

REVIEW

by **prof. Dr. Milen Ivanov Baltov, Burgas Free University**

of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree "**Doctor**"

in: 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences

Professional field: 3.7 Administration and Management

Doctoral Program: Social Management

Author: Dimo Zhelev Zhelev

Topic: Influence of leadership on the motivation of hotel employees in crisis and post-crisis period

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mina Angelova, Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

1. General description of the submitted materials

By Order No. PD-21-1491. of 17.07.2024 of the Rector of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for providing a procedure for defending a dissertation on the topic "Influence of leadership on the motivation of hotel employees in a crisis and post-crisis period" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and Management, PhD program Social Management. The author of the dissertation is Dimo Zhelev Zhelev – a part-time PhD student at the Department of Management and Quantitative Methods in Economics with supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mina Angelova from the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski".

The set of paper materials presented by the candidate Dimo Zhelev is in accordance with Article 36 (1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv and includes the following documents:

- an application to the Rector of the University of Plovdiv for disclosure of the procedure for defending a dissertation;
- CV in European format;
- minutes of the Departmental Council related to reporting on the readiness to open the procedure and with a preliminary discussion of the dissertation;

- dissertation;
- abstract;
- a list of scientific publications on the topic of the dissertation;
- copies of scientific publications;
- list of noticed citations;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;

The PhD student has applied 4 publications, three of which are independent and one is co-authored.

2. Brief biographical data about the PhD student

Dimo Zhelev has successfully completed the period of his doctoral studies at the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski". Prior to that, he graduated as a Master of Economics in Marketing at the same university. His bachelor's degree is in "Tourism" at the University of Food Technologies - Plovdiv.

A PhD student is a manager of a dynamic business and is the basis for creating a vision for the company. Responsible for recruitment, selection and attestation of personnel. Creating, offering and implementing successful services in the field of digital marketing in the hospitality industry, including hotel pricing in digital channels, social media management, filming, advertising campaign management, copywriting, website development, design and more. Process management, business modeling, liaison with partners and key accounts, work with institutions and more.

3. Relevance of the topics and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

The relevance of the problem developed in the dissertation can be found in the current state of the Bulgarian economy, given the cyclical exit from one crisis and the entry into another. The crisis related to the outbreak of a global pandemic of the COVID-19 disease in 2020 is an example of a strategic event that changes the external environment for a huge part of business organizations, with companies in the hotel sector being significantly affected. Very soon after, the world witnessed a new crisis related to the war between Russia and Ukraine. It can be assumed that due to the geopolitical situation and fragmentation, mobility, increasing population density and technological development, such events are expected to have increasing intensity at the global level. Events of all kinds are referred to – military, political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, environmental, etc. This inevitably leads to increased dynamics – one of the main characteristics that bring out the uncertainty of the external environment.

4. Knowledge of the problem

The PhD student knows well the state of the problem and creatively evaluates the literary material, studying the correlation between leadership styles, environmental characteristics and employee motivation in several main aspects. On the one hand, it examines the insufficiently high level of preparation of Bulgarian managers for the exercise of agile leadership by imposing different leadership styles and this in the context of the global crisis related to Covid-19, as an example of an event of strategic importance, leading to high uncertainty of the external environment of organizations. On the other hand, it shows familiarity with the need to measure employee motivation and maintaining a high level of motivation as a priority for the organization, there is a change in the structure of the workforce worldwide in the direction of increasing the requirements for employees, their knowledge, skills and competencies and the growing competition between enterprises in hiring qualified employees.

5. Methodology of the study

The chosen research methodology allows achieving the set goal and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation. To prove it, an author's questionnaire has been created, aimed at managers, measuring the level of crisis (uncertainty of the environment), as well as the assessment of the leadership style from the perspective of the manager himself, in which questions are asked to distinguish the leader's followers from the rest of the employees. In-depth interviews are also conducted with the top, middle and bottom management in order to confirm the data obtained from the quantitative methods through a qualitative method of research.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

The object of the study are accommodation establishments that are categorized with three, four or five stars, with more than one hundred beds, located on the territory of the Thracian Tourist Region, the Rhodope Tourist Region, the Valley of the Roses Tourist Region and the Rila-Pirin Tourist Region. The choice of these specific four regions out of a total of nine such presented in the concept of tourist zoning is motivated in two dimensions - in the areas with a higher share of year-round hotels and respectively a lower level of seasonality and in areas with a higher share of sites that have not been forced to close their doors for a long period of time.

The subject of the study is a study of the influence of the leadership style applied by the leader during a crisis and in the post-crisis period on the level of motivation of the leader's followers in business organizations. The main research goal is to develop a methodology and methodological tools for assessing the leadership style with specific characteristics of the environment and their impact on employee motivation. The implementation of such a goal would mean approbation of this

methodology and the presentation of an applied model that can be successfully used by Bulgarian hotel managers so as to give direction on what leadership style to strive to show in crisis and in the post-crisis period to increase the effectiveness of organizations.

The thesis is that there are specific dependencies between the leadership style (and the accompanying behaviors) and the level of motivation, it is possible to adopt different approaches by the manager in a crisis and post-crisis environment, which will motivate the employees in the organization as much as possible.

The content is in three chapters. In the first chapter, a theoretical study of the topics of leadership, external environment, crisis, motivation is made. The second chapter examines the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation in crisis and post-crisis periods, and the third chapter presents the results and analyses in the study of the influence of leadership styles on employee motivation in times of crisis and post-crisis environment.

As a result, the main objective of the study has been fulfilled through the development of methodology and methodological provisions for assessing the leadership style in crisis and post-crisis period. A methodology has been tested among the object of the study – accommodation establishments categorized with 3, 4 and 5 stars in 4 out of a total of 9 tourist regions. The sectoral analysis of the hotel industry, as well as the conducted surveys and in-depth interviews with leaders and followers, found results confirming the research thesis. These results validate conclusions from the approbation of the methodology on the object of study by answering the research questions and related hypotheses.

7. Contributions and relevance of the development to science and practice

The contributions are well formulated and actually reflect what has been achieved in the work. A theoretical study of the categories of leadership, crisis, environment and motivation has been correctly made, and on the basis of the analysis and synthesis resulting from it, a model for the relationships between elements of these theoretical categories has been proposed. A conceptual model has been developed, allowing the creation of a methodology for studying the influence of the chosen leadership style on motivation in periods of crisis and post-crisis environment. The leading importance of transactional leadership style behaviors in increasing the motivation of followers in times of crisis has been established. This contribution is assessed as promising, but needs further research in larger samples, as well as in the study of other sectors of the economy, in order to be validated and developed.

An applied model for choosing a leadership style by property managers is proposed in order to increase the motivation of employees in an environment with different levels of uncertainty. An

empirical study of the accommodation establishments in Bulgaria, the subject of the study, has been carried out, establishing the leadership styles that are part of the FRLM model and their representation among Bulgarian property managers. A sectoral analysis of the hotel industry in Bulgaria has been carried out in order to compare and compare the main indicators of activity in the hospitality industry, establishing phases of crisis and post-crisis environment within the period 2020 – 2023.

8. Evaluation of the publications on the dissertation

The publications that reflect the results of the dissertation are 4 articles and reports that are not reduced due to coincidence or overlap (with participation in other procedures). They do not have an impact factor, but in this scientific field and in the procedure for the degree of "doctor" this is not required by the minimum national requirements of the Law on the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, which are covered. One report is on the topic "Applying an effective leadership style in the context of periods of crisis collapse and recovery", and the other is on the topic "Leadership as a factor for sustainable development of tourism organizations: empirical results".

In the collective publication – the article with Milena Angelova on the topic "Leadership as an Imperative of Motivation: Research Design", the contribution of the PhD student is reflected in a separation protocol. The candidate has also prepared and accepted for publication a report on the topic "Prerequisites for increasing employee motivation through the application of an effective leadership style".

9. Personal participation of the PhD student

The personal participation of the PhD student in the conducted dissertation research is emphasized, and the fully formulated contributions and results obtained are his personal merit.

10. Abstract

The abstract meets the requirements and is structurally sustainable, reflecting the logic and depth of the dissertation. The publications used are four. They reflect key points in the study and are related to some of the contributions. In parallel, the PhD student is working on two projects of a research nature and numerous engagements as an expert.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

Questions on the dissertation:

1. Will the environment for innovation among Bulgarian tourism companies improve if leadership among employees is more pronounced?

2. Will the competitiveness of tourism companies improve in the context of the upcoming global economic crisis if they diversify into other activities related to the blue economy?

12. Personal impressions

My personal impressions of the PhD student are indirect and insofar as the former caretaker Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria is personally familiar with his work as an expert in the sector and they are positive.

13. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

The recommendation to the PhD student is to concentrate the links between the industry-level analysis with the leadership findings from the sample, and for further work to focus his research efforts on transforming some of his recommendations to support the programming process of the next (for the period 2028 – 2035) programs such as "Human Resources Development" and "Innovation and Competitiveness".

CONCLUSION

The dissertation *contains scientific, scientifically applied and applied results that represent an original contribution to science* and *meet all* the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (RARA), the Regulations for the Implementation of the RARARB and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski".

The dissertation shows that the PhD student Dimo Zhelev Zhelev has in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty of Social Management, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

In view of the above, I confidently give my *positive assessment of* the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, results achieved and contributions, and *I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"* to Dimo Zhelev Zhelev in the field of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.7 Administration and Management, PhD program Social Management.

20.09.2024

Reviewer:..

Prof. Dr. Milen Baltov