

SCIENTIFIC REVIEW

From: *Prof. Dr. Pavel Pavlov*, Director of the Doctoral Training Institute of Varna Free University “Chernozizec Herbar”

Concerning: thesis work for the award of a PhD degree in Economics and Management (Industry) PhD at PO 3.8 Economics at the Free University of Burgas

Basis for the submission of the peer review: participation in a scientific jury for the protection of thesis pursuant to Order No YMO-29/6.10.2022 of the Rektor of the Free University of Burgas

Author of the dissertation work: *Delyan Lazarov Lazarov*

Topic of thesis: *Shaping and stimulating business innovation*

1. Dissertane information

The Dissertane studied at the Centre for Economic and Management Studies at the Free University of Burgas under the PhD programme ‘Economics and Governance (Industry)’. The training took place on a *full-time* basis between 2017 and 2021.

Delyan Lazarov graduated from his secondary education at Gen. Vladimir Zamov, Sopot, in 1998, graduated from Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov University in Burgas in the specialty of Economics Administration and acquired Bachelor’s CSTs and the following year he also acquired TCO ‘Master’s’ in the same field. In 2009, the Dissertane obtained a further qualification of MBA Finance from the Financial Academy of the Government of the Russian Federation.

In parallel to the start of his studies in 1998, he started working for an international company and, at the time of acquiring the Bachelor’s CCU, was already the manager of the sites in Burgas. After acquiring TCO, Master’s degree continued his career at Lukoil Neftochim Burgas AD and now holds the position of Director of Economics.

The PhD student, Delyan Lazarov, held seminars at the Centre of Economics and Management Studies of the Free University of Burgas.

2. General characteristic of the reported thesis work

The 270-page dissertation work consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a list of the literature used. The work contains 33 figures, 31 tables and 2 graphs. The list of literature used consists of 348 sources of Cyrillic and Latin characters.

The *relevance* of the topic is determined by a number of circumstances, the most important of which are:

- In the early 90s, a process of transforming the ownership structure of firms and forms of industrial governance began, leading to the destruction of the then existing mechanisms of institutional, cross-industry and inter-company relationships and interaction;
- The strong dependence of the Bulgarian economy on funding from the European Structural Funds, which have proven to be a major source of growth and a key factor in the development of the economy in Bulgaria;
- The main mechanism for improving the competitiveness of the national economy, its individual industries and enterprises is innovation activity, as set out in the National Strategy for Promoting the Development of SMEs and the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation in Bulgaria.

More generally, the relevance of the subject of dissertation work is linked to the definition of working methods for the transformation of innovation activity into competitiveness growth at the level of individual enterprises, as this process is the most important and important prerequisite for sustainably managing the competitiveness of the Bulgarian economy.

The purpose and tasks of the study are correctly defined.

The main objective of the research, namely to develop methodological approaches and tools designed to create and implement mechanisms to increase innovation activity in SMEs, is designed and implemented.

Thesis work sets out and accomplishes the tasks arising from the objective, among which are worth mentioning:

- The business innovation management system and the discovery of interconnections between its subsystems has been analysed;
- The drivers of innovative activity of enterprises have been identified and the scope for using them to increase the efficiency of innovation management is justified;
- The necessary conditions for growth through innovation and change of business models for business management are defined;
- Methodological tools have been developed to analyse the innovation potential of the enterprise;
- Justified directions and methodological tools to stimulate the innovation potential of enterprises;
- Proposed avenues for improving innovative development methods and tools;
- Methodological tools have been developed to assess the innovation infrastructure of enterprises and identify development paths.

The object and object of the dissertation work have been correctly defined.

The proposition that a doctoral candidate successfully defends in the overall research application is that there is a scientifically justified causal link between innovation and the growth of companies.

The doctorate's awareness and awareness of the issues addressed in thesis work can be considered to be particularly high.

3. Evaluation of the scientific and scientific results obtained

In work, there is evidence of a scientifically valid causal link between innovation and the growth of firms.

The first part of the argument has been established in the context of the literature review. The second part of the argument is confirmed by the methodological tools developed in the study to analyse the innovation potential of the enterprise and the methodological tools for evaluating the innovation infrastructure of enterprises and identifying development paths.

The practical focus of dissertation work is linked to specific methods developed to assess the innovation potential of enterprises and development strands. Given the specificity of innovation, the current topic and practical and applied added values could be in the interest not only of science, but also of government policies, businesses and consumers, which have been identified as key factors in increasing the innovation performance of SMEs.

The combination of methods such as inductive and deductive methods, statistical, comparative, case studies, survey methods, etc. Thus, the origins, characteristics and possibilities for increasing the efficiency of the innovative activity of SMEs in Bulgaria are appreciated.

The practical focus and relevance of thesis is also complemented by the empirical research carried out, which specifically shows quantitative results on SME innovation activity based on a methodology developed by the author.

The empirical analysis uses the study on the innovation activity of SMEs in the South-East Region (SEE) and South-West Region (SEZR), which was carried out in implementation of the project ‘Regional indexation of innovation activity in economic sectors (iris) – scenarios to the four priority thematic areas for smart specialisation identified in the ESIS and their place in the circular economy’. The survey was conducted using the direct standardised interview method at the respondent’s workplace. The target groups are companies with and without innovative activity from the UPU (Sofia city, Sofia district, Pernik, Kyustendil and Blagoevgrad) and the Yeuri

provinces of Burgas, Stara Zagora, Sliven and Yambol. The sample was based on 151 interviews, i.e. 151 number of SMEs.

A wide range of methods are used to analyse and systematise the results of the survey, including essentially a transition method from abstract to concrete, idealisation method, formalisation method, modelling method, induction method, expert evaluation methods, etc.

Methodological approaches and tools have been developed to create and implement mechanisms to increase innovation activity in SMEs.

4. Assessment of scientific and applied contributions

The author of the dissertation work derives eleven contributions, of which six scientific and five scientific applications. I fully accept these contributions as correctly defined and represent a significant contribution in the research and scientific application field.

Among these are particularly noteworthy:

- Shaping an Innovation Roadmap based on logical sequencing of the innovative solutions adopted;
- Systematising innovation management in four main aspects;
- Systematising basic constructions into each of the main aspects;
- Developing a “loop” of continuous improvement in favour of companies’ growth;
- Building on the model for the 5 Porter powers by integrating open systems in interdependence with the surrounding competitive environment within the industry, taking into account global factors affecting the competitive environment.
- Defining factors for successful innovation;
- The vision of a framework instruction for business in managing innovation development;

- The conceptual model for turning innovation into a competitive advantage for businesses;
- The proposed methodology to form a complex integrated assessment for each of the key aspects of innovative activity;
- The developed matrix for the assessment of the innovation potential of SMEs from the two regions studied JUR and SEY.

5. Autorephere assessment

The autoreferate is 59 pages accurately presenting the content of the dissertation work and the results achieved.

6. Assessment of dissertation publications

A total of six posts were published by PhD Delyan Lazarov. They all relate to the topic of the dissertation study and have produced results and contributions.

7. Opinion on the presence or absence of plagiarism

Reference to and use of different sources in theatre work is correct and bona fide. I have no information about plagiarism in theatre and its autorephere.

8. Recommendations and critical remarks

1. The following recommendations could be taken into account in further research by a doctorate on this very forward-looking and significant issue:
 - Explore opportunities to further promote the contributions achieved by the dissertane and scientific application tools through a monographic publication on this interesting and topical subject, to publish in publications referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information Scopus and WoS, as well as in other prestigious international publications;

- Doctoral candidate to take an initiative with the active support of the company's leadership to conduct a scientific application forum (roundtable, discussion forum, etc.) with the participation of responsible representatives of the relevant government and local authorities and administrations on the current problems of shaping and stimulating innovation activity of leading enterprises in the country in the context of global and local challenges to the national economy;
2. It would also be advisable to take account of a technical recommendation in the description of the author's publications in accordance with the scientific and bibliographic requirements, such as: name of author (s), more precise name of the scientific edition and/or scientific forum, ISBN, exact name of publisher/forum, year of issue, etc.

9. Conclusion

The reviewed theatre work fully complies with the requirements of the ZRASRB, its Implementing Regulation and the Rules on Learning Activities of Burgas's Free University for the Award of Doctor Education and Science.

I am convinced that I appreciate very much the results and contributions to thesis and I propose to the Honourable members of the Scientific Jury that we award a doctorate degree to **Delyan Lazarov Lazarov** in Professional Division 3.8. Economics, under the 'Economics and Governance (Industry)' doctoral programme.

15.12.2022 **Reviewer:**

(Prof. Dr. Pavel Pavlov)