

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Eng. Neli Ivanova Nikolova

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Member of the Scientific Jury appointed for the defense of the dissertation by

Andrean Dzhoe

on the topic: “Challenges Facing Leaders in Human Resource Management in the
Era of the Circular Economy”

for the award of the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” (PhD)

in Professional Field 3.7. “Administration and Management,”

Doctoral Program “Organization and Management Outside the Sphere of Material
Production” at Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”

1. Topicality and Significance of the Dissertation

The dissertation by Andrean Dzhoe addresses a topical scientific and practical issue in the field of administration and management. The research focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), for which the integration of sustainable development principles, corporate social responsibility, and ESG factors necessitates significant changes in management approaches, organizational culture, and human capital development.

The relevance of the topic stems from the need for enterprises to balance economic efficiency with the responsible use of natural resources, the development of employee competencies, and the creation of sustainable organizational models. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of leadership in this process, as a successful transformation is not limited to the implementation of isolated environmental practices; rather, it entails a shift in management decision-making, staff motivation, and systems for employee development and evaluation.

2. Research Methodology

To achieve the goal and objectives of the dissertation, an integrated, interdisciplinary, and empirically oriented approach was employed, enabling the research problem to be examined from several mutually complementary perspectives. The structure follows a coherent logic: starting from the conceptual framework of the circular economy and the relationship between human and natural capital, moving through an analysis of human resource management systems, and concluding with an applied model and recommendations for organizational practice.

The methodological framework combines a review and analysis of scientific literature, a synthesis of theoretical models, document analysis, and an empirical survey. The theoretical overview establishes the necessary foundation for viewing human resource management not merely as an administrative function, but as a strategic mechanism for developing organizational capacity and sustainable practices.

A notable strength is that the author does not limit the work to a description of the regulatory and conceptual underpinnings of the circular economy; rather, the author explores their connection to actual management practices within SMEs. In this regard, the empirical component plays a crucial role in identifying specific organizational needs and substantiating practical recommendations. The sample of 102 enterprises provides a basis for an analytical study of the sectors in question. At the same time, the author explicitly acknowledges the limited scope for generalizing the results to all SMEs in Germany.

3. Contributions of the Dissertation

I accept the contributions formulated in the dissertation. They are of both a scientific and a scientific-applied nature. Sustainable development is examined in direct relation to organizational behavior, leadership, and human capital development. The strategic role of human resource management in building and

developing knowledge regarding sustainability is substantiated. A significant scientific-applied result is the identification and systematization of the problems and challenges faced by SME leaders during the transition to a circular economy, based on an empirical study conducted across three sectors of the German economy. Another contribution is the development of an integrated management framework that encompasses leadership, strategic human resource management, knowledge and competencies, organizational culture, motivation, employee well-being, digitalization, and partnerships.

4. Authorship of the Results

I consider the results obtained from the research and the submitted dissertation to be the original work of the doctoral candidate. This is further confirmed by the publications related to the dissertation, which make a significant contribution to the subject matter of strategic human resource management, sustainable management, and the transition of SMEs toward a circular economy.

5. Opinions, Recommendations, and Observations

Based on the submitted abstract, several aspects can be identified that could be further developed in future research.

Firstly, expanding the empirical base and including additional sectors and regions would allow for a broader comparison of the results.

Secondly, a longitudinal follow-up of enterprises that have implemented the proposed model would help assess its impact on organizational practices and the dynamics of measurable sustainability indicators.

Thirdly, further operationalization of the model's components through specific indicators would facilitate the assessment of progress.

These observations serve as guidance for the further development of the topic and do not alter my positive assessment regarding the relevance, conceptual design, and practical orientation of the research.

6. Conclusion

The conclusions drawn, the proposed management solutions, and the model for sustainable leadership and transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises—developed by Andrean Joe in his abstract and dissertation—contribute to the understanding of the role of human resource management within the context of the circular economy.

Having reviewed the full text of the submitted materials, I believe that this work has the potential to enrich academic research in this field and support the practical application of sustainable development principles within organizations.

In light of the above, I provide a positive assessment of the dissertation and recommend that the esteemed scientific jury confer upon Andrean Joe the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) in professional field 3.7 "Administration and Management," under the doctoral program "Organization and Management Outside the Sphere of Material Production."

October 26, 2026

Gabrovo

Signature:

/ Assoc. Prof. N.Nikolova, PhD/