of specialists from both academia and practice. It is the search for the applicability of the results in practice that is the main orientation advocated by the author in the monograph, and serious evidence is provided in support of this. The monograph is written in an appropriate and comprehensible way, which preserves the scientific rigor, but at the same time makes the results and established results accessible and understandable for application in practice.

Apart from the thesis, the other publications submitted for participation in the competition cover several main topic areas that are representative of contemporary psychology.

One major thematic area focuses on stress, well-being and health, integrating findings from predominantly undergraduate research, analyzing the causes and determinants of health behaviours. The importance of social support as a moderator and "buffer" of stress, the characteristics of type D behavior and their influence on personal health, the role of physical activity, life satisfaction, quality of life and mental well-being as determinants of health behavior are examined. It is worth emphasizing that in some of the publications the cross-cultural research perspective is advocated, which includes a comparative analysis of various aspects of health behavior among students from Bulgaria, Germany and Poland.

The scientific and scientific-applied interests of Chief Dr. Vihra Naydenova with the field of human resources management finds expression in a wide range of publications. What they have in common is that they obey the scientific-research perspective related to the conduct and analysis of empirical research, but at the same time have a pronounced practical orientation. Critical issues for modern human resource management are discussed, including personnel selection and development, performance management, assessment centers, application of competency models and 360-degree feedback, talent management, succession planning approaches and ways in organizations, as well as the role of induction and mentoring as a factor in employee performance and engagement.

The overall analysis of the publications of Chief Assistant Professor Vihra Naydenova shows that her scientific work focuses on several significant areas with a pronounced practical orientation, namely the problems of stress, well-being, health and support in an organizational context, human resource management and, in particular, the emphasis on selection, onboarding, evaluation and performance management.

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE CANDIDATE'S SCIENTIFIC AND SCIENTIFIC-APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS**

The contributions of Chief Assistant Dr. Vihra Naydenova can be specified in several directions. It contributes to clarifying the factors that determine the formation and maintenance of employee engagement. Her research on engagement adds value to existing views and establishes research and application-relevant results. An integrated approach is presented to identify the factors that predict engagement, emphasizing the importance of work itself and more specifically,

the perception of its meaningfulness and significance, social relationships in the workplace and approaches to employee learning and development as part of the management of human resources. The similarity, but also the differentiation and interaction between engagement, job satisfaction and commitment to the organization is clearly shown.

It provides a series of practical recommendations and guidelines that relate both to the introduction of effective management approaches to maintaining and increasing employee engagement. These conclusions and recommendations are valid not only for the specific organizations in which the research was conducted, but are also applicable to other organizations in a national and international context.

Empirical evidence is found on the importance of employee selection, performance appraisal and learning and development approaches, enabling the identification of the effect different aspects and components of HRM have on employee engagement and performance.

The cross-cultural perspective that reveals the characteristics and trends in health behavior, quality of life and mental well-being among students in a university setting is applied.

Dr. Vihra Naydenova contributed to the adaptation and development of research methods, including perceived stress, social support, motivating factors at work .

In the monograph and in other scientific publications Chief Assistant Professor Vihra Naydenova successfully combines the theoretical-empirical with the practical-applied perspective and seeks evidence and verification in practice of the established results. This gives a pronounced scientific-applied orientation to her publications and integrates in practice the theoretical achievements, the results of empirical research and their validation in the field of human resource management.

At the moment, I have no information and I have not found any elements of plagiarism by the chief assistant. Dr. Vihra Naydenova.

#### **PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE CANDIDATE**

I have personal impressions of the candidate, as I know Dr. Vihra Naydenova from her studies in Psychology and as her thesis supervisor in the Work and Organizational Psychology specialization. I can argue that as an undergraduate she developed an interest and affinity for stress and health behavior research that continued in her doctoral dissertation and subsequently expanded her research interests and pursuits. This scientific consistency and expansion of the perimeter of scientific interests to the field of human resources management contribute to the consolidation and

development of work psychology in our country. My direct interaction and work with her on joint research and publications give me reason to state that she works and interacts well in a team and has a conscious, systematic and committed approach to conducting scientific and applied research. In the course of her career as an expert in human resource management in various organizations and as a long-time lecturer, Dr. Vihra Naydenova has developed and continues to develop research and teaching experience. Her achievements so far and the future potential for development as a scientist and lecturer allow us to claim that she is a valuable and prominent representative of work psychology in our country.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the conclusions and findings regarding the publications and contributions of Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova , I categorically assert that her candidacy meets all the requirements of the RASRB and the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski ".

My high rating is comprehensive and refers to both her teaching and research activities. Her many years of experience and teaching experience in bachelor's and master's degrees testify to her professional preparation and are a prerequisite for future career development in the academic field. The scientific work of Chief assistant professor V. Naydenova covers essential problems in the field of work and organizational psychology, corresponds to the profile of the scientific specialty and reveals a thorough approach to conducting empirical research, analysis and interpretation of results and deriving scientifically based regularities and trends. The scientific guidance of numerous graduates in master's programs allows to apply her knowledge and experience in the preparation and training of future specialists in the field of work psychology. She successfully works in co-authorship and interacts with other researchers, which is confirmed by her joint publications and work in research teams with scientists and practitioners in the country and abroad. The citations of her publications testify to her scientific recognition and contribution to modern psychology.

My long-term personal impressions in the course of her academic career and professional development up to now give me reason to believe that Chief Dr. Vihra Naydenova is an established researcher, teacher and expert who contributes to the development of work psychology and the training of future specialists.



As a result of the high evaluation of the scientific and teaching activities of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova, I propose to the Scientific Jury to support her election as "Associate professor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology (Work Psychology) at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

30/08/2022

City. Sofia

Reviewer :

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