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Dr hab. Agata Sudolska, prof. UMK
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management
Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Review Report on PhD dissertation of Mrs. Leila Shoraka entitled “Employability Market Orientation in Iran” prepared under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. dr hab. Anna Pawłowska and the co-supervisor Yaghoob Maharati, PhD

1. Formal issues

The review of Mrs. Leila Shoraka PhD dissertation has been assigned to me by the resolution of the Scientific Council of Faculty of Management of Warsaw University on 22th December 2021, which was informed to me by the letter addressed by Prof. Grzegorz Karasiewicz, Head of the Scientific Discipline Council Management and Quality Studies. My review is based on the statutory requirements laid down in the Act of 14 March 2003 for Academic Degrees and Academic Title and Degrees and Title in Art which states that PhD dissertation should represent a genuine answer to the scientific problem and demonstrate general theoretical knowledge of a candidate in a particular scientific discipline as well as the candidate’s ability to carry out scientific work independently.

The script includes 180 pages, therein: Abstract, Introduction, three chapters, consisting of, respectively, 36, 37 and 49 pages, statistical annex, references, list of tables and list of figures. The thesis structure is harmonious and it includes a theoretical grounding, a method explanation, results presentation and a discussion. It is worth emphasizing that empirical evidence covers over 50% of dissertation volume.

The dissertation is grounded properly in selected literature, reflecting the current state of knowledge in the field. References are appropriate to the standards of literature selection, usage and the text clarity. The editorial side of the thesis is correct.

2. General evaluation of the dissertation

The general evaluation of Mrs. Leila Shoraka’s PhD dissertation is positive. It is justified by the choice of the study’s subject, the merit, research methodology, empirical results as well as editorial quality. The order of substantive chapters and division of the contents do not rise any objections. In my opinion the structure of the thesis is clear and its parts are kept in correct proportion.

The problems tackled in the dissertation are definitely located in the management science. The topic is very interesting and up-to-date. Due to changing market circumstances, nowadays organizations' attitudes toward human resources are changing significantly. They tend to hire and retain qualified, skilled employees who are able to adapt to new environmental conditions. As a result, contemporary organizations shift to using flexible human resource management strategies. However, in management literature relatively much attention is paid to the issue of making the process of human resource management more flexible, presented from the organization's perspective. On the contrary, the issue of employees' reaction to this new situation is relatively rarely researched and analyzed. This problem is a significant challenge as the lack of knowledge about employees and the mechanisms governing their behavior in the event of changes regarding the rules in relations with employers may increase personnel risk to a level that reduces the economic efficiency of the organization. The need for exploring this issue is additionally strengthened by the fact of the emerging demand-potential imbalance in the labour market to the benefit of the employee, which is relatively new for contemporary organizations. The dissertation under review focuses on the concept of Employability Market Orientation (EMO) which is a behavior model assumed to help improve adaptation in employees in front of changing the organization's approach in the flexibility of human resource management and changing the relationship of the employees and employers. As employability is as a proactive adaptation strategy in the changeable and competitive economic environment, it takes on particular importance today, in the conditions of high uncertainty. Mrs. Leila Shoraka undertakes to replicate the research on Employability Market Orientation, originally conducted in Poland, in different economic and cultural context, that is on Iranian market. She is looking for the answer to the following question: "Can Employability Market Orientation improve employability, and decrease the sense of job insecurity of the employees in Iran regardless of geographical boundaries, cultural and economic differences?" Which deserves to be emphasized, the Author expands the approach to investigate Employability Market Orientation in Iran by adding new variables, not included in Polish original study, such as flexible HRM as organizational determinant and attribution style as an individual determinant of Employability Market Orientation. This way She fills the research gap and responds the need pointed out by several authors for further research in regard to enormous cultural diversity among employees from different countries and regions. Therefore there can be no doubt that the PhD Candidate choice of Her research problem will largely contribute to the existing body of knowledge and fill the gap in the research concerning individual's employability. I would also like to emphasize that the research problem that Mrs. Leila Shoraka focuses on is inspiring and ambitiously outlined, combining psychological, cultural as well as managerial issues, which is not an easy task. The topic taken up by PhD Candidate in the submitted dissertation falls within the discipline of Management and Quality Studies. Having in mind the above mentioned, I express my opinion that the research problem undertaken in the dissertation is important, interesting and relevant.

The objectives of the study, hypotheses and research questions are characterized in chapter 2. Generally, the Author's research intentions are presented clearly, which proves Her academic maturity, including the ability to formulate problems and research steps leading

to solve them. To achieve the thesis objectives and to verify the hypotheses the Author carried out an empirical study. In order to verify the hypotheses Mrs. Leila Shoraka applied the quantitative approach that involves collecting and analyzing numerical data and applying statistical tests. A scope the conducted empirical study, i.e. the questionnaire survey conducted among 320 employees working in public and private sectors is sufficient. In the questionnaire the Author included validated measures of tested variables. Their selection and adaptation to the dissertation objectives is not doubtful. The questionnaire construction meets the standards of high-quality research. The research sample is well described, however, in my opinion, the criteria for the research participants selection (which was purposive sampling) are not articulated clearly enough.

The thesis is well grounded in literature. The list of references includes 230 books and papers. Selection of sources is correct and their usage raises no objection. The dissertation is well written showing clearly the way of the Author's thinking and her intensions. The Author proves that She can clearly formulate and communicate Her thoughts. While discussing particular issues, the Author consistently presents also the achievements of Iranian management literature in the field.

In my opinion the dissertation by Mrs. Leila Shoraka can be considered as an important work from the viewpoint of management knowledge, contributing both to the science and practice.

3. Specific remarks

Introduction provides the general background of the research and research context, research scope as well as the contribution to the science and practice. All these information, except for clearly stated purpose, are properly presented. The Author asks the question whether Employability Market Orientation improves employability, and decreases the sense of job insecurity of the employees in Iran regardless of geographical boundaries, cultural and economic differences. I assume that obtaining an answer to this question is the main purpose of the dissertation, however this has not been explicitly spelled out. Introduction part does not include typical elements such as objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses. I suppose this is due to the fact that the number of questions and research hypotheses formulated by the Author is so large. They are clearly presented in Chapter 2. However, in my opinion at least the objectives of the dissertation and the research questions should also be clearly stated in the Introduction.

Chapter 1 is a presentation, on the basis of detailed literature analysis, of theoretical constructs which are later analyzed in the empirical research. The Author shows good knowledge of the subject literature. She dedicates a lot of attention to the concept of flexible human resource management. Referring to works of many authors PhD Candidate presents the idea of the concept, followed by explaining the dimensions of flexible HRM and its significance for an organization and its employees.

Then, continuing Her theoretical considerations Mrs. Leila Shoraka discusses the changes in contemporary employment relations. The content of this chapter refers also to such issues as the employee job insecurity and employability as an employee feature. While explaining

employability as an employee feature in the modern labour market, the Author presents a rich overview of definitions and approaches, the essence of which is in the table 1-3.

Referring to the presented review of approaches, from the reviewer position, I would like to mention that the Author discusses about a modern labour market, while most of the cited sources are from about 7-8 years ago. Only one item is dated in 2019. I think that the inclusion of more current publications on this subject would enrich the view on the requirements of the modern labour market.

Exploring the chosen research area the Author devotes relatively big part of Chapter 1 to the presentation of Employability Market Orientation (EMO) explaining it as a new model of employee adaptive meta-competences and describes selected individual determinants of Employability Market Orientation.

When discussing about an individual's cognitive flexibility, Mrs. Leila Shoraka presents the differences of necessary skills for obtaining employability in 2015 and 2020, pointing out that both cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence have appeared as a new individual attributes required on the labour market. These considerations are very interesting in terms of so called 'future work skills'. During the PhD exam I would like to ask PhD Candidate whether, in the face of changes taking place in the global environment, including the labour market, She sees any other skills than those mentioned in the dissertation, important from the perspective of the obtaining employability in XXI century.

What is worth noticing, the Author consistently presents Iranian scholarly achievements regarding the discussed aspects. The chapter ends with the comparison of Iranian and Polish socio-economic culture which, in my opinion, is of significant importance and value in terms of striving to compare Iranian and Polish research results, what is articulated in research objectives.

All these considerations are properly presented, they are maintained at an appropriate, as for PhD dissertation, level of detail. The Author shows skills and ease in referring to the current theories and studies. I truly appreciate the analysis of different research, previously run, when discussing the above said issues.

Chapter 2 is very detailed explanation of the methodology applied in the research. It contains precise description of research problems undertaken in the dissertation, presentation of research hypotheses and models, the description of the research sample and data collection method as well as the description of statistical analysis method applied in the research.

The main research objectives of the study presented in the dissertation are "to investigate:

1. How Iranian employees adapt to the flexibility of human resource management and changes in the relationship between the employee and the employer, based on EMO model and what employees' EMO depends on;
2. Identifying the factors that influence Iranian workers' EMO levels (demographic, individual, and organizational factors);
3. Comparison of Iranian and Polish research results;
4. Presentation of the results with additional variables not included in the Polish study (flexible human resource management as organizational determinants and attribution style as an individual one)".

The above said objectives form a coherent and logical whole. Referring to the defined study objectives, the Author formulated six research questions, namely:

1. Do employees who exhibit EMO have better rates of Employability?
2. Do employees who exhibit EMO feel a low level of Job insecurity?
3. Do employees who exhibit EMO have special socio-demographic and employment related characteristics: age/gender/education/marital status/type of contract/work experience/management position/the number of jobs to now/employment time in current job/planning for working in the current job?
4. Do employees with EMO have individual psychological features?
5. Do organizational factors influence employees EMO level?

Moreover, in case of research question 4 and 5 supplementary questions (respectively 3 in case of the RQ 4 and 5 in case of RQ 5) referring to chosen individual features (cognitive flexibility level, attribution style, career adaptability level) as well as chosen organizational factors influencing EMO level were listed by the Author.

The Author put forward 15 hypotheses which is generally a great number. In addition, most of them have been detailed with supplementary hypotheses which in total leads to the fact that the Author verified 53 hypotheses. I understand that all formulated hypotheses create a 'path' to solve the main research problem and I appreciate the effort made by the Author. While assessing dissertation objectives and the set of hypotheses, I would like to notice that that the study objectives correspond well with the title and the research hypotheses. Moreover, the objectives are characterized by cognitive significance and it is possible to refer to the content of the adopted objectives within the framework of the adopted research procedure. Additionally, as a reviewer, I would like to emphasize that significant value of Mrs. Leila Shoraka's dissertation results from the fact that all hypotheses are embedded in the management literature. PhD Candidate performed exhaustive deliberations on several aspects related to Her research problem and as the result in the thesis She presents clear justification for the research hypotheses by referring to the relevant literature in the field. This shows the scientific maturity of PhD Candidate as well as Her research inquisitiveness.

The presentation of all research questions, the hypotheses assigned to particular research questions as well as research variables examined in the research is provided in Table 2-1 (p. 63-64). I appreciate the way the study process was prepared and described. The information presented in Table 2-1 makes the whole research procedure very understandable.

The content of Chapter 2 illustrates the way of deriving hypotheses and looking for dependencies between separate variables. The Author presents two models of the conducted research. Model 1 was designed based on the relationship between such independent variables as individual determinants (attribution style, cognitive flexibility, career adaptability scale) and organizational determinants (flexible HRM, psychological contract) and EMO. On the other hand, Model 2 was designed to investigating the moderating role of organizational determinants on the relationship between individual variables and EMO. The details regarding the research methodology applied in the thesis are clearly presented in Table 2-2.

In Chapter 2 Mrs. Leila Shoraka describes also the research sample as well as the indicators and measures for data collecting. The research sample comprised 320 employees working

in public sector (169 civil servants) and private sector (151 sales staff). The Author conducted a questionnaire survey (paper and pencil method). Research participants were hired under two types of Psychological Contract (relational and transactional). The groups are contrasted in terms of the rules that govern the relationship between the employer and the employee. It has been assumed that in the private sector, the employees have temporary contract and work based on a transactional psychological contract who have short-term and unstable job. On the contrary, in the public sector, employees have permanent contract with relational psychological contract. In other words, public employees are considered to have long-term and stable job. Therefore, I find out that the selection of the research sample was purposive, although the Author does not clearly indicate the criterion of this selection. I understand that it includes the type of employing sector (organization) and thus the type of psychological contract.

While describing indicators and measurements for data collection, the Author explained them in detail, proving the use of validated measures of tested variables. Their selection and adaptation to the examined research problem is not doubtful. For measuring scales reliability, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used. The questionnaire construction meets the standards of high-quality research.

The last section of research overview provided in Chapter 2 relates to statistical analysis method applied by the PhD Candidate. The statistical analysis carried out by the Author was based on the use of the Pearson correlation coefficient, linear regression, hierarchical regression analysis, multi-factor analysis of variance, and a structural equation model (SEM).

Chapter 3 presents the obtained research results. The chapter starts with the presentation of descriptive statistics of the research variables. Following this part the Author presented the section regarding investigation of the proposed research hypotheses. She applied structural equation modelling (SEM) using AMOS software to test the hypotheses. First, She provided the indicators of fitting the research model. Then Mrs. Leila Shoraka presented, respectively, the relationship between EMO and socio-demographic variables, employability and job insecurity as adaptive indicators, the relationship between EMO and individual determinants and the relationship between EMO and organizational determinants. What is worth noticing, while interpreting the results obtained, PhD Candidate in each case explained the degree of hypotheses verification.

The subsequent section of Chapter 3 is Discussion of the results obtained in the study. In my opinion, discussion is crucial for academic works. PhD Candidate again proved Her scientific maturity by contrasting the research results with the existing literature and showing to what extent Her results are aligned with the evidence found in the adequate literature. She did it following the research questions posted by Her which makes the whole section very clear and easy to follow by the reader.

Regarding the results of the conducted study, the question arises about the universality of research conclusions. The obtained results show that in case of Poland there is a different level of EMO between private and public sectors, while in case of Iran this relationship was not confirmed (Table 3-39, p. 128). Therefore, I would like to ask PhD Candidate to explain this difference - what conditions influence these different results in both countries?

What about other nationalities (countries) - are there any results to be compared with the conducted study?

The empirical part of the dissertation deserves recognition as it confirms the conviction of Mrs. Leila Shoraka's high analytical competences. The way research was conducted, statistical analysis of the obtained results as well as the graphic presentation make the presented research part a valuable study, providing interesting conclusions. Adequate, advanced methods of statistical analysis and inference were used in the dissertation. PhD Candidate maturity is also confirmed by the way She creates Chapter's conclusions, indicating theoretical and practical implications of the study which I consider to be an important advantage of the reviewed thesis. Expressed limitations and indication of future research avenues are also of great importance in this regard.

Conclusion

The conducted assessment allows to conclude that the PhD dissertation of Mrs. Leila Shoraka entitled *Employability Market Orientation in Iran*, written under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. dr hab. Anna Pawłowska and co-supervisor Yaghoob Maharati, PhD, should be considered as an original and genuine answer to the scientific problem in the field of management and quality sciences, indicating the ability to independently conduct scientific work by Her. The cognitive results obtained confirm that the Author of the dissertation has general theoretical knowledge and research competences required for the doctoral degree in the field of social sciences in the discipline of management and quality science.

The value of the work results from taking up an important and poorly recognized scientific problem of great importance both in theory and managerial practice as well as conducting the research procedures in a correct manner. In particular my positive assessment of Mrs. Leila Shoraka's dissertation derives from:

- the ability to formulate a relevant research problem,
- grounding the presented discussion in rich, well selected literature and data from primary source, enabling thesis objectives' accomplishment and the hypotheses verification,
- applied research methodology proving PhD Candidate competences in rising research problems, selecting and designing research tools, analyzing and interpreting obtained results,
- the use of advanced quantitative methods,
- dissertation contribution to theory and practice made by indicating several theoretical and practical implications of the conducted study,
- the thesis structure and language showing the Author's ability to compose a scientific work.

The comments posted in the review do not diminish the value of the work and, at the same time, in most cases are debatable.

Taking into account all the adopted evaluation criteria, I conclude that the PhD dissertation of Mrs. Leila Shoraka under review, entitled *Employability Market Orientation in Iran*, written under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. dr hab. Anna Pawłowska

and co-supervisor Yaghoob Maharati, PhD, meets the requirements laid down in the Act of 14 March 2003 on Academic Degrees and Academic Title and Degrees and Title in Art. On the basis of what is stated above, I request that PhD dissertation be admitted for public defense.

Konkluzja

Przeprowadzona ocena pozwala stwierdzić, że rozprawę doktorską Pani Leili Shoraka pt. *Employability Market Orientation in Iran*, napisaną pod kierunkiem dr hab. Anny Pawłowskiej, prof. UW oraz dr Yaghooba Maharati należy uznać za oryginalne rozwiązanie problemu z zakresu nauk o zarządzaniu i jakości, wskazujące na umiejętność samodzielnego prowadzenia przez Nią pracy naukowej. Uzyskane wyniki poznawcze potwierdzają, że Autorka rozprawy posiada ogólną wiedzę teoretyczną i kompetencje badawcze wymagane do uzyskania stopnia doktora w dziedzinie nauk społecznych w dyscyplinie nauki o zarządzaniu i jakości.

Wartość pracy wynika z podjęcia ważnego i słabo rozpoznanego problemu naukowego, mającego duże znaczenie zarówno teoretyczne i praktyczne, jak również prawidłowego prowadzenia postępowania badawczego. W szczególności moja pozytywna ocena pracy Pani Leili Shoraka wynika z:

- umiejętności sformułowania odpowiedniego problemu badawczego,
- oparcia prezentowanej w dysertacji dyskusji na bogatej, dobrze wyselekcjonowanej literaturze i danych ze źródeł pierwotnych, umożliwiających realizację celów dysertacji oraz weryfikację hipotez,
- zastosowanej metodyki badań, potwierdzającej kompetencje Doktorantki w zakresie formułowania problemów badawczych, doboru i projektowania narzędzi badawczych oraz analizy i interpretacji uzyskanych wyników,
- wykorzystania przez Doktorantkę zaawansowanych metod analizy statystycznej,
- wkładu rozprawy doktorskiej w teorię i praktykę zarządzania poprzez wskazanie szeregu teoretycznych i praktycznych implikacji prowadzonych badań,
- oceny struktury pracy oraz języka, wskazujących zdolność Autorki do komponowania prac naukowych.

Komentarze zamieszczone w recenzji nie umniejszają wartości pracy, a jednocześnie, w większości przypadków, mają charakter dyskusyjny.

Biorąc pod uwagę wszystkie przyjęte kryteria oceny, stwierdzam, że recenzowana rozprawa doktorska Pani Leili Shoraka pt. *Employability Market Orientation in Iran*, napisana pod kierunkiem dr hab. Anny Pawłowskiej, prof. UW oraz dr Yaghoob Maharati spełnia wymagania określone w ustawie z dnia 14 marca 2003 r. o stopniach naukowych i tytule naukowym oraz stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki. W związku z powyższym, wnoszę o przyjęcie rozprawy i dopuszczenie jej do publicznej obrony.

