

REVIEW

By Prof. Margarita Angelova Stefanova-Bakracheva, DSc

Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

For awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor”

In the scientific area 3.2. Psychology

Doctoral programme Social Psychology

Author: Elitsa Banko Ntountoulaki

**Title: Leadership styles and forming organizational culture
in healthcare during the COVID-19 crisis**

PhD supervisor: Prof. Mayiana Mitevaska, DSc

1. General description of the submitted materials

By order № РД 21-493 as of 27th February 2024 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for providing a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic “Leadership styles and forming organizational culture in healthcare during the COVID-19 crisis” for awarding the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in the field of higher education 3. social, economic and legal sciences, professional field, scientific area 3.2. Psychology, doctoral programme Social Psychology.

The author of the dissertation is Elitsa Banko Ntountoulaki – PhD, individual form of study at the Department of Psychology with PhD supervisor Prof. Mayiana Mitevaska, DSc from Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The set of materials, provided by Elitsa Banko Ntountoulaki, are in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Rules for development of the academic staff of Plovdiv university and includes the following documents:

- CV;
- dissertation;
- abstract of the dissertation;

- a list of the articles related to the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of the articles;
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the documents.

2. Brief biographical data about the doctoral student

According to the attached biographical data Elitsa Ntountoulaki graduated bachelor's degree in Psychology and afterwards two master programmes at Paisii Hilendarski University - Psychology of Management and Positive Psychology. Since 2022 she has been a PhD student in Social Psychology.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the objectives and tasks

The PhD thesis is devoted to a classic problem - leadership styles and the formation of organizational culture, focusing on the sphere of health care and relevant for the contemporary context aspect - the functioning of organizations under the conditions of crisis. The research is focused on the effective performance of organizations in the health-care system in a period of crisis and outlines the specifics of the interaction of organizational culture, leadership style and individual variables. The pandemic has put pressure on all sectors of the economy besides the footprint on each individual, with the health-care system being particularly affected. Numerous publications examine the effect of the health crisis and the factors that determine a smoother passage through the crisis in order to derive preparedness for responses to future contingencies. This puts the development and interest of the PhD student in an undeniably relevant perspective in the author's clearly emphasized position regarding the crisis - considering it as a turning point. The ongoing global crisis caused by military actions and the related social and economic expressions continues this line and orientation towards the search for permanent flexibility and re-organisation. Particularly in a sector with a clear hierarchical structure such as healthcare, whether in the public or private sector, efficiency with an emphasis on quality of healthcare services and patient care is an important issue. The dissertation research presented outlines a picture of the sector in Bulgaria at a particular point in time and opens up opportunities for further research and study and suggestion of practical implications.

4. Knowledge of the topic

Elitsa Banko Ntountoulaki demonstrates knowledge of the problem and competence to systematize and present in a meaningful and analytical way the development of research in the field of leadership styles, organizational culture and healthcare.

5. Research methods

Four instruments were used for the empirical study and assessment of personality traits, the self-esteem, the leadership style assessment, and the organizational culture assessment. These, together with the demographic part included, enable the research to achieve its purpose. The convenient sample for the cross-sectional study comprises 376 respondents, with a relatively even distribution across age, place of work, gender, job title and years of experience.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

The dissertation comprises 196 pages and is structured in three chapters: two theoretical chapters, an empirical chapter with results, an introduction, a conclusion and a literature review. The results are illustrated with 30 tables and 2 figures. The literature includes a total of 236 sources in Bulgarian, English and Greek. It should be noted the use of classical references, as well as studies from the period before and after the pandemic, and the inclusion of studies on the topic of the dissertation conducted in Bulgaria.

The first chapter presents definitions and approaches to the study of leadership styles and their place in the optimal functioning of organizations, with a special focus on organizations in the healthcare sector, and traces the impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter Two presents approaches to the study of organizational culture and its relationship to organizational performance and management style. Chapter three describes the object, scope, purpose and objectives of the empirical study, research expectations, research subjects, instruments used and results of the study.

The PhD student traces the development of the research and highlights the main accents, clearly, focused and comprehensively building her research framework - tracking leadership styles and organizational culture and their interaction, as well as the place of individual variables in the effectiveness of organizations in general

and in the healthcare sector in particular. The style is clear and the text is focused entirely on the topic, organized coherently and meaningfully.

Elitsa Ntountoulaki presents the conceptual models of leadership styles, which are based on universal and situational factors, and the modern concept of effective leadership, which is defined according to the situation features and specificity. The theoretical overview includes the leader's traits, the behavioral approach to leadership styles, the situational approach to leadership, and transformational leadership. Emphasis is put on the factors that can counteract or change the leadership effect. The author's position on managers and leaders is one of leadership competencies rather than position, and she considers leadership skills rather than function. This is particularly valuable and should be brought out more clearly as it is also directly linked to the concept of the research - leadership rather than the leader in the organisation as a factor in the prosperity of the organisation. The characteristics and functions, as well as the patterns of organizational culture with a health care focus, are described.

A central interest is leadership in times of crisis and the relation of leadership and organizational culture. The object and subject of the study focus on the purpose of the research, which is operationalized in five distinctive tasks. These include a theoretical review, an examination of personality traits, leadership styles, and organizational culture, an exploration of the influence of personality on organizational behavior and leadership styles, an elicitation of the dominant value orientations in health care, and a study of the relationships and mutual influences between personality antecedents and situational determinants in organizational behavior.

The results describe, in relation to the set research objectives, the distribution of leadership styles and the most pronounced management of exceptions, personality traits with the most salient awareness and the effects of gender, age, location, private or public institution, position, seniority, including in the organization, hierarchical position, preferred type of organizational culture with a dominant hierarchical type. The effect of individual variables to preferred culture type is examined and the relationship between leadership styles and preferred organizational culture described.

7. Contributions and significance of the dissertation for science and practice

The PhD student has outlined five contributions. I accept the two scientific and theoretical contributions with a recommendation for some refining. The remaining three contributions, formulated as practical-applied, are not clearly stated in the PhD thesis.

The key contribution of the PhD thesis that has not been brought out is the research model - the interrelations of different factors from the perspective of transformational leadership and leadership as a characteristic that everyone carries, not just the formal leader and that the environment and organisational climate is determined by considering not as an aggregate but rather the interaction of individual and personal characteristics, preferred leadership style and organisational type. This defines a dynamic that is particularly prominent in unstable conditions and therefore, the complex consideration of the elements in the model at any point in time, can ensure the necessary high flexibility and adaptability.

8. Evaluation of the publications related to the dissertation

The PhD student has enclosed 12 publications that have been published and are related to the topic of the dissertation. Two of them are authored and ten are co-authored. This far exceeds the required minimum.

9. Personal contribution of the doctoral student

I believe that the obtained results and the formulated contributions are personal achievements of the PhD student.

10. Abstract of a dissertation

The abstract covers 32 pages and meets the requirements, reflecting the main results realized in the PhD thesis.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

Technically, the recommendation is paragraphs of 1-2 pages to be aggregated. It would be better if the classic structure of three chapters, theoretical, research design and results, is followed. In terms of content, it would be clearer and more demonstrative of competence if the analysis were thorough, especially in aspects e.g. where individual variables have and do not have an effect. The hypotheses

put forward should be better substantiated. I have a more substantial comment on two of the tasks and, respectively, the hypotheses and the basis for confirming the hypotheses and in particular concerning the long-term effects substantiation. Currently a research model is absent that is a major contribution and would more clearly and precisely focus the contribution of the work. The patterns currently reflected in the contributions and paragraph titles are also not explicitly outlined. The subject and object of study remain somewhat broad, as does the goal. It would be clearer to focus the purpose as e.g. deriving a model of the interaction of personality dispositions, leadership styles, individual variables, cultural factors and environmental influences on organisations in the healthcare sector. The main hypothesis is that leadership styles described by initiative and commitment to the activities in the organization would directly influence the behavior of individuals in the work reality, which is specified in five hypotheses. Hypotheses 1 and 4 - regarding the construction of organizational behavior and sources of change in the organization - require more of a longitudinal study to prove them and could be refined to the specific research planned and conducted.

The main remark is about the way the results are interpreted. Given the fact that the instruments were administered to all respondents, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding the influence of leadership style or personality traits. The direction of interpretation may be the relationship between personality traits and preferred leadership style and organizational culture and the effect of individual variables on them. This suggests a model that has theoretical and applied value and can paint a picture specific to healthcare organizations and provide guidance for HR accordingly. The correlations between preferred leadership style and organizational culture are correctly described, but the place of personality traits does not provide sufficient grounds to support the analyses made and what drives leadership. For clarity in research design, it is important that research is presented with a focus on the variables underlying the instruments used. Currently, results for personality traits can only be used as a link to preferred leadership style and organization type. In the results presented, the personality trait Purposefulness was used, which should be corrected. It is also good to have an interpretation for the absence of links for Openness to Experience. Most of all,

it is important to interpret the personality traits as personality traits and not as describing the organization.

It is advisable that findings and conclusions are refined and related to the outcomes outlined for the specific period in a cross-sectional study, which refers to any findings that imply transformation and change measurable in a longitudinal study. In this line, studies that delineate changes in the long term before, during and after the pandemic could be referred.

Regarding the research methods used it is stated that the instruments are adapted for Bulgaria, but their psychometric characteristics obtained specifically in this study are not presented. The self-assessment questionnaire is referred to, but no results are presented. There is some inaccuracy in referencing to the adaptation of all instruments and the format of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire used is not specified. This is important in terms of the interpretation of the results that is presented and leaves the author's conclusions about the influence of personality traits on the type of organisational culture preferred insufficiently substantiated. The results can be interpreted in a completely different framework - the relationship of personality traits to preferred culture type and personal leadership style. Other possible interpretations represent overinterpretation. This would be useful in outlining a pattern that is currently absent from the dissertation research, namely: the relationship between personality traits, individual characteristics, preferred organizational culture and leadership style (in a crisis).

12. Personal impressions

My personal impressions are based solely on the materials submitted for review.

13. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

My personal opinion and recommendation is for further data processing and interpretation and suggestion of practical guidelines for future research.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains results, which represent an original contribution to science, refer to future research, and meet all the requirements of the Law for Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the respective Regulations of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv. The dissertation shows that the PhD student has the capacity to independently conduct scientific research.

In view to the above I give my positive assessment of the research presented by the reviewed dissertation, abstract, results and contributions, and I propose the scientific jury to award Elitsa Banko Ntountoulaki the educational and scientific degree 'Doctor' in the professional field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral programme: Social Psychology.

13th March 2024

Reviewer:

Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, DSc