

# R E V I E W

by competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor"

in professional field 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"

**Reviewer:**

**Valeri Stoilov Stoyanov**

**Professor in a professional field 3.2. Psychology,**

**Doctor of Science**

Varna \* 2022

## **1. General presentation of the received materials for the competition**

The competition for the academic position " Associate Professor " in professional field 3.2 Psychology (Work Psychology) is for the needs of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Philosophy. It was announced in the State Gazette no. 30 of 15.04.2022 and on the website of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The review was assigned by decision of the Scientific Jury, determined by Order of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" from 16.05.2022

The only candidate in the competition is Ch. 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 Regulations for its Application and the Regulations for the Terms and Conditions for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova offers 27 scientific works for review in connection with the competition, as follows:

**1. Monograph** – 1 issue: Naydenova V. (2022). Employee engagement and training. People in Organizations - Potential, Development and Contribution, ed. East-West, Sofia (Reviewers: Dr. Snezhana Ilieva; Prof. Dr. Irina Zinovieva; Prof. Dr. Margarita Atanasova; Scientific Editor: Prof. Dr. Ludmil Georgiev. ISBN 978-619-01-1056-9 (375 pages).

**2. Study aid** – 1 pc. in co-authorship: Naydenova, V., Dzhamdzhieva, M, Staevska, V. (eds.) (2008): Qualitative methods in the social sciences. Introduction. University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski", Sofia. Also published online on the SU website. ISBN 978-954-07-2646-5.

**3. Reports and articles in Bulgarian, published in publications from the NACID reference list** - 23 items, of which 10 are independent, and the remaining 13 are co-authored.

**4. Publications in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information** - 6 nos. co-authored.

**5. Articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes, in English** - 2 nos. (1 co-authored and 1 independently).

A report on the noticed citations, as well as the required documents for participation in the competition, is presented.

The scientific works proposed for review are outside the works specified in the abstract of the dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" and are accepted for review.

With the scientific works submitted for participation in the competition, the obtained Ph.D. and the noted citations, Vihra Georgieva Naydenova meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position "docent", higher education field 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, according to the Appendix to Art. 1a, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (New - SG No. 56 of 2018, in force from 07.06.2018) - Minimum national requirements for scientific, teaching and/or artistic or the sports activity of the candidates for acquiring a scientific degree and for occupying the academic positions of "Chief Assistant", "Associate Professor" and "Professor" in field 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology.

## **2. Applicant data**

Ch. Assistant Professor Dr. Vihra Naydenova is a graduate of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski", where in 2003 he obtained a Master's degree from the University of Applied Sciences in the professional field of "Psychology", with two specializations - clinical and counseling psychology and work and organizational psychology. In 2008, he also obtained an Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Bielefeld, Germany. The topic of the dissertation is: "Stress and health among Eastern European immigrants in Germany". She has held various expert and managerial positions in the field of human resources management, organizational development, training and development, selection and evaluation of personnel. During the period 2007-2015, he worked as a part-time lecturer at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" and as an expert on scientific projects. Since 2015, he holds the academic position of "chief assistant" at the same university. He is a member of the Society of Psychologists in Bulgaria.

The educational profile and accumulated professional experience from Dr. Vihra Naydenova, as an expert in the practice of human resources management, organizational development, training, development, selection and evaluation of personnel and in the system of higher education as a lecturer and project expert, are consistent with the requirements for occupying the academic position "associate professor" by 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 the RSARB and Article 105 of the Regulations for the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

### **3. General characteristics and assessment of the candidate's scientific output**

The scientific interests of Dr. Vihra Naydenova are in harmony with the transformation in modern psychology, aimed at the search for the determinants of the mental well-being and optimal functioning of the person, as well as the development of his personal potential through the social (including the organizational) environment.

Scientific works are devoted to significant and current problems in the field of labor, organizational psychology and health psychology.

The focus of empirical research is employee engagement in the organization. The role of organizational factors in creation has been thoroughly explored of more intensive employee engagement, such as employee training and development, social relationships in teams, job meaningfulness, feedback from managers, etc. The interrelationships between engagement and work performance, work engagement and health behaviors, management and talent development in organizations are convincingly elucidated. A specific emphasis in the research models is the influence of the induction process of new employees in the organization, their training and the value of mentoring in the formation and development of work engagement.

A significant part of Dr. Vihra Naydenova's scientific research is related to the problems of mental stress, mental well-being, the role of social support as a resource coming from others in the social environment, as well as the interrelationships between mental stress and health behavior, quality of life, mental well-being and health behavior in college students.

The habilitation thesis, with which Dr. Vihra Naydenova applied for the competition is: Naydenova V. (2022). Employee engagement and training. People in Organizations - Potential, Development and Contribution, ed. East-West, Sofia (Reviewers: Dr. Snezhana Ilieva; Prof. Dr. Irina Zinovieva; Prof. Dr. Margarita Atanasova; Scientific editor: Prof. Dr. Ludmil Georgiev .ISBN 978-619-01-1056-9 (375 pages).

The monograph is undeniably dedicated to a current problem for work and organizational psychology, which is currently poorly represented in the scientific works of experts in our country. The dynamics of organizational processes and the external environment for organizations implies permanent and systematic solutions related to the optimal functioning and motivation of employees, with the aim of managing their work performance and guaranteeing the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations. From this point of view, the commitment of employees is key to the work performance of employees, and the disclosure of the organizational factors that condition it - a subject of scientific research and applied solutions.

Structurally, the monograph consists of an introduction, three chapters, appendices, recommendations and future research, conclusion and references. The text is spread over 375 pages.

In the introduction of the monograph, the main goal is stated to "...research, present, systematize the essential characteristics of employee engagement and the most important factors that determine it." (p. 12)

The first chapter of the monograph provides an overview of theoretical models for clarifying the essence of commitment. Critically analyzed are the leading concepts of engagement, in which it is defined as a mental state, or as an attitude, or as a behavioral complex, as well as a personality trait. The presentation of the scientific models of the construct is combined by the author of the monograph with a presentation of the understanding of the commitment of experts from practice, who form corporate policies for improving individual and group performance at work. Psychological and behavioral indicators of engagement, as well as how it affects business results and the development of companies, are presented in a reasonable and logical manner. The interrelationships between leadership development and engagement are analyzed, as well as the importance of personal and organizational factors that influence employee engagement.

In Chapter Two, "Engagement in the Context of Human Resource Development", the role of human resource management in the organization in sustaining and developing engagement is rightly presented as key. In this regard, the interrelationships of engagement with various aspects of human resource management have been analyzed. Analysis highlights include the impact on engagement of recruitment, onboarding, employee learning and development, role enrichment practices, strategic talent management, performance management, feedback, employee performance appraisals, and career development.

A special place in the analyzes is occupied by the problem of introducing new employees to work - a problem that rarely finds a place in the scientific research of experts in organizational and work psychology. It has been convincingly shown that the intensity of employee engagement and, in perspective, staff retention also depend on the nature of the introduction to the company. Particular attention is paid to company learning and talent development, in the context of the engagement issue.

A successful analysis was made and the possibilities of the "Assessment Center" method were presented, both for the selection and forecast of career development of employees, and for the creation of timely and comprehensive programs for training and development of talents in the organization.

The third chapter of the monograph presents the setting and results of our own empirical research on the factors that influence engagement in the Bulgarian cultural context. More than 520 persons - employees in five organizations in Bulgaria from the financial sector and from the information technology sector, as well as from one state organization - were investigated.

The research model logically follows the analyzes made in the first two chapters, with the main goal being to reveal factors that influence employee engagement in the specific Bulgarian cultural context.

I find the model adequate for the purpose, as well as the chosen research instruments. To measure engagement, Schaufeli's and Becker questionnaire was used, in which engagement is operationalized into three subscales: dedication, absorption, and energy/enthusiasm.

An author's questionnaire "Importance, meaningfulness, motivational factors at work" was used to measure the main motivational factors in an organizational environment. It consists of twenty-two items, based on Lawrence and Nohria's theory of the four basic human drives. Through factor analysis, the author of the monograph derives four latent factors - "Finding meaning and meaningfulness in work"; "Power and Influence"; "Social Relationships and Bonding" and the "Learning, Creativity, Protection and Ideas" factor.

To measure job satisfaction, the questionnaire developed by Prof. Snezhana Ilieva and consisting of 19 statements was used, which examines the level of satisfaction with the job in general and with its various aspects.

All scales show good internal consistency and the ability to be analyzed the results of the study. The empirical information is duly statistically processed and thoroughly analyzed. A wide range of statistical methods was used: descriptive statistics; evaluation of the internal consistency of scales through Cronbach's Alpha; correlation analysis, analysis of variance; regression analysis, factor analysis.

Differences in engagement and job satisfaction were analyzed by individual-demographic characteristics and depending on the type of organization. Through stepwise regression, the most significant motivators related to overall employee engagement were extracted. The predictor with the most significant impact on overall work engagement was "Significance and meaningfulness in work". A weaker but significant influence is shown by the predictors "Social relationships and forming relationships at work" as well as "Learning, development and innovation". The model has good explanatory power.

The cited findings show the rich possibilities of management in organizations to maintain a high intensity of the general engagement of employees. Finding meaning and significance in work can be enhanced by the organization's strategic leadership by communicating the organization's mission and vision, as well as the contribution to society. Line managers can do this through systematic feedback on the contribution of each member of the teams and the individual importance and contribution to the results and the team. Obviously, the focus of the management should permanently be the relationships in the working groups and a "transparent" system for training, qualification and career development of the personnel should be maintained.

The monograph is written in a professional language that is accessible and easy to read by a wider range of interested parties. The combination of scientific concepts on the problem with the "view" of specialists from practice makes the monograph very informative and interesting not only for academic circles and specialists in human resource management, but also for managers from various fields of business, for students and for all those who have an interest in these issues.

Dr. Vihra Naydenova's monograph is a complete scientific work on work and organizational psychology, dedicated to a specific, current problem, thoroughly and systematically analyzed on the basis of her own empirical research, with a clear and logically justified author's position. There are significant theoretical and practical contributions.

In some of the other publications of Dr. Vihra Naydenova, problems correlated with those presented in the habilitation thesis are analyzed. The publications are developed accurately, logically, with a strong author's presence and are published in issues from the national reference list of scientific publications and are referenced in global databases with scientific information.

Another group of publications tested a number of hypotheses about cross-cultural differences in students related to perceived stress, psychological stress and health behaviors in a university environment, social support, quality of life and mental well-being in students and expatriates.

Dr. Vihra Naydenova's extensive involvement in research teams on various topics, both with colleagues from Bulgaria and abroad, is impressive. This is a testament to her recognition as a thorough and valuable researcher in the field of psychology, and the significant number of citations in journals referenced in global databases of scientific information only adds to this impression.

The scientific production of Dr. Vihra Naydenova, with whom she participated in the competition for the academic position of "associate professor", meets the requirements for the presentation of scientific works and contributes to the transfer of modern scientific and scientific-applied achievements in the field of work and organizational psychology and their teaching in higher education and within the postgraduate qualification of experts in organizational development and human resource management.

#### **4. Summarized presentation of the candidate's scientific and scientific-applied contributions**

The contributions in the scientific works of Dr. Vihra Naydenova can generally be systematized, as the formulation of ideas, concepts and approaches in a significant field of application of her achievements for labor and organizational psychology - the management of human resources in organizations. Thus the fragmented knowledge of a number of problems, including and the problem of employee engagement is given clearer systematicity and clear application perspectives.

In a more concrete form, the scientific and scientific-applied contributions of Dr. Vihra Naydenova are reduced to the following:

1. The essence of the phenomenon of "employee engagement" has been logically and argumentatively analyzed. Successful and sustained differential analyzes were made for the content side of constructs such as "employee engagement", "job satisfaction" and "attachment to the organization".
2. The main factors influencing engagement in an organizational environment are outlined. The influence of work engagement on the work performance of employees in the organization and the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization is analyzed.
3. The role of the specific care of human resources management specialists and managers from the various hierarchical levels in the organization for the introduction of employees into the organizational environment, for their organizational socialization and their subsequent training and stimulation of personal and career development, for maintaining of intense work engagement.
4. Revealed for the Bulgarian cultural context, through our own empirical research, are the main factors that influence the engagement of employees in the organization, the meaningfulness and significance of work, social relationships in the work environment and the opportunity for learning, development and respect are particularly important for development of individual potential and career development.
5. A number of methods have been adapted and standardized for Bulgarian cultural conditions, as well as original methods for psychological measurement related to: perceived stress; health behavior;

mental well-being; quality of life; social support; motivation and behavior of the individual in an organizational environment, feedback in an organizational environment, motivators at work, employee engagement.

6. A number of hypotheses have been empirically tested and cross-cultural differences related to mental stress and health behaviors in a university environment, social support, quality of life and mental well-being in university students have been delineated.

*At the moment, I have no information and I have not detected any plagiarism by the Dr. Vihra Naydenova.*

## **5. Characteristics and assessment of the candidate's educational and pedagogical activities**

It is difficult for me to give an assessment of the teaching activity of Dr. Vihra Naydenova due to the fact that we work in different higher schools. I know her from her presentation at various scientific forums, and my impressions are that she is erudite thorough researcher.

The scientific production presented at the competition shows that Dr. Vihra Naydenova very actively conducts empirical research in the field of work and organizational psychology, and this is a prerequisite for the transfer of scientific knowledge in the process of teaching students and in the various forms of postgraduate qualification. In this sense, I think that she can be a very useful teacher, leading independent courses in the thematic field of work and organizational psychology.

## **CONCLUSION**

Bearing in mind the above stated in the review, I draw the following conclusions about the candidacy of Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova for taking the academic position "associate professor":

1. Meets the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position " associate professor", field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology, according to the Appendix to Art. 1a, para. 1 of the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

2. Has accumulated professional experience as a lecturer, researcher and expert in the field of work and organizational psychology in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for occupying the academic position " associate professor" and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

3. Offers for review scientific production with significant scientific and practical-applied contributions.

4. Works successfully in teams with researchers on various scientific projects, both with scientists at home and with those from abroad, being definitely a recognizable scientist in the field of psychology not only in our country, but also abroad.

All this gives me grounds for **a positive assessment** of the candidacy of Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova for the academic position of "associate professor".

In this regard, I recommend to the Scientific Jury to propose, according to the procedure established in SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", Dr. Vihra Georgieva Naydenova to be elected to occupy the academic position of "associate professor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology (Work Psychology).

**12/07/2022**

**city of Varna**

**Reviewer:**

**Prof. D.Sc. Valery Stoyanov**