

REVIEW

By prof. Valentin Penchev Vasilev, PhD

Higher School of Security and Economics, Plovdiv

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

to occupy the academic position "CHIEF ASSISTANT"

in Higher School of Insurance and Finance

professional direction 3.8. Economics (Financial Optimizations and Business Process Management)

Nikola Nikolov Dimitrov entered as a candidate for the "chief assistant" position advertised in the State Gazette, no. 34 of April 16, 2024, and on the Higher School of Insurance and Finance website.

1. A general overview of the items received

I have been selected as a member of the scientific jury for a competition to fill the academic post of "chief assistant" at VUZF in professional direction by order of the Rector of the Higher School of Insurance and Finance. 3.8. Economics (Financial optimizations and business process management).

Nikola Nikolov Dimitrov was **the only applicant approved to take part in the competition.**

Presented by Nikola Nikolov Dimitrov. a set of materials on an electronic medium follows the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of VUZF and includes the following documents: A curriculum vitae in European format; A curriculum vitae in European format; a copy of the diploma for the educational and scientific degree "doctor" held; a medical certificate; a certificate of criminal history; a certificate of internship in the specialty, if applicable; copies of official notes and other materials about the evaluation by the indicators under Art. 14, para. 1; a list of publications and other results of science and application; a reference on the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for occupying the academic position of "principal assistant", to which the relevant evidence is attached; consent form for the processing of personal data in connection with participation in the contest.

Three scholarly works or publications total—"Efficacy of Specific Lean Tools in Enhancing Operational Efficiency"; "Lean Thinking as a Strategic Tool in Chaotic Environments"; and "Financial Implications of Lean Thinking in Organizations"—have been submitted by applicant Nikola Dimitrov.

The overview-style documentation makes it easier for the reviewer to become familiarized with and assess the scientific output, the applicant's autobiographical information, and other pertinent procedure-related data.

The applicant's documentation has been thoroughly verified and satisfies all standards outlined in the relevant national and internal rules for the higher education institution.

Brief biographical data of the applicant

Nikola Dimitrov received his bachelor's degree in computer science from The University of Sheffield in Thessaloniki. At the same university, he earned his "Master" degree in technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship. In 2014, he finished the "RBI & McKinsey Lean Academy" "Lean Navigator" certification program.

The following is his professional developments:

- 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. , being a senior consultant at LeanInstitute.bg and an official trainer and coach of Youmagnus AG for Bulgaria.

In March 2024, he successfully defended the ONS "Doctor" at VUZF, with the topic of his dissertation research "FINANCIAL OPTIMIZATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS, THROUGH LEAN THINKING".

In the period 2019-2024, he is a part-time teacher at the Higher School of Insurance and Finance.

3. General characteristics of the applicant's activity

Based on official note No. 320/12.06.2024, the candidate's educational and pedagogical activities have been evaluated in a positive light. It validates the candidate's total of 2440 hours of pedagogical experience from 2019 to 2024. Hours in 24 academic fields are mentioned in the reference (17 in Bulgarian and 7 in English). The candidate's

accumulated educational experience is unquestionably beneficial and demonstrates the level of teaching maturity he has attained.

Based on the candidate's submitted research and publications, a good assessment of their scientific and scientifically applied activity has been made. It is undeniable that the topics covered in the papers that have been deposited are current. It makes perfect sense to incorporate the Lean methodology into the current arsenal of management techniques. Furthermore, the public sector has been acknowledging 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 are directly tied to applying this information to the real-world circumstances of the companies' operations in Bulgaria. Generally speaking, the following subject categories contain the research scientific areas that fall under the candidate's scientific field: study of the role of LEAN management as a strategic factor for financial optimization in organizations, and in this aspect the following objectives are leading: 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. These novel research aims in the candidate's work provide the study with an essential scientific focus.

Data on citations and references to the candidate's publications **are not presented.**

Without being specifically detailed by the author, the points of contribution that can be inferred from the documentation that is provided are primarily theoretical. Among them are the following:

- A theoretical study of "Organizational Chaos" and "Lean Management" was conducted
- Identified and theoretically scientifically defended the importance of the strategic role of Lean Management
- Presented theoretical evidence for the role of financial optimization through Lean Management:

The candidate claims that these contributions are essential in a company environment where financial performance, efficiency, and flexibility are valued more and more.

Practitioners who want to apply lean management concepts to address organizational chaos and enhance financial performance might find Dr. Nikolov's study to be a fundamental source of information.

4. Evaluation of the candidate's personal contribution

I acknowledge that the developments are entirely the author's own and that the applicant personally contributed to the materials that were provided during the process. I also positively evaluate the developed contributions and the outcomes that were attained, which are his worth.

I have not found any evidence of plagiarism and I am not aware of any reports of it.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

For Dr. Nikolov, I offer the following suggestions and scientific-methodological notes:

- To promote and popularize the originality and concepts of science and research, as well as those with higher citation indexes, it is advised to boost publication activity in publications overseas;
- I advise the candidate to concentrate on researching how his ideas about the efficient administration of the processes under study relate to public policies and strategic management in the area of the study. Accordingly, many of the concepts in his scientific portfolio have a great deal of "width" in their applications and, generally speaking, take on the form of a "scientific project" that can be funded and tested, even with the help of the European Union, and that can use some of the concepts it has published;
- It is appropriate and helpful for the applicant to utilize "benchmarking" and "bench learning" 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.
- It is advised that a study discipline be instituted in the upper grades, which would help to implement some of Dr. Nikolov's concepts in an educational setting and serve as a sort of advancement of his research;
- The benefit of digging deeper into the issue of "Navigating in the nuances of organizational culture" in the future, is that it has an impact on the author's scholarly output and may present a new area of study for the applicant;
- It is advised to look further into the connection between change management and the lean toolkit. Such an expansion would be beneficial to developments and would substantially enrich them in the future as an impact on management practice at different levels;
- A good effect in the candidate's creative profile would be to find indicative scientific proximity between his views on effective management and strategic

management and development by adding to the rich scientific toolkit he uses and offers analytical tools such as - Balanced charts and systems of performance indicators; Common Assessment Framework CAF (Common Assessment Framework); Improvement Roadmap; A3 Thinking; PDCA Cycle; KANO Analysis and others. I think that with their help, the topic he looks at will be explored in greater detail;

- The books "Permission to Feel" (M. Brackett, ed. FREI'; 2024) and "The Good Life" (R. Waldinger, M. Schultz, ed. East West; 2023) are highly recommended for the author. Compared to some of the theses and conclusions of the author's developments, the ideas offered in thesis editions can deepen his scientific insights;

The notes and suggestions made above do not take away from the candidate's effort; rather, they are meant to help the doctorate student—whose success I firmly believe in—research more effectively in the future.

6. Personal impressions

I have a positive impression of the candidate's work from my participation in a scientific jury for his acquisition of PhD in March 2024

CONCLUSION

The materials submitted by the candidate contain **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) and the Regulations for the Implementation, fully complying with the specific requirements of the Regulations for admission and training of doctoral students in the Higher School of Insurance and Finance.

As part of the documentation, the competition contender provided scientific papers. A significant number of the candidate's original scientific and applied contributions, which have garnered national recognition, have been published in journals and scientific collections. His theoretical advancements are useful in the real world, and some of them are specifically focused on scholarly endeavors.

Dr. Nikola Dimitrov has unquestionable qualifications in science and education because his research and teaching activities have produced results that fully comply with the VUZF Rules for the application.

From the overall complex assessment of the documentation on the procedure, it can be concluded that Dr. Nikola Dimitrov possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in Professional direction 3. 8. Economics, demonstrating

qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research, teaching and administrative such.

Due to the above, I confidently give my positive assessment for the occupation of the academic position "CHIEF ASSISTANT" in the Higher Education Department 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional direction 3.8. Economics (Financial Optimizations and Business Process Management) and I propose to the honorable scientific jury to vote positively for the candidacy of Dr. Nikola Nikolov Dimitrov.

01.07. 2024 г.

Reviewer:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Valentin Vasilev". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V'.

(prof. Valentin Vasilev)