

OPINION

by Associate Professor Olimpiya Yordanova Vedar-Velichkova, PhD

on the dissertation titled

„Management of People and Teams in Remote Work (in a Virtual Environment)“

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field

3.7. Administration and Management

by regular **doctoral student Raina Kostadinova Pehlivanska**

Scientific supervisor Prof. D.Sc. Tsvetan Parvanov Davidkov

This opinion has been prepared based on the Rector's Order No. RD 38-284/03.06.2024 and Protocol No. 1/10.06.2024 from the first meeting of the scientific jury.

1. Regarding the candidate

Raina Kostadinova Pehlivanska is a regular PhD student in the Department of "Business Management" from July 2020 to January 2024 (with a six-month extension). She has been dismissed with the right to defend her dissertation due to a successfully conducted preliminary discussion of her dissertation work.

Ms. Pehlivanska holds a Bachelor's degree in "International Economic Relations" (UNWE, 2012) and a Master's degree in "Business Administration – Human Resource Development" (Faculty of Economics at SU, 2015). She has substantial professional experience in the field of human resource management and is a certified career consultant.

My personal impressions of the work of PhD student Pehlivanska are excellent – goal-oriented and active, with a clear vision of what she wants to achieve, and courteous in building and maintaining collegial relationships.

2. General Characterization and Substantive Evaluation of the Dissertation Work

The presented dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of information sources and referenced literature, and five appendices, totaling 179 pages. Excluding the literature and appendices, the work has a volume of 149 pages. The text includes 31 figures and 32 tables. A total of 180 information sources have been used, of which 14 are in Bulgarian and 166 are in English. The chosen structure is suitable for a comprehensive development of the content.

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the impact of remote work on employee performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and the degree of employee autonomy. The subjects of the study are employees and managers in "Human Resources." The object of the research is remote work and its effects, advantages, and disadvantages for employees and organizations. Various research methods have been employed. The limitations of the study are clearly defined.

The first chapter of the dissertation includes a review of the concepts of remote work. The main advantages and disadvantages of remote work are presented concerning organizations (employers) and employees. Serious attention is given to the contradictory findings in the studies on the impact of remote work on performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and autonomy, which justifies the research questions posed in the dissertation.

The second chapter is dedicated to the methodology of empirical research. The adequacy and applicability of the methods used—focus groups, surveys, and interviews—are justified and

defended. The entire process of conducting the research is described in stages. The main survey involved 814 respondents, but after removing invalid survey forms, the processing and analyses are based on the responses from 560 employees.

The third chapter contains the analysis of the results and the discussion of them. Based on the data from the survey, the relationships and dependencies between remote work and performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and employee autonomy are sequentially analyzed and commented upon. To answer the research questions, correlation and ANOVA analysis, as well as checks for relevant statistical significances, were used. The data regarding the work model (mainly or entirely remote; balanced between the two forms; mainly in-office) were analyzed, and it was found that:

- A relatively small portion of respondents prefer to work primarily in the office, associating remote work more with disadvantages, inconveniences, and problems; those working primarily remotely emphasize advantages to a greater extent; those working in a "balanced" manner evaluate both advantages and disadvantages in a more even manner.
- There is a correspondence between preferences and the actual work model.

The discussion also leads to another significant conclusion, namely that psychological attitudes and social needs are crucial for the preferences and choice of work model among the subjects studied. This is also confirmed by the analysis of the results from the qualitative study, which examines the perspective of employers (interviews and focus groups). They declare that (especially after the Covid-19 pandemic) they aim to primarily implement a hybrid model and offer their employees more social activities, but the responses of individuals are not uniform and depend on personal characteristics and professional requirements.

The chapter concludes with a summary containing brief answers to the eight research questions, as well as a discussion on the challenges facing human resource management professionals.

The conclusion includes a summary of the results, recommendations for employers regarding the choice of work model, as well as some guidelines for future research on the subject.

My overall assessment of the content is that the set research goals and objectives have been met.

3. Evaluation of scientific and applied contributions

Four key contributions have been formulated, and my assessment of them is as follows:

- I accept the organization of the advantages and disadvantages of remote work as a contribution.
- I accept the creation of a viable model for researching the impact of remote work on employee performance, work-life balance, flexibility, and degree of autonomy as a contribution.
- I recognize the formulated conclusions and recommendations for selecting a work model and addressing challenges posed by working in a remote environment as a practical applied contribution.
- I consider that the dissertation contributes to enriching management approaches related to leading people in remote work.

I would add that the results, conclusions, and recommendations obtained would also be useful for enhancing human resource management curricula.

4. Evaluation of the publications related to the dissertation

Three publications have been presented (two in Bulgarian and one in English) that are related to the topic of the dissertation and are in appropriate journals.

5. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract consists of 62 pages. It correctly reflects the structure and content of the dissertation and meets the requirements.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

I do not have significant critical remarks regarding the content, but I would recommend improving the technical formatting of the text and refining the language and expression style.

7. Conclusion

The presented dissertation is a result of in-depth work and demonstrates a good understanding of theoretical and practical issues, as well as acquired skills for independent research work.

The above exposition gives me grounds to accept that doctoral student Raina Kostadinova Pehlivanska has fulfilled all the necessary requirements of LDASRB, the Regulations for the Application of LDASRB, and the Regulations for the Conditions and Procedures for Obtaining Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." Based on this, I will support the decision to award the doctoral student the academic title of Doctor in field 3.7 Administration and Management (Business Administration).

16 August 2024

Reviewer:

Assoc. prof. Olimpiya Yordanova Vedar-Velichkova, PhD