EXPERT OPINION

by Prof. Dr. Lalka Borisova

Scientific specialty : " Economics and management (by industry)",

Mon 3.7. "Administration and Management"

**About :** Dissertation work for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", field of higher education 3. Social , economic and legal sciences, by professional direction 3.7. Administration and Management (Business Administration )

**Author of the dissertation** : **Militsa Milenkovic**

**Dissertation topic: The role of intercultural communication in the management and development of modern business organizations**

**Reason for submitting the Review:** Participation in the composition of the scientific jury for the defense of the dissertation work, according to Order No. 240/03.11.2023 of the Rector of the Ministry of Education and Culture - Botevgrad.

### I. Summary data on the candidate's scientific output and activity

### 1. Information about the PhD student

Militsa Milenkovic is a doctoral student in an independent form of study at the International Higher Business School, according to Order No. 243/30.11.2021 of the Rector of MVBU. The development of the creative biography of the doctoral student eloquently shows the concentration of research activity in a well-structured direction in the field of intercultural communications and their management.

### 2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation work

The doctoral dissertation is 245 pages long. The structure consists of an introduction, an exposition in three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography (a total of 203 sources, of which 14 in Cyrillic and 203 in Latin), appendices, a glossary . The dissertation includes 42 tables, 18 figures and 3 appendices.        **The title of the**

**dissertation is clearly formulated and closely related to the doctoral thesis. The chosen topic is relevant from the point of view of the role of management processes in intercultural communications, their importance and significance in the management and development of modern business organizations, while at the same time justifying the existence of connections between the components of intercultural communication competence. The dissertation is distinguished by thoroughness of the conducted research, insight into the essence of the investigated problems, objective analysis and reasoned conclusions, own definitions.**

The research logic and structure of the dissertation are well constructed. When structuring, the traditional approach for writing similar works is followed - first, the theoretical positions on the topic are clarified, secondly, the different models are presented and classifications are made, and thirdly, the own research is done, analyzing the data from it and revealing possibilities, proposals and guidelines for improvements are made.

**The object** of research is intercultural communication and its main aspects as a key area of communication processes in an intercultural environment, and **subject** - the management of intercultural communication for the development of modern business organizations.

**The main goal** is to study, present and analyze the importance and significance of intercultural communication in the management and development of modern business organizations, while at the same time trying to show the existence of connections between the components of intercultural communication competence.

**The doctoral thesis** is based on the assertion **that intercultural communication plays a key role in the management of organizations operating in an intercultural environment and including culturally different individuals.** For the successful management of these organizations, employees need certain levels of intercultural communication competence, which can be improved and refined in order to overcome cultural distances and barriers and the successful functioning of organizations through intercultural interaction.

This position is supported by one main hypothesis and four working sub-hypotheses , subsequently developed and proven in the overall presentation.

**I believe** that **the thesis and working hypotheses are protected in the dissertation research. What was assumed in the general hypothesis about the existence of significant relationships between the investigated factors of**

**intercultural communication competence and the components of the intercultural sensitivity of individuals is confirmed** ( **main hypothesis** ). In the research process, it is proven that there are some differences in the expressiveness of the studied factors of intercultural communication competence (respect, trust) and the levels in the individual components of the intercultural sensitivity of the researched persons (openness to cultural differences). **(first sub-hypothesis ). The second sub-hypothesis** is also partially proven with the statement, that statistically significant differences were found in the studied factors of intercultural communication competence depending on gender, with women having higher scores on the respect factor compared to men. Work experience has a significant effect on intercultural sensitivity, on the component openness to cultural differences.

**Hypothesis 3** was also proven , establishing significant interrelationships between the investigated factors of intercultural communication competence and the components of intercultural sensitivity. The relationship between the attention/participation factor and the three components of intercultural sensitivity is strongest. Interrelationships were also established between the commitment factor and the three components, as well as between the trust, respect and pleasure factor and the open-mindedness component to cultural differences. **Hypothesis 4 is confirmed by finding a significant effect of the factors of intercultural communication competence on the components of intercultural sensitivity.** The factors attention/participation and engagement have an effect on the understanding of cultural behavior. The factors trust and attention/participation influence the components open-mindedness to cultural differences and cultural flexibility.

**The obtained results and general conclusions provide the basis for the formulation and presentation of subsequent guidelines and recommendations for the improvement and improvement of intercultural communication competence in the management and development of organizations.**

The proof of the working hypotheses gives reason to consider that the formulated **doctoral thesis** of the research is also protected.

In **Chapter One, a volume of 50 pages, it is done theoretical analysis about the nature of intercultural communications.** A comprehensive literature review of the theory on the subject was made, the definitions of leading authors were systematized, the main concepts were clarified, a parallel was drawn between them, as well as a comment by the author of the study. It contains a total of 6 paragraphs.

**The first paragraph** contains the main concepts in the dissertation and their definition according to various Bulgarian and foreign authors. The concept of "communication" is examined, presented through some basic theoretical concepts, perspectives and definitions. In the context of work, emphasis is placed on those definitions of communication that reflect its essence in a work environment and in the management of organizations. Various formulations are presented, a literature review is made, and at the same time the author's working definitions are formulated for the purposes of the dissertation research.

Reviewing the literature, the doctoral student makes a comparison between "intercultural communication", "multicultural communication" and " intercultural communication" (cross-cultural communication). The doctoral student makes this distinction and allocates a separate paragraph to clarify the nature of intercultural communication, specifying that for the purposes of the dissertation, the terms "intercultural communication", "intercultural communication" and "intercultural dialogue" will be used as synonyms with an unambiguous meaning.

**The doctoral student formulates a working definition of "communication** " (p. 15), which **I consider a scientific contribution:** "communication is a two-way process in which, by transmitting and receiving information, incl. through the expression of ideas, feelings, thoughts, attitudes, cooperation can take place to achieve group and/or organizational goals, as well as to achieve a common shared understanding'.

By upgrading the content, the concept of "culture" is also clarified, with the summary that it "provides human guidance and orientation, value, identification; it also provides rules, order and legitimisation – it is therefore essential to human interaction and reduces the complexity of life ". Other definitions of well-known authors are cited, postulates about intercultural differences are clarified.

**In the second paragraph, the doctoral student analyzes the concept of "intercultural communication" in the definition of various authors, making her own conclusions and conclusions with the clarification that for the purposes of the dissertation, the concepts "intercultural communication", "intercultural communication" and "intercultural dialogue" will be used as synonyms with a single meaning.** The term "multicultural" is used as a characteristic of the social environment, and "multiethnic" is used in the sense of a community of the various ethno-cultural features of the social groups from which the society is formed, drawing

a parallel between nationality and ethnicity. In summary, it is noted that globalization and the free movement of people have made the world much different and meetings between representatives of different cultures are a daily occurrence. This necessitates the mastering of a new and vital competence - **the intercultural communication competence** , which allows effective and efficient communication with different people.

In **the third paragraph** , the topic is developed, the doctoral student systematizes the approaches to studying intercultural communication. In this paragraph se explores **the integration of the three main methodological** perspectives in studying the problems of intercultural communication: social, interpretive, critical and dialectical approach (with four building blocks of intercultural communication: culture, communication, context and power). Emphasis is placed on the usefulness of using a dialectical approach in studying intercultural communication.

In **the fourth paragraph** (Cultural identity and intercultural communication) terminological clarifications are made and working definitions for the purposes of the study are substantiated. The doctoral student defines cultural identity as part of a sociological or demographic classification, as well as the psychological identification of the individual (subject) with a certain group. This concept is complemented by the term "ideology", in the sense of personal beliefs (personal aspect) and others, learned in the process of communication with other people (social aspect), which is a factor of identity. The importance of the ideological messages in a number of publications of leading authors on the subject and their importance for intercultural communication is also traced, analyzing the four interrelated processes: assimilation, integration, marginalization and separation, which define cultural identity.

In communications, regardless of their nature, the values of the individual have a decisive place. The doctoral student has presented various definitions and comments on the topic and definitions of the concept of "values" and concludes that "the value is precisely that distinctive characteristic of the individual person (or group of people), which, in relation to the desires, influences the choice of various methods of action on attitude towards achieving people's goals' (p. 40).

This paragraph follows **a logical connection** between the individual paragraphs and clarification of key terms and definitions. The doctoral student highlights two opposite approaches to the study of values: "structural-energetic" and "structural-content". The first relates to Rokich 's Theoretical Model (with 18 values each), which

links core values to beliefs and attitudes, classifying them as "Terminal Values" (what we strive for, desired end states of existence) and "Instrumental values' (means to achieve goals, preferred ways of behaving).

The structural-content approach presents the theoretical models of Hofstede , Triandis , Schwartz , Trompenaars , Hampden-Turner , Schwartz , etc. These authors look for the universal dimensions in the organization of values for the adequate description of individual and cultural differences, on the one hand, and on the other - the semantic-content connections between individual values.

The PhD student correctly summarizes the importance of different sets of values and those that are appropriate for companies with intercultural communication and a different value base.

In **the fifth paragraph** (Cultural profiles and cultural indicators. Cultural integration) cultural indicators are systematized that should be taken into account when working with partners from abroad and the conclusion is made that cultural profiling can also be used for recruitment. The PhD student draws a parallel between different countries in the cultural integration of women and men, correctly noting that the main indicator that facilitates integration is language competence - mastering the language of the host company.

The **sixth paragraph** (Intercultural Communication and Leadership in Organizations) makes the case for organizations' need for global leaders to communicate in a multicultural environment; leadership competencies and the role of leadership in an intercultural environment are analyzed; in an integrated model of leadership, the leading role of communication is highlighted. After quoting famous authors on the subject, the PhD student summarizes the leading role of leaders in intercultural communication: they will also be the leaders capable of appreciating the values of diversity and taking advantage of the opportunity to turn cultural differences to their advantage and a strong competitive resource.

**In this chapter, the doctoral student demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the theoretical positions related to intercultural communication and cultural identity, the role of cultural values and attitudes to communication with culturally diverse individuals, demonstrates an ability to *assess and outline* the meaning of cultural profiling, draw *reasoned inferences* and *formulate* appropriate conclusions.**

In **the fourth chapter ( Intercultural communication in the management of organizations)** , it is in a volume of 80 pages, in six paragraphs. The doctoral student skilfully builds on the content of the dissertation research by emphasizing key cultural values in organizations, intercultural communication and culture shock, barriers and intercultural conflicts, the role of intercultural communication competence, views and models for measurement and evaluation.

The **first paragraph** highlights the role of cultural values, defined as abstract ideas about what is perceived by the community as good, right and desirable. The focus is on the cultural values of business organizations, which are the common goals that are expected and encouraged by members of the business organization and their pursuit. A comparison is made between the views of established authors on the subject, such as Shane , Cameron and Quinn, Hofstede with the finding that there is no unified theory of the values of an organization. **In my opinion, this is the place for the doctoral student to make her own conclusion about the different value theories and offer her own view, which can also be accepted as a contribution to the research.**

A parallel is drawn between organizational and societal culture ( Schwartz 's approach ), and the importance of values such as social order, respect for tradition, security and wisdom . The statement about the built-in cultures and the behavior of the subjects in the group is correct, the unifying values here are: social power, authority, humility, wealth. Examples from different cultures are given - from English-speaking countries, cultural groups from Sub-Saharan and North Africa, India, Latin America, Asia, Europe. According to the doctoral student, differences in cultural values lead to differences in organizational behavior in different cultural regions. There are also differences in the area of the environment, communications in organizations and the attitude towards employees, i.e. people with their personal values make the organization. **The doctoral student summarizes that "** the cultural values prevailing in the society in which the organization operates directly influences its cultural values and, therefore, the norms and practices it develops."

The **second paragraph** examines the behavior of traveling in an intercultural environment and the attitudes of the individual - to accept the new environment with the established cultural values or to prefer one's own views and attitudes, experiencing the so-called "culture shock". Definitions of a number of authors and causes of a number of conditions, such as restlessness, uncertainty, confusion, anxiety, the various beliefs, norms, values and traditions that are professed in the respective country are indicated

in support. According to the PhD student, probably the best strategy for dealing with different cultural influences is to make a conscious effort to adapt to the new culture, although this may require strong personal awareness, a lot of patience and persistence .

The following three paragraphs trace the role of intercultural communication and the management of adaptation processes, barriers to intercultural communication and intercultural conflicts. Anxiety, language, stereotypes, prejudice, non-verbal interactions, ethnocentrism , xenophobia, racism, discrimination and acceptance of similarities instead of differences - identified by LaRay Barna in the field of education and transferred to different situations of intercultural communication - are indicated as barriers. The list is supplemented by the misinterpretation of non-verbal signals, which are *found* to have different meanings in different cultures and, if not known, have an offensive meaning, it also *outlines* the nature of intercultural conflicts, as part of relationships and for various reasons - money, time, religion, politics, culture , values, beliefs, motivations, ideas, desires, when making important decisions, when making changes, etc.

In her analyses, the doctoral student **correctly goes from the general to the particular,** tracking the manifestations of individualism and collectivism, according to Hofstede . Communication styles are tracked: direct approach defined as something good and indirect approach - as destructive. The role of the personality type – emotionally expressive and emotionally restrained, as well as a seven-step conflict resolution model – is decisive for the way out of conflict situations. It summarizes that cultural competence is "a set of appropriate behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable them ... to work effectively in cross-cultural situations." Different approaches and rankings of leading authors are presented, but **there is no critical analysis** of their application, strengths and weaknesses.

The doctoral student makes an in-depth analysis of intercultural communication competence in the management of organizations and summarizes that it is a unity of: knowledge and skills for the studied language; skills to detect differences; skills to relate differences in culture to that of national culture and skills to examine these interactions in a balanced and critical manner.

**I believe** that dissertation research is useful with analyzes of intercultural communication competence. The doctoral student correctly chose the topic of her dissertation, builds on the content for communication in the conditions of different

cultures, which requires knowledge of customs, manners, symbols and tolerant attitude and acceptance of differences. The role of intercultural communication competence in managing organizations and establishing sustainable business relations between different nations and cultures is highlighted.

**In this chapter, the doctoral student demonstrates** *skills* **in analyzing literary sources, highlighting problems and barriers to intercultural communication, and making well-founded generalizations.**

**The third chapter ( Research and analysis of the role of intercultural communication in the management and development of modern business organizations ) , a volume of 79 pages, has a practical focus.** Contains an analysis of the research framework - aims, objectives, hypotheses, methods, sample of the study with a focus on the role of intercultural communication in the management of organizations.

PhD student **shows ability** *critically and purposefully* use the analysis and synthesis of methodological ideas and, on this basis, compile the necessary methodology, conduct in-depth empirical research, professionally analyze the obtained results and make justified generalizations and conclusions.

129 respondents (employees) working in organizations that carry out business relations with culturally different partners participate in the empirical survey. The research was conducted through the Google platform and includes basic socio - demographic and labor characteristics, a questionnaire related to the role of intercultural communications in the development of modern organizations and two questionnaires:

1. Factors of intercultural communication competence (derived from Guo M. Chen's models, 5-point scale: commitment, respect, trust, enjoyment, attention/participation);

2. Questionnaire for measuring intercultural sensitivity (according to the model of Chen and Starosta ), representing part of the three aspects of cognition, affect and behavior of intercultural communication competence:

- Intercultural sensitivity (related to the affective component);
- Intercultural awareness (related to the cognitive component);
- Intercultural agility/dexterity (related to the behavioral component).

3. The personality block for determining the demographic and work profile of the respondents contains a total of 5 questions (persons' gender, age, position in the

organization, education, work experience). The sample is described by these several demographic characteristics. The evaluation of the statements is carried out using a five-point Likert scale from 1 "very inaccurate" to 5 "very accurate". Based on the results obtained in the research, 4 statements are selected for each of the five dimensions in the model, which reflect the most essential characteristics for each dimension.

The development used the following **methods** for processing the results:

1.    To reach the first objective of the study, frequency distribution tables and pie charts with percentage ratios were used to visualize the survey sample and summarize the results of the first questionnaire;

2.    To reach the second objective of the research, statistical methods are used to process the results. The results of the second and third questionnaires were processed with the statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics , and the following analyzes were used to process the results: reliability analysis; factor analysis; variance analysis – ANOVA, T- test ; correlation analysis; regression analysis.

The results are analyzed and graphically displayed.

The doctoral student reaches the following conclusions:

1.    The subjects communicate continuously and very often with people from different cultures. The most common barriers in communication interactions of persons with people from other cultures are language, stereotypes and prejudices;

2.    Communicators with people from different cultures sometimes fall into conflict situations in their interactions, and the most common causes of intercultural conflicts are differences of opinion on essential issues and reasons related to misunderstandings in communication regarding cultural norms and values.

3.    People believe that the communication skills needed to interact with people from different cultures are acquired, learned, developed, like all other communication skills;

4.    According to the respondents, the organizations in which they work are "to some extent" involved in the processes of communication interactions with culturally different people. Companies engage in the processes of intercultural communication mainly by organizing informal meetings, language training and communication training, courses on various programs;

5. However, organizations (including managers/leaders of intercultural teams) "neither support nor support" communications with representatives of different cultures;

6. Trained her, courses and programs for people coming from different cultures are organized mostly rarely. However, most of the respondents believe that people of different cultures can be a valuable organizational resource in achieving the company's goals;

7. The most indicated individual deficits of the respondents in their communications with people from different cultures is the commitment of organizations to the acquisition of new skills; the lack of more training, programs for the development of intercultural communications. Also listed are: prejudices/stereotypes; the desire/motivation to learn; language skills; the lack of knowledge about values, norms, traditions for the specific culture;

8. According to most of the respondents, in order to improve the intercultural communication competences of employees, the commitment on the part of managers/leaders of intercultural teams should be increased; to organize more informal/out-of-hours meetings; to organize more trainings, incl. language courses related to the specifics of communication in organizations and in the local culture itself; to accumulate more knowledge about the local culture on the part of the representatives of the different cultures; to use more tools (attestations, assessments, feedback) in communication with culturally different, based on the specifics of communications in organizations.

The empirical study of the relationships between the factors of intercultural communication competence (according to the model of G. M. Chen) and intercultural sensitivity (according to the model of Bhauk and Brislin ) and the results obtained lead to the following conclusions, which the doctoral student reasonably draws:

1. Regarding the level of expression of the factors of intercultural communication competence from Chen's model, it is found that individuals have the highest scores on the factors respect and trust, which indicates a manifestation of recognition, respect, respect, reverence, as well as understanding, faith, empathy , confidence in communication interactions with people from different cultures;

2. The persons studied are rather moderately concerned, attentive and sharing, to a certain extent focused, considerate, respectful of others culturally different in communicating with them;

3.    Regarding the level of expression of the components of intercultural sensitivity from the model of Bhauk and Brislin , it was found that the studied persons demonstrate expression mostly to the component Open-mindedness towards cultural differences, i.e. openness to new opportunities for communication, without the presence of stereotypes, activity and desires for new challenges in communication interaction;

4.    The subjects show a tendency towards appropriate forms of politeness, the sensitivity to differences, demonstrating respect for the norms, values, beliefs of the other culture (Understanding cultural behavior). They are rather resistant to adaptation to changes, to initiative and restructuring in communication, to creating good relations in communication interaction with people from different cultures (Cultural Flexibility);

5.    In connection with the established differences in the factors of intercultural communication competence depending on individual and work-organizational characteristics of the studied persons:

*Depending on gender:* it was found that there were no statistically significant differences in the intercultural communication competence factors depending on gender, except for the respect factor - women declared higher values compared to men, which testifies that to a greater extent express readiness for recognition, respect, respect, respectability in cultural interaction with representatives of different cultures;

6.    *Depending on the age:* it was found that the age of the subjects did not influence the factors of intercultural communication competence and there was no statistically significant difference in the values of the five components depending on this characteristic;

7.    *Depending on the work experience:* differences related to the work experience of the examined persons were found in relation to the attention / participation factor. Persons with the least work experience (1-5 years) tend to be more focused, respectful, considerate in communicating with culturally different individuals;

8.    **In summary:** differences are found in the factors of intercultural communication competence depending on individual and work-organizational characteristics by gender and work experience; no differences were found depending on age. It is found that there is no statistically significant difference in the values of the components understanding of cultural behavior and cultural flexibility in relation to work experience.

Correlation dependence between *the factors of intercultural communication competence, between the components of intercultural sensitivity* was also proven ;

*Correlations between factors of intercultural communication competence and components of intercultural sensitivity* :

The doctoral student makes a reasonable conclusion that persons with longer working experience are more open to communication interactions, without expectations and stereotypes; they show a higher degree of activity and desire for new knowledge and challenges in communicating with culturally different individuals.

**Formulated hypotheses are proven** in the process of research and analysis.

Generalized **guidelines and recommendations** for improving and perfecting intercultural communication and communication competence in the management and development of organizations have also been systematized .

At **the conclusion** of the dissertation, the doctoral student made the necessary summaries and main conclusions from the dissertation research. In all parts of the dissertation research, the own presence and own handwriting of the doctoral student is clearly visible, who definitely shows qualities of *precision and skills for data analysis and synthesis* , competences and vision for overcoming proven problems and recommendations for improving the activity.

**It should be emphasized that the peer-reviewed dissertation research is distinguished by its complexity, breadth, depth and justification of a wide range of expedient proposals and innovative approaches.**

**II. Scientific and scientific-applied achievements in the dissertation work**

In all parts of the dissertation research, the own presence and own handwriting of the doctoral student is clearly visible, which definitely shows qualities of *constructiveness and logical consistency* , ability to reveal, define and solve scientific and scientific-applied problems in the field of intercultural communication and communication competence at management and development of organizations . The results and suggestions in the dissertation research can be applied in other organizations after adaptation.

The research logic and structure of the dissertation are well constructed. In structuring, the traditional approach was successfully applied: theory - practice - guidelines and proposals. The dissertation research is well balanced, focused and purposeful. The scientific problems are clearly formulated, and the scientific conclusions and proposals are well-founded. It should be emphasized that the research is distinguished by specificity, breadth, depth and justification of a wide range of

expedient propositions. It is a good idea for the doctoral student to give her own definitions and offer a glossary of terms, to make her own main conclusions and recommendations for the development and improvement of intercultural communication and communication competence in the management and development of organizations . The scientific contribution of the dissertation can be sought in several thematic directions. I accept scientific and applied contributions (4) in the dissertation research, formulated by the doctoral student.

Applying these advances can improve management practice. The indicated scientific and scientific-applied achievements in the dissertation are the personal work of the doctoral student. The statement of contributions correctly represents the scientific achievements of the dissertation.

**III . Critical notes to the content part of the dissertation, recommendations to the doctoral student**

The dissertation research meets the content and requirements for the development of a similar scientific work.

I have no *critical comments that would* significantly affect the positive evaluation of the content part of the dissertation research. The notes made during internal protection have been correctly edited and removed.

**IV. Other matters**

**The abstract** gives an idea of the object, the subject, the thesis, the purpose and the tasks of the research, as well as the methodology used, the structure and the content of the work as a whole.

The doctoral student indicated 8 *publications* on the dissertation, independent and co-authored - publications in refereed and indexed editions: articles, reports, in the country and abroad.

My personal impressions of the doctoral student are based on reading the dissertation. I have excellent impressions of her scientific performances and the developed dissertation work.

**V. Conclusion**

The dissertation is *a complete, in-depth and conscientious scientific study* of an actual and significant theoretical-methodological and scientific-applied problem, it contains *essential scientific and scientific-applied contributions* in the field of modern dimensions of management processes and intercultural communications and can *definitely* be *positively evaluated* .

The doctoral student *knows* the basic literature and good practices in the researched field well enough, can clearly *formulate research problems, analyze, systematize and critically interpret classic and new theories and concepts , construct a research apparatus, conduct empirical research, draw reasoned conclusions and to justify proposals for improving the management practice of intercultural communications in organizations. The findings of the study and the directions it provides can serve to outline cultural differences in communicating with people from other cultures.*

The literature used and cited is sufficient in volume and includes well-known authors on the subject.

This gives me grounds for a positive conclusion that the dissertation work **corresponds** to the requirements of ZRASRB, the Regulations for its application, as well as the Regulations for the holding of competitions for the acquisition of scientific degrees and for the occupation of academic positions at the Ministry of Education and Culture, which is why **I offer** with **full conviction** of the respected members of the scientific jury to **vote for awarding Milica Milenkovic the educational and scientific degree "doctor".**


Sofia, 19.12.2023

SIGNATURE: ……………..

(Prof. Lalka Borisova, PhD)