PhD THESIS REVIEW

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. Diana Bakalova, PhD, Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Concerning: Public defence of a PhD thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional field: 3.2 Psychology; Specialized professional field: Social Psychology

Doctoral candidate: Polina Gudeva – PhD student at Department of Psychology, Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

Dissertation title: "Views on self-efficacy, interpersonal needs and interpersonal relationships in employees of the Ministry of Interior"

In the dissertation work, the doctoral candidate combines an original blend of social-psychological and organizational-psychological perspectives to systematically investigate a significant topic related to the interplay between self-efficacy beliefs, including professional and social aspects, the degree of expression of interpersonal needs for inclusion, control, and attachment, and the associated social roles, the subjective assessment of interpersonal relationships as favorable/unfavorable at both the individual and group levels among various professional groups of employees in the Ministry of Interior, Bulgaria.

The work is structured into an introduction, a theoretical part with 3 chapters, and an empirical part with 3 chapters, including research design and methods, results, summary, conclusions. The total volume of the work is 212 pages, including the references and two appendices amounting to 52 pages. There are a total of 180 literary sources, including 12 in Cyrillic and 168 in Latin script, with a significant portion of them being from recent years. A total of 53 tables and 5 figures are included in the dissertation work.

The *first part* (theoretical overview) consists of *three chapters*, which I consider excellently structured, albeit presented in an overly detailed manner in view of the empirical part of the work. Still, in full accordance with the theme and objectives of the dissertation, in the literature review, the candidate convincingly outlines and connects: 1) A. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and his concept of self-efficacy, conceptualized as overall, professional, and social effectiveness in the workplace, including confidence in successfully handling typical work tasks and problems, achieving personal goals, and maintaining good relationships with colleagues, 2) The theory of U. Schutz on fundamental orientation in interpersonal relationships, further developed by Schnell and Hammer for its application in workgroups, and conceptualized through three interpersonal needs: inclusion, control, and attachment, and 3) theoretical models of interpersonal relationships and dynamics in groups, with a focus on Tajfel's theory of social identity, Bailey's interactive process analysis model, Heckman and Morris's group dynamics model, and Schultz-Hard, Hertel, and Brodbeck's model for group performance management. The way the candidate precisely defines and examines the key researched concepts and their potential for operationalization leaves a favorable impression.

The *second part* (empirical) also consists of *three chapters*. In the *first chapter*, the objectives, hypotheses, methods, and the sample of the empirical research are clearly and accurately described. The choice of measures and scales aligns perfectly with the research objectives and is suitable for testing the hypotheses. In general, the study is a cross-sectional and intersectional field research conducted among a specific population, with an impressive sample of 997 employees of the Ministry of Interior (Bulgaria) distributed across 57 groups

from various professional directions – these groups are actual functional units within the Ministry with relatively stable compositions, where employees interact directly and informally. A structured questionnaire was used for collecting quantitative data, compiled from three research instruments with excellent psychometric properties. I highly appreciate the fact that two of the scales - for professional self-efficacy and for interpersonal relationships in business groups - were designed and adapted by the candidate. However, I note the absence of a detailed description of the research procedure - whether the study was conducted face-to-face or online, how participant anonymity was ensured, and what were the conditions under which it was administered - considering the specifics of the respondents' profession.

In the *second chapter* of the empirical part, the results of hypotheses testing are presented, along with analyses of the psychometric properties of the measures and scales used. I positively regard the detailed description of the results of instrument adaptation, including PCA and reliability analysis of the scales for this particular sample. The candidate's skills both in working with statistical methods for quantitative data analysis and in describing the results of these analyses in an appropriate manner are evident.

The results of the empirical research were presented in an appropriate tabular form and were well-structured in terms of the objectives and hypotheses. I appreciate positively that the analysis of the relationships between self-efficacy views, interpersonal needs, and the subjective assessment of interpersonal relationships, has been conducted at both individual and group levels. However, there are instances where coefficients have been repeated both in the tables and in the text, which hinders the readability of the text. Table 30 is too long and should be placed in an appendix. Furthermore, the results shown on it are repeated in Table 31a.

The conclusions drawn from the hypotheses testing and the summary conclusions were correctly synthesized and reflected in the *third chapter* of the empirical part. I highly commend the candidate's skills in summarizing a rich array of results and discussing them through the lens of the hypotheses. I also appreciate the positive inclusion of applied guidelines. However, I could not find a section discussing the limitations of the study, which, like in any research, could serve as guidance for future studies.

I have several questions related to the analysis:

1. What were the candidate’s reasons to claim that the relationship between self-efficacy views and the degree of expression of interpersonal needs was moderate when the correlation coefficients presented on pp. 109-110 indicated that this relationship was weak?

2. Why were the interpersonal needs of inclusion and attachment analyzed as separate variables when the PCA results showed that both heavily loaded onto the same component?

3. How would the candidate explain the result that inclusion as an interpersonal need, measured with FIRO-B, correlated so weakly with inclusion as a component of the assessed interpersonal relationships?

4. Why were T-tests used for comparisons between three or more groups (e.g., for self-efficacy between three professional groups - firefighters, police officers, and operators and coordinators in NES 112; between three groups categorized by the assessment of their interpersonal relationships as unfavorable, satisfactory, and favorable; between groups according to their social roles) instead of ANOVA with pairwise tests, which perhaps would significantly facilitate the analysis, description, and summarization of the results?

I believe that the 4 contributions outlined in the dissertation work are undeniable and encompass fundamental, methodological and applied benefits, as well as practical applications.

The summary of the dissertation is a precise reflection of both structure and content of the PhD thesis.

Furthermore, the doctoral candidate is the author of three articles on the topic of the dissertation published in Bulgarian language in proceedings from two national and one international forum.

Conclusion: In spite of some omissions and inaccuracies in the textual description of the dissertation study, the study is commendable for its well-grounded topicality, objective-oriented and well-structured theoretical background, appropriate research design, abundance of scrutinized, discussed and summarized relationships, as well as undoubtable contributions to the theory, methodology and practice of social and organizational psychology. **The PhD thesis has been prepared in compliance with the requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and hence, I would suggest to the honoured members of the academic jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Area of higher education: 3. Social, economic and legal sciences; Professional field: 3.2 Psychology; Specialized professional field: Social Psychology to the doctoral candidate Polina Gudeva.**

14.09.2023 Prepared by:

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