

# OPINION

by prof. Virginia Zhelyazkova, DSc, from  
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of the materials submitted for participation in the competition  
for occupying the academic position "associate professor" in  
VUZF University – Sofia  
in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences  
in the professional area 3.7. Administration and Management  
(Organizational Leadership and Psychological Aspects of Management)

In the competition for the academic position "associate professor",  
announced in the State Gazette, no. 52 of 07/05/2022 and on the website of  
VUZF, as the only candidate is assistant professor Victoria Gatsova, Ph.D., from  
the same university.

## **1. General presentation of the procedure and the materials obtained**

I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the current  
competition for the academic position of "associate professor" at VUZF  
University – Sofia (VUZF), in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic  
and legal sciences, professional area 3.7. Administration and Management  
(Organizational leadership and psychological aspects of management), by Order  
No. 370 of 10.11.2022 of the Rector of VUZF. With the decision of the scientific  
jury (Protocol No. 1 of 12.11.2022), I am committed to preparing an opinion on  
the present procedure.

Dr. Gatsova submitted the following materials for consideration by the  
scientific jury:

- Autobiography;

- Diploma for acquired educational and scientific degree "Philosophiae Doctor";
- Habilitation thesis on the topic of the announced competition;
- Monograph, different from the main habilitation work;
- Book based on the dissertation work for the award of the Ph.D.;
- Other publications related to the competition and their summaries – one large research paper and three articles developed independently;
- Reference to the fulfillment of the national minimum requirements laid down in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB) and the Regulations for its implementation;
- Reference to contributions in scientific publications;
- Reference to the citations of scientific works in publications of other scientists;
- Employment certificate;
- Information on the candidate's participation in various projects;
- Other administrative documents accompanying the procedure.

I accept the publications submitted for consideration in connection with this procedure, as well as the information on the citations of the candidate's works.

They are completely sufficient for the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for the candidate, laid down in the LDASRB and the Regulations for its implementation for the occupation of the academic position "associate professor" under 3.7 Administration and Management. At the time of preparation of this opinion, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the candidate's scientific output.

## **2. General characteristics of the applicant's activity**

Dr. Gatsova has been a lecturer at VUZF since 2014. For the past eight years, she has accumulated both significant pedagogical experience, teaching 15

different academic disciplines from the field of the competition, as well as scientific experience in the course of her research on her chosen topics.

The scientific publications presented by Dr. Gatsova for the purposes of the present procedure are dedicated to topical matters, which are at the same time too challenging from a research and practical point of view. In her works, the candidate examines some of the most controversial topics in the field of modern management - counterproductive behavior, stress, and toxic leadership, analyzing them through the prism of the psychological phenomena behind their manifestation. This is what is original and most valuable in her approach - the interdisciplinary search for answers to complex, yet important, central questions for the management of any organization. The application of this approach is a demonstration of the serious depth and multi-layered knowledge of the candidate, which skillfully and fascinatingly presents the complexity of the studied phenomena and their effects on organizational ecosystems.

In her main habilitation thesis "Professional Stress and Counterproductive Behavior in the Organization", Dr. Gatsova examines the causes of stress in modern organizations and seeks an answer to one of the main questions for modern managers: how to control stress in the workplace and how to manage it. This, as the author reveals in her work, must be done both at the organizational and at the individual level.

Dr. Gatsova examines in detail counterproductive behavior and its relationship with occupational stress. Valuable is the empirical research based on a survey conducted on counterproductive behavior and stress, the results of which Dr. Gatsova presents in her book. Based on the analysis of these results, she reaches specific conclusions and recommendations, the main of which is the need for professional stress not to be underestimated by the management of organizations, because it leads to a number of serious consequences for the quality of work and its results.

The paper consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion within a total of 159 pages. The structure meets the aims and objectives of the research, the scientific apparatus is very good. The author analyzes a significant number of scientific publications on the topic of her work, which shows her competence, as well as the validity of the conclusions she reaches. The methodology is combined - it covers methods from both the field of quantitative and qualitative analysis and supports the achievement of the goals set by the author.

The study "Occupational Stress and Counterproductive Behavior in the Organization" definitely represents a valuable work that sheds light on a significant and very relevant problem for the practice of modern management, adding value to the Bulgarian scientific literature. The research is very relevant especially today when the effects of stress are becoming visible as a result of the global pandemic of COVID-19. The subject of mental health has become central to both the scientific community and business practice. Coping with the effects of stress in the workplace is an issue that is often the subject of discussions within organizations' senior management meetings, especially as the pandemic has revealed its magnitude. I congratulate Dr. Gatsova for the choice of topic and for the up-to-date presentation of research on her problem, and I consider that her work is a useful read not only for students but also for managers of various types of organizations.

Dr. Gatsova's second monographic work is entitled "Toxic Leadership in the Organization". It also examines an unfailingly relevant topic, but what makes it particularly interesting at the moment is the intensification of the discussion in both the public and academic space on the question of the consequences on the effectiveness of the work process of negative managerial manifestations and practices. This discussion began even before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and has intensified especially since the tectonic changes that have occurred in the way of working and in leader-subordinate relationships in an

environment of an extraordinary crisis on a global scale. More and more in the scientific literature, leading universities attach importance to this issue. For example, Harvard University has devoted a series of articles to the problem of toxic leadership, and the Oxford Word of the Year for 2018, announced by Oxford University Press, is "toxic."

Dr. Gatsova's book addresses an issue that is undoubtedly significant and has serious research potential. It is multifaceted and interdisciplinary. From this perspective, the view that the author presents within her book by drawing parallels between a number of psychological and managerial phenomena and looking for the connections between them is very valuable.

Structurally, the book is logically built into an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. Points and sub-points are appropriately defined and positioned within the content. The thesis, object, subject, and objectives of the paper are clearly defined. This shows the author's good awareness of the problem she researches and the presence of a specific position on the individual issues she examines.

The chosen methodology is from the field of qualitative analysis and meets the research objectives.

The study is a very well-structured introduction to the complex and deep issue of toxic behavior and specifically toxic leadership. The topic undoubtedly deserves much more attention than it has received so far in the Bulgarian scientific literature. The author rightly states that the lack of knowledge about this problem is at the root of the low awareness of the seriousness of the consequences of toxic leadership both organizationally and personally. The path to increasing the effectiveness of various management practices goes through removing toxicity from organizations.

In her work, Dr. Gatsova presents in a clear and accessible way the main elements of toxicity, the types of toxic leaders, and their approaches and styles of behavior. She goes a step further by looking for the causes of toxicity in a person's

psychological profile and in their individual history. It presents the manifestations of toxicity and the perspective it has depending on the gender of leaders.

It is valuable that the author examines and analyzes not only toxic leaders but also the characteristics of their subordinates, as well as the environment that is conducive to the development of their style. This makes the work interesting as it puts toxic leaders in their context and helps the reader to understand when and how and for what reasons they might manifest.

For the purposes of the analysis, the author has studied a significant number of scientific publications of Bulgarian and foreign scientists on her chosen topic - 89 and 4 internet pages.

The work has both theoretical and scientific-applied contributions to scientific literature in the Bulgarian language.

The main theoretical contributions within the work consist of 1) defining toxicity as a manifestation of leaders' behavior; 2) the systematization of the causes and manifestations of toxicity based on the analysis of a significant number of scientific publications by some Bulgarian and mostly foreign authors; 3) the proposed conceptual model for dealing with the toxicity of leaders at the individual and organizational levels.

In scientific and applied terms, the main merit of the author is in illuminating the problem of toxic leadership and providing guidelines for dealing with it in practice.

The remaining three scientific publications of the author - the large research paper and the three articles - complement her contributions in the field of the subject of the current competition and are a demonstration of Dr. Gatsova's activity as a young researcher.

### **3. Critical remarks, questions, and recommendations**

I have no serious criticisms of the candidate. I am impressed by the scientific output of assistant professor Dr. Gatsova, who manages in a short time

to do serious research and develop valuable works with a strong practical orientation and current sound meaning.

I would like to present the following questions to the candidate:

- If in an organization it is found that there is an employee in a key position with highly toxic behavior, what is the right decision - to fire him/her or to find a way for the team to adapt to his/her behavior?

- Does toxic leadership lead to counterproductive employee behavior, and if so, should the leader be replaced?

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the above, I give my positive assessment of the materials provided for consideration in connection with the present procedure and vote "FOR" the occupation of the academic position of "associate professor" under 3.7. Administration and Management (Organizational Leadership and Psychological Aspects of Management) by Dr. Victoria Gatsova.

30.11.2022

Sofia

Prepared the opinion: (s)

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