

REVIEW

By prof. Dr. Valentin Penchev Vasilev

Higher School of Security and Economics, Plovdiv

of a dissertation on the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in Field of Higher Education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences
Professional field 3.8. Economics
Doctoral Program "Finance, Insurance and Insurance"

Author: Nikola Dimitrov

Theme: „FINANCIAL OPTIMIZATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS, THROUGH LEAN THINKING“

Scientific supervisor: prof. Dr. Julia Dobрева

1. General description of the presented materials

By order No. 50 of 05.02.2024 of the Rector of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance Prof. Doctor of Law Boris Velchev, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation on the topic "FINANCIAL OPTIMIZATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS, THROUGH LEAN THINKING", for the obtaining of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the Higher Education Department 3. Social, economic, and legal sciences, Professional direction 3.8. Economics, PhD program "Finance, Insurance and Assurance". The author of the dissertation is Nikola Dimitrov - a doctoral student in independent study, with a scientific supervisor Prof. Yulia Dobрева.

The materials submitted by Nikola Dimitrov include documents according to the presented inventory **/list from 1 to 9/**: (dissertation work; abstract; declaration of originality; certificate of fulfillment of minimum requirements; list of publications; copies of publications – 3 copies; summaries of publications; resume)

Three articles have been attached by the PhD student to the procedure documents.

The overview format of the documentation makes it easier for the reviewer to get to know and assess the scientific output as well as the candidate's autobiographical information. The applicant's provided documentation has been thoroughly verified and meets all requirements outlined in the relevant national and internal regulatory framework for the higher school.

2. Brief biographical data of the PhD student

Nikola Dimitrov graduated from The University of Sheffield in Thessaloniki, with a Bachelor of Computer Science. He became a "Master" in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship at the same educational institution. In 2014, he completed the "Lean Navigator" certification program at the "RBI & McKinsey Lean Academy".

His professional development is as follows:

- CRM Manager & Process Optimization Specialist, Raiffeisen Bank Bulgaria /2011-2016/.
- Business Process Optimization Specialist, Ingram Micro Bulgaria /2016-2017/
- Director of the "Educational Activities" Directorate and Director of the Distance Learning Center at VUZF /2019-2020/;
- Continuous improvement consultant (LEAN) Lean Institute Bulgaria /2016-present/;

His portfolio of training and consulting includes companies such as Raiffeisen Bank, OTP Bank, CEZ GROUP, A1, Ingram Micro, Witte Automotive, LEM, OPTIX, Dreamix.eu, Sofia Municipality, etc. senior consultant at LeanInstitute.bg and official trainer and coach of Youmagnus AG for Bulgaria.

3. Actuality of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

The topicality of the issue under consideration is indisputable. It makes perfect sense to incorporate the Lean methodology into the survey management arsenal. Furthermore, the public sector has been recognizing the importance of the lean toolkit in recent times due to its accelerated organizational development in some directions, in addition to corporate organizations, which is the focus of the scientific research given in the dissertation. It is especially helpful given the tasks that have been developed that have a strong connection to applying this information to the real-world circumstances of the companies' operations in Bulgaria.

4. Knowing the problem

Since the PhD student is also heavily involved in the research process, we can assume from the process documentation that he has a thorough understanding of the subject under investigation. His ability to describe the main theories and recommendations for the execution of scientific study has been considerably assisted by the wealth of personal knowledge and experience he has gained.

5. Research methodology

The chosen research methodology allows for achieving the set goal and obtaining an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation work. The author has applied a dynamic, systematic, and evaluative approach, a high degree of generalization, the identification of trends, and the inclusion of carefully chosen research methodologies that are suited to the complex nature of the scientific subject.

6. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation has a volume of 152 pages, 24 pages of literature and an appendix. It is structured into an introduction, an exposition in six chapters, a conclusion, references and Index of Abbreviations. The list of sources of information includes 192 sources in English.

The main research thesis of the dissertation research is correctly stated, namely: This study is guided by the understanding that management systems and tools can catalyze not only the mitigation of operational shocks but also the creation of an environment that is conducive to sustainable organizational growth and financial stability.

This research thesis serves as the foundation for defining the study tasks. The primary objective is to investigate and clarify in detail the function of lean management as a strategic element for financial optimization in businesses. This goal is supported by several specific objectives, each intended to expand upon the previous to produce a coherent and thorough study: To analyze the relationship between organizational chaos and financial performance; To explore the application of Lean Management principles as a mitigating tool against chaos; To assess the impact of lean thinking on financial optimization in Southeast European organizations.

A solid balance has been achieved between structure and content, with the scientific study consisting of the following chapters.

The "General description of the dissertation work" presents key components related to the choice of topic, as well as the scientific rationale for the realization of the dissertation study.

In Chapter 1, "Introduction to Organizational Chaos and Complexity," the conceptual framework of organizational chaos is highlighted along with its relevance to fundamental management procedures. The theoretical components are logically constructed as follows: Defining organizational chaos. Understanding organizational complexity; The interaction between chaos and complexity; Chaos, complexity and financial performance. Item 1.6 is interesting and leading. The role of leadership in managing chaos and complexity, which is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter 2, "Review of the Literature on Chaos Management and Economic Thinking" makes a retrospective analysis of the theoretical achievements and development of the topic. The chapter is well-written, covers important writers and ideas, and maintains a consistent style in its accurate interpretation of management standards and regulations that are grounded in both theory and practice. If they had located a location and ideas from Bulgarian writers and scientists, like those that can be discovered, particularly in the last few years, the development would have benefited in this area as well. Of course, the section on lean thinking and its guiding principles deserves a special place in this chapter. The following section presents the scientific connection between the idea of chaos and lean thinking in the context of finding organizational solutions that are sustainable.

The methodological framework and research model are argued and presented in the "Research Methodology" chapter, and this is done accurately and precisely enough.

Chapter 4, "Data Analysis, Findings, and Implications," presents the analytical components of the dissertation research related to the 75 participants who participated in the doctoral student's study. The analysis is provided in great detail, and this section of the development emphasizes the doctorate student's capacity to assess data scientifically, formulate recommendations, and provide arguments supporting specific findings. There are numerous examples of this kind of well-balanced theory and practice here, but two stand out in particular: identifying the function of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) methodology and the adoption of lean thinking concepts. Particularly important in this part of the development is the author's conclusion that the key to organizational effectiveness is the affirmation of the transformative potential of Lean Thinking to deal with the financial challenges posed by chaos and complexity in organizations. It states that this is the key to organizational effectiveness. In this sense, the dissertation's scholarly discussion conceptually clears the path for further study and application, emphasizing the necessity of a strategically nuanced approach to Lean implementation that is suited to the particular financial situations of businesses in Southeast Europe and beyond.

In the conclusion, emphasis is placed on some key challenges in using the lean approach in management. The summaries are presented in general, without being refined and shaped as those with a theoretical and those with a practical-applied nature, which is usually done in dissertation developments. An interesting chapter in the conclusion presents the future possibilities for the development of the topic, with the author summarizing that the study offers several areas for future research, among which - Evaluation of the long-term financial impact of Lean Thinking in different organizational contexts; Analyzing the impact of cultural dynamics on the success of Lean strategies; Exploring how Lean Thinking can be integrated with new technologies and business models to drive financial innovation and more. This approach deserves admiration.

Of course, this is the appropriate place to acknowledge Prof. Dobрева's competent scientific direction, which surely had an impact on the standard of scientific study and upheld the university's long standing traditions of excellent practical and scientific accomplishments in dissertation research.

Once again, we will emphasize that we accept the credibility of the material on which the contributions of the dissertation work are built as an author's product, and I have no grounds and proof for a different opinion.

7. The development's contributions and importance for research and practice

The dissertation study highlights several points of contribution that, although not explicitly presented by the author, can be classified as theoretical contributions. Among them are the following:

- A theoretical investigation of "Lean Management" and "Organizational Chaos" was conducted
- Determined and provided a theoretical and scientific defense of the strategic function that lean management plays.

- The following theoretical data is provided to support the importance of financial optimization through Lean Management:

The author claims that these contributions are essential in a business environment that places a growing emphasis on adaptability, productivity, and financial outcomes. For practitioners looking to use lean management concepts in order to address organizational chaos while improving financial performance, the research can operate as a fundamental resource.

Of course, future developments would gain from a more precise highlighting of the contributing factors as well as a suitable depiction and summary of them.

In summary, the qualifications for obtaining the ONS "Doctor" state that certain conditions must be met in order to be positively assessed by the position in terms of recognizing contributing moments and their importance.

8. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work

The publications attached to the documentation are 3 /three/ articles in English, independent, one of which is in print. All are in publications of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance VUZF/ - 2 in the magazine "Management in Business and the Public Sector" and 1 in "VUZF Review".

The developments are related thematically to the dissertation research.

There are quantitative prerequisites for a positive evaluation in this part of the doctoral student's work.

One observation is that the list of publications is not well formatted. In the attached documentation, they are given only as titles, without indicating any data about the relevant published documents - publisher, year of publication; authorship /co-authorship/; issue number; pages; referencing, etc.

9. Assessment of compliance with minimum national requirements

In the attached reference for fulfillment by the doctoral student of the minimum national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the professional direction 3.8. Economics has the required points /80 points/, which are proven in a relevant way in the documentation.

10. Personal participation of the doctoral student

I accept the improvements as fully the author's own, and I accept the doctorate student's involvement in the dissertation study that was done. I positively assess the developed contributions and the outcomes that were attained, which are his worth.

I am not aware of any reports of plagiarism and I have not detected any.

11. Abstract

To enable the clear presentation of the accomplished scientific and applied results and contributions, the 58-page abstract is written according to the guidelines and customs of this particular procedure step. It includes all the major sections of the dissertation.

12. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have the following recommendations and scientific-methodical notes for doctoral student Nikolov:

- It is appropriate and helpful for the applicant to utilize "benchmarking" and "benchlearning" as tools to compare and find best practices in their future study. This would make benchmarking procedures easier as well as the testing and implementation of ideas and best practices found through research.
- To promote and popularize the originality and concepts of science and research, as well as those with higher citation indexes, it is advised to increase publication activity in publications abroad;
- It is appropriate to expand on the theories around the concept of the "learning organization" in future developments, as they are not well represented in dissertation work. These allow the model to be modified and given a far more flexible appearance and form;
- The topic of Navigating the nuances of organizational culture, which is touched upon in the development, deserves to be developed in more depth in the future;
- It is advised to investigate the connection between change management and the lean toolkit in further detail. The expansion in question would have a positive impact on development and enhance its future prospects by influencing management practices across multiple domains.
- Bulgarian authors and sources should find a place in the author's future works. In this area, several interesting authors can be mentioned, who would enrich the content of the scientific research, especially in the development of the topic;
- Finding a demonstrable scientific proximity between the candidate's views on strategic management and development and effective management would be a positive impact on his creative profile. To this end, he could add new tools to the extensive scientific toolkit he currently uses and offers, like Balanced charts and performance indicator systems, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), Lean methodology, Improvement Roadmaps, A3 Thinking, PDCA Cycles, KANO Analysys, and others. I think that by using them, the subject he looks at will be covered much more completely;
- The EU experience is not sufficiently referenced in certain pertinent dissertation development components, despite the fact that it is not the dissertation's primary goal. Although the request is made in the text, it is not well stated, and the study would undoubtedly profit from these kinds of references and best practices.
- The book "The Good Life" / R. Waldinger, M. Schultz; ed. East West; 2023/ is one that I highly recommend. The concepts presented in the book can broaden the author's academic views and have a strong resonance with some of the dissertation's theses and findings;

The aforementioned observations and suggestions aim to improve the effectiveness of the doctorate student's future study, whose success I firmly believe in, rather than reduce the significance of scientific progress.

13. Personal impressions

I do not know the PhD student and have no personal impressions of him and his work.

14. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

It would be beneficial to increase the candidate's scientific research's potential applications and to include it more broadly within the university's majors' studied academic subjects;

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, scientific-applied and applied results, which 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 (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB. The presented materials and dissertation results fully comply with the specific requirements of the Regulations for admission and training of doctoral students in the Higher School of Insurance and Finance.

Nikola Dimitrov, a PhD student, has demonstrated through his dissertation work that he has extensive theoretical understanding and practical skills in professional directing. 3. 8. Economics, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Because of the aforementioned, I can confidently offer my **positive evaluation** of the research that was done, as demonstrated by the dissertation work that was reviewed above, the abstract, the accomplishments, and the contributions. I also suggest to the honorable scientific jury that Nikola Dimitrov be given the title of "Doctor" in education and science at the Department of Higher Education. 3. Professional orientation in the social, economic, and legal sciences 3. 8. Doctorate Program in Economics: "Finance, Insurance, and Assurance"

21.02. 2024 г.

Reviewer:
(prof. Dr. Valentin Vasilev)