

REFERENCE

From: Prof D.Sc. Zhelyu Vladimirov, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", scientific field 3.7. "Administration and Management"

On: the scientific works of Senior Assistant Professor Dr Ivanka Georgieva Mihailova, presented for participation in a competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" under professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management" (Fundamentals of Management, Organizational Behavior, Organizational Conflict Management - in Bulgarian, French and English), announced by the Faculty of Economics of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", SG, issue 103 / 10.12.2021

Grounds for the review: order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", RD-38-95/07.02.2022

1. Brief presentation of the candidate

Ivanka Georgieva Mihailova graduated with a bachelor's and master's degree in Business Administration from the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1998 and 1999, respectively. In 2018 she defended his doctoral dissertation on "Management Strategies for Dealing with Organizational Conflicts" at the same university. From 2000 to 2010 she was a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University in the disciplines "Organizational Behavior" and "Human Resources Management". She also worked as an accountant for two years in "Trade and Building" Ltd. from 2004 to 2006. From 2010 to 2019 she was an assistant at the Department of Business Management at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration at Sofia University, and from 2019 so far she is a senior assistant professor in the same department.

She provides lectures on the disciplines: "Fundamentals of Management"; "Organizational Conflict Management", "Environmental Management", "Organizational and Management Models for Quality and Organizational Excellence" and "Writing a Master's Thesis", as well as conducts seminars on the disciplines: "Fundamentals of Management" (in Bulgarian, English, and French) and "Environmental Management". She has a high workload with classes - 419 hours, equated to seminars in the year 2016/2017; 466 hours in 2017/2018; 454 hours in 2018/2019; nearly 544 hours in 2019/2020; and 347 hours in 2020/2021.

She is the administrator of the master's program "Business Administration - HRD", since 2020 she has been the scientific secretary of the Department of Business Administration, and since 2021 she is a member of the team of the Career Centre of the faculty. For the period 2011-2021 she was a supervisor of 68 diploma theses, and since 2017 she has been an academic mentor of obligatory internships for 183 students. She has participated in nine research projects, one of which as a leader and in 18 national and international conferences. She is a member of the Bulgarian Association of People's management trough the corporate membership of the faculty. Fluent in English and French, as well as fluent in Russian and Italian.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's work

Ivanka Mihailova is the author of 33 publications in Bulgarian and English, participating in the competition with 16 of them. These publications include two independent monographs, one of which is based on a defended dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor"; two articles, one of which is co-authored, published in journals indexed in the Web of Science; 11 articles and reports published in non-referred journals with scientific review and in edited collective volumes; and an independent study in the Yearbook of Sofia University, Faculty of Economics, included in the National Reference List of Contemporary Bulgarian Scientific Publications with Scientific Review. Five of the articles are stand-alone in English,

published in the *Knowledge International Journal*; and one of the reports in Bulgarian is also independent. The other five articles and reports are co-authored. All articles and reports in Bulgarian scientific journals are in those that are included in the National Reference List of Contemporary Bulgarian Scientific Editions with Scientific Review.

The total volume of the pages of the attached publications is 485, of which the independent author's pages are 439 and 30 of them in English, and the total pages in co-authorship - 46. The attached reference shows that the candidate has a total of 8 citations, 2 of which are in publications in English and 2 are in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information.

The publications submitted for participation in the competition do not repeat those for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". With these works the candidate meets the minimum national requirements under Art. 2b of the Law on Academic Staff Development for professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management". As far as I am aware of the areas of research of Dr Mihailova, the publications submitted for the competition do not reveal plagiarism.

These publications can be grouped in the following thematic areas: (1) *Management of organizational conflicts* (№№: 1, 2, 4, 13, 14, 16 - in Bulgarian and №№ 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 - in English); (2) *Management of organizations* (№№ 3, 4, 11, 13, 14 - in Bulgarian), and (3) *Organizational behavior* (№№ 8, 12 - in Bulgarian and № 15 - in English).

(1) *Management of organizational conflicts* (monograph, book based on a defended doctoral dissertation, articles №№: 4, 13, 14, and 16 - in Bulgarian and №№ 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 - in English).

This area forms the core of the candidate's scientific interests, so I will dwell on it in more detail. The topic is relevant insofar as conflicts in organizations are inevitable and their neglect creates a risk for their proper functioning.

Before engaging in a more in-depth study of conflicts in organizations from the perspective of managers and employees, the author has three studies on specific conflicts in organizational networks of collaborating organizations and clusters (publications №№ 4, 13 and 14). The main types of conflicts in business networks and their ways of resolving are revealed in publication №4. It has been shown that the problem of conflicts in organizational networks is not well known (№13). The main disadvantage of the conflicts is the managerial weakness of the cluster managers, which leads to a breach of trust between the organizations in these clusters in Bulgaria (№ 14).

The main dimensions of the organizational conflicts are developed in the candidate's book on the basis of a defended doctoral dissertation - "Management strategies for intervening in conflicts between employees" (2021). Based on qualitative (interviews with 12 managers of different levels) and quantitative research (through a standardized questionnaire) among 300 managers of different organizations, the author revealed the preferred management strategies for intervening managers as an informal third party in conflicts between employees.

The results are interpreted within the framework of the main theories and models for explaining organizational conflicts. It is concluded that a significant part of the surveyed leaders perceive conflicts mainly as a negative phenomenon; most leaders do not recognize the type of conflict; do not know the stages in the dynamics of the conflict; do not show knowledge of intervention strategies. The most commonly used intervention strategy is mediation, followed by autocratic decision and neglect. Original empirical data on the relationship between the frequency of use of different strategies and attitudes to conflict and some key demographic characteristics of respondents are presented.

The candidate's monograph "Workplace Conflicts: An Employee Perspective Analysis" (2021) logically builds on previous research on organizational conflicts by disclosing employees'

opinions. The data were obtained through an online questionnaire of 708 respondents. The extent and nature of conflicts in organizations are studied in terms of their frequency, levels of manifestation, causes, negative and positive results, and emotional impact on employees. Interpersonal conflicts are analysed depending on the frequency of their occurrence, the time spent dealing with conflicts, the other participant in the conflict, the causes, behavior of participants in the conflict, and the actions of employees in response to the conflict. In addition, the level of support for conflict resolution, the degree of resolution, satisfaction with conflict resolution, the role of leaders in conflict management in the workplace, and training in conflict management were studied. The obtained results reveal a panoramic picture of the conflicts in the studied organizations with specific data, most of which are visualized in figures.

It becomes clear from the results that conflicts exist in the studied organizations, but are not so common in Bulgarian conditions. These conflicts are dual in nature, as they lead to both negative and positive results. The data on interpersonal conflicts in which the employees themselves were participants are similar. It was found that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on the overall level of conflict in organizations. Satisfaction with conflict resolution among respondents is not high, and conflict management is reported as an important part of the management of organizations.

Based on these and other more concrete results, the relevant recommendations have been made to minimize the chances of conflicts, as well as to develop the skills of employees to deal with such conflicts.

Many of these results have been tested in other publications of the candidate such as articles and conference papers. For example, Article № 5 analyses the dual nature of conflicts - not only as destructive, but also as constructive. The positive effects of conflict include finding a new solution to an organizational problem, improving business relationships and even the emergence of innovation. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the emergence of conflicts in Bulgarian organizations is the subject of a study in Article № 6. It has been shown that the level of conflict has not increased due to widespread work from home and the lack of direct control over employees. Publication № 7 reveals that in a small part of the surveyed organizations in our country there is a procedure for resolving conflicts, and in this respect there are significant differences between large and smaller organizations. Three articles demonstrate the need to train leaders in conflict management. Both some gaps in the leaders' knowledge of the conflicts and significant differences between them depending on some demographic and organizational characteristics (№9 and №10) are revealed. It was found that a large part of the surveyed organizations do not provide training in conflict management to managers and as the main source of their knowledge of conflicts remains their experience (№16).

(2) Management of organizations (№№ 3, 4, 11, 13, 14 - in Bulgarian).

The issue of organizational conflicts is studied by the candidate in close connection with the more general problems of management. For example, publication №14 outlines the policy in Bulgaria regarding clusters and their current state at the time of the study. The main characteristics of the clusters in terms of their structure, activity and management are revealed. The topic of clusters as a means of increasing the innovation and competitiveness of Bulgarian companies is analysed in Article № 3. Special attention is paid to the role of state support for the creation and development of clusters. An overview of the theoretical approaches on the cooperation between organizations in networks, as well as the benefits and problems associated with this cooperation, is given in Article № 4. The non-recognition of cluster conflicts is derived from the very low activity of clusters. When these clusters do not have a clearly defined strategy, goals and measures for achievement, it is logical that there are no conflict processes in them (№13).

The topic in publication № 11 are ten leading tools for business management and their integration into the curriculum of management and economic disciplines. Based on their analysis, opportunities have been demonstrated to strengthen interdisciplinary links in the teaching of these disciplines.

(3) *Organizational behavior* (№№ 8, 12 - in Bulgarian and № 15 - in English).

Some basic topics of organizational behavior have been studied by the candidate in co-authorship with other scientists. Based on 1385 surveyed persons, the overall motivational profile for Bulgarian employees is shown (№ 8). This profile is based on the assumption that high motivational potential is contained in the factors that are considered important, although the level of satisfaction with these factors is low. The inverse assumption of factors that are not "important" but are combined with a high level of satisfaction indicates low motivational potential. The dynamics in the attitude to 14 work values in Bulgarian organizations for the period 1995-2014 as a means of outlining the motivational attitudes of the surveyed employees is presented in publication № 12. Publication № 15 reveals the influence of entrepreneurs' values on innovative behavior in a sample of 200 Bulgarian organizations. According to the results, some values of entrepreneurs and managers are significantly related to the innovative behavior of the organization, as well as the high degree of compliance between organizational and work values of employees is associated with innovative behavior.

3. Significance of contributions to science and practice

The review of the works submitted for the competition by senior assistant professor Dr Ivanka Mihailova reveals that these are author's research that meets scientific standards. Based on the obtained results, the candidate has formulated eight contributions of a theoretical nature and five practical-applied contributions, which are her personal achievement.

Among the more important contributions are those related to the issues of organizational conflicts: (1) Systematization of basic concepts and theoretical concepts for conflict management in organizations; (2) Developing and testing her own tools for studying strategies for intervention of managers in conflicts between employees, as well as bringing out the basic types of behavior of managers to resolve such conflicts; (3) Developing and testing her own tools for studying of interpersonal conflicts in Bulgarian organizations; (4) Identifying the need for the establishment of procedures for management of organizational conflicts, as well as training programs for managers in conflict management; (5) These results can be useful for the selection of adequate approaches for conflict resolution and the development of training programs for conflict management in organizations.

4. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions

I do not have specific comments on the papers submitted by the candidate, but I have two recommendations. The first one is that most of the candidate's research data, which is valuable in itself, is processed mainly with frequency and cross-tables distributions. At the same time, these data allow for more complex processing with factor and cluster analysis or multiple regression, which would show not only relationships but also influences. In this sense, my recommendation to the candidate is to pay more attention to these possibilities.

The second recommendation refers to more intensive publication in journals with impact factor or impact rang, for which the applicant has already shown capacity.

5. Conclusion

The presented publications of the candidate testify for in-depth knowledge of the problems related to the conflicts in the organizations, both from the point of view of the managers and the employees. This issue is relevant, which can be seen from the opinions of the surveyed

managers and employees. A detailed and in-depth review of contemporary Bulgarian and foreign literature has been made, with which the author contributes to the transfer of knowledge in this field. The candidate demonstrates a very good knowledge of theoretical and practical problems and correctness in referring to the publications used. Large-scale empirical studies have been conducted on their own, which reveal good skills in data collection and processing, summarizing the results and drawing significant conclusions. The obtained results contribute significantly to the understanding of the conflicts and their management, to the improvement of the training of the leaders in this field and add value to the existing knowledge. Many of these results will become the learning content of Dr Mihailova courses with students.

With the works presented in the competition and with his active scientific, teaching and teaching-administrative activity, Dr Ivanka Mihailova is emerging as a serious and promising researcher and lecturer.

All this gives me a reason to recommend to the esteemed scientific jury to award Senior Assistant Professor Dr Ivanka Mihailova Academic position "Associate Professor" under professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management" (Fundamentals of Management, Organizational Behavior, Organizational Conflict Management - in Bulgarian, French and English) at the Faculty of Economics, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

04.03.2022
Sofia

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