

REVIEW

by **Prof. Dr. Anastasia Milanova Bankova**,
member of a Scientific jury for defense of dissertation
(Order of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”
RD 38-284/03.06.2024)

on the topic:

**“ Management of People and Teams in Remote Work (in a Virtual
Envirolment) “**

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**"
in scientific field 3.7. Administration and management
to **Rayna Kostadinova Pehlivanska**, PhD student at the Faculty of Economics
and Business Administration, Sofia University “St. Kl. Ohridski”
(the defense will take place on 12 of September 2024)

I. General assessment of the candidate.

I have known PhD student Raina Kostadinova Pehlivanska since she graduated with honors from the Master's Program in Business Administration - Human Resources Development. She received her Bachelor's degree at the University of National and World Economy, and her secondary degree at the Language High School in Plovdiv with English. She speaks 3 more languages at a working level. Mrs. Pehlivanska has worked in various organizations in the field of human resource management. With her work as a researcher, she has shown that she has the necessary potential for development and is able to connect her research with practice in various organizations.

II. Evaluation of the dissertation.

a. Technical characteristics of the dissertation

The presented dissertation on “Management of People and Teams in Remote Work (in a Virtual Environment)” includes 179 pages (about 250 standard typewritten pages, 149 pages of basic text, 15 pages of annexes (5 issues) and 15 pages of bibliography. Structurally, the work contains an introduction (it outlines the relevance of the topic, the purpose and goals of the work, the research tasks), three chapters, the first is devoted to the review of the literature on the subject, the second chapter is devoted to the methodology of the research presented by the author. The third chapter deals with the results of the study and their analysis. The work ends with a conclusion, a list of information sources and 5 annexes. The work is illustrated by 31 figures and 32 tables. The list of information sources contains 180 titles – 15 in Bulgarian, 165 – in Latin, including 3 from electronic sources.

Three papers on the dissertation have been published in scientific journals.

The Summary of the dissertation of 62 pages correctly reflects the content of the work, includes an assessment of the contributions of the work by its author, a list of her publications on the topic.

Based on the documents submitted it is obviously that Rayna Pehlivanska has fulfilled the requirements of the doctoral program and the state requirements for the doctor's degree according LDASRB (Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in Republic Bulgaria) for the scientific field "Social, Economic and Legal Sciences", professional direction 3.7. "Administration and Management".

The technical characteristics of the dissertation make it possible to conclude that the work meets the formal requirements for such work.

Regarding the content of the dissertation, the following assessment can be given:

b. Actuality of the topic.

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged companies to work remotely in a virtual environment. Of course, working in a virtual environment is something that will become more and more imperative. Like everything else in life, it can be assumed that it has both advantages and disadvantages. However, this problem is new and not yet sufficiently researched. That is why the author chooses this topic to contribute with her work to both the research and the practice of the organizations.

b. Clarity of the goals.

The author points out that "the dissertation aims to explore the impact of remote work on employee performance, their work-life balance, flexibility and degree of autonomy" in job. In addition, it aims to investigate employees' preferences regarding specific remote work patterns and what are the reasons for these preferences, as well as employers' perspective on the effects of remote work. In this way, the author hopes to help organizations in making decisions about the policy of remote work in their practice.

The author derives the following tasks of the study:

1. To present a review of the research done so far in relation to remote work. To identify the main areas for which there is insufficient data or there are contradictory ones.
2. Theoretically, to consider the definitions of remote work, to make a comparison with other concepts that are used as synonyms or close to it.

3. Methodologically, to evaluate and compare the methods used to study the effects of remote work, so as to determine the most appropriate one for the current study.

4. Empirically, a study should be conducted to test hypotheses about the influence of the formulated main indicators on remote work in a virtual environment and to interpret the results.

5. Based on the results obtained, conclusions and recommendations should be made that will be useful for organizations when deciding what model of work to choose for their employees,

d. Evaluation of the structure of the dissertation.

The dissertation has a clear, traditional structure for such a work, which has already been described above.

e. Content description of the dissertation.

The introduction of the dissertation is dedicated to substantiating the relevance of the problem, assessing the degree of its research, the main purpose and tasks of the research, determining the object and subject of the research, research questions and limitations of the research and is developed accurately in the scientific traditions.

Chapter one of the dissertation is devoted to publications in the field of remote work – starting from the existing definitions, the formulated advantages and disadvantages of remote work for organizations and employees, the effects in society, assessment of the state of research work – preferences and underrepresented problems. The author notes the wide variety of conceptions (sometimes contradictory), arguing her choice for her further work.

Chapter two of the dissertation is devoted to the methodology of the research conducted by the author of the work. She hopes that this toolkit will be

used by other practitioners and scientists. The important part of the dissertation concerns the empirical research. The author used an interview and a focus group to refine the questionnaire for the empirical research, conducted a pilot study to improve the toolkit, the actual study and afterwards processed the answers obtained. At all stages of the work, she combines qualitative and quantitative methods, which is a merit of the study. It uses factor analysis to extract the important factor groups, variance (dispersion) and correlation analysis to examine the relationships proposed in the research questions, correlation analysis to evaluate the formulated hypotheses. All this is presented in detail, and the results are discussed in the third chapter of the dissertation. It should be noted that the author very precisely "designed" the questionnaire for the survey. It was carried out through the online platform LimeSurvey, distributed through social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn. The survey consists of 49 indicators and 8 demographic questions. Some of the questions in the questionnaire are statements to be evaluated by the respondents according to their attitude towards them (according to the Likert method). Studying the opinion of the participants (employees in organizations) in the study regarding their preferred way of remote work and the reasons for this, the author correctly distinguishes between their personal experience – whether there is a difference between the preferred and the real way of working. The methods are selected and used correctly, according to their importance for the quality of the research, which makes a very good impression and gives useful ideas to other interested parties in their further use. In parallel, interviews and discussions (individually and in focus groups) were held with representatives of employers in order to establish their opinion on the issues studied.

The author correctly points out the limitations of the study, which boil down to the fact that the studied persons are only from Bulgaria – this sets a certain national and cultural context; that productivity is assessed on the basis of self-assessment of the examined persons; that the empirical data were collected

within a month (in this sense, they outline rather a snapshot of the situation), that the subjects studied were mainly from certain industries, that not all important factors were included in the study. Of course, these limitations are understandable, because the work was carried out by a single researcher in a limited time.

Chapter Three begins with an introduction of the participants in the survey. 814 respondents took part, from which surveys with incomplete answers were excluded and 560 questionnaires were analyzed. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented. The study itself covers 8 research questions, which could be divided into two groups. The first group is related to remote work patterns and their effects on the four factors – performance, work-life balance, flexibility and autonomy. The second group covers the following four questions, which concern preferences and policies on models of remote working (by employees and by employers/organisations). It is particularly important for people involved in human resources management to indicate possible reasons for the preferences and results of employees, which makes it possible to choose an appropriate model of remote work – for which groups of employees what model of work would be successful, taking into account the conditions for positive or negative manifestation of the expected results, for targeted training of employees for the chosen model of work, for providing the necessary conditions for successful work (provision of equipment and technologies, etc.), for overcoming undesirable developments. The conclusions are detailed and reasoned, which increases the possibility of their use in practice. The work ends with a summary of the results.

f. Assessment of the contributions of the dissertation.

I accept the contributions formulated by the author to the dissertation:

- clarification of the effects of remote work on employees, organizations and society, based on a study of the manifestation of characteristics of this work

in different models of its use; the advantages and disadvantages of this are systematized;

- the model and tools of the study are substantiated – their applicability and significance have been proven on the basis of an empirical study conducted and subsequent correct statistical and heuristic verification;

- The results of the dissertation contribute to the justification and enrichment of management approaches related to guiding people when working remotely, can be the basis for future research projects.

g. Critical remarks and recommendations.

My notes are, first of all, recommendations for future work. The author herself has formulated future projects in this direction. Her research should continue because we are witnessing a drastic and rapid change in the technique, technology, social environment, culture and competence of generations, etc., which create and will create new influences, connections and characteristics, new problems that need to be monitored and even anticipated in order to prepare for them in a timely manner.

It would be good to think about the rapid expansion of the study and the inclusion of other important factors. For example, in our country there is no legislation that regulates the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the affected parties when working remotely. For example, employers often make savings as a result of the transition to a remote model of work in an electronic environment, but they often forget to "share" at least part of them with employees to compensate to some extent for their increased costs, this is not even about providing conditions for effective work (which are an obligation, but even they are not always provided). It is often not noticed that the choice of time to do the work has nothing to do with the obligation to work with clients or

teams located in different time zones, etc. Employees in some countries are compensated for this and it is their legal right.

Insofar as management also seeks solutions to problems, the research can also be extended to the study of good practices, possible ways to deal with problems, the use of the fact that each factor can lead to positive and negative results depending on the conditions and the possibility of creating them appropriately.

Especially necessary is the assistance to establish an adequate system for evaluation and control of remote working. The practice is quite problematic.

All this shows that the author will have a lot of work to do in the future. She has made a very good start with the current study.

III. Conclusion.

Based on the quality of the work presented, which I appreciate heigly,

I find that

the author **Raina Kostadinova Pehlivanska** has proven

that she can recognize significant problems, independently conduct very good quality research, develop recommendations for practice,

that is why I recommend awarding her the educational and scientific degree of **Doctor**.

Reviewer:

/Prof. Dr. Anastassia Bankova/

Date:

15-th of August 2024, Sofia