

EXPERT OPINION
on the doctoral thesis titled
Strategic Networking as a Management Tool

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Ostrava

a) The relevance of the theme for the development of field of study

Submitted doctoral thesis is focused on the research of social networks which are presented in business in a different forms such as industry clusters, alliances, joint ventures and so on and cover inter- and intra-organizational networks. The networking is a dominant way of cooperation in today's globalized world and the presented work seems to be a very valuable contribution to this approach in business and enterprise management.

b) The achievement of defined objective

The main target of this thesis is to evaluate the network management tool 'Strategic Networking' in practice and to prove that it contributes to the performance of a network. For the achievement of the target three research questions were formulated in a following way:

- *RQ1: How are organizational networks (intra-, inter- and regional) managed in practice?*
- *RQ2: What does an intra-, inter-organizational and regional network managed by Strategic Networking look like?*
- *RQ3: Is a network that is managed by Strategic Networking more successful in terms of financial or non-financial measures?*

To answer these questions also three groups of assumptions are defined at the micro-, meso- and macro-level as the three levels of networks were analysed.

The achievement of target and the answer of all three research question is discussed in detail in a separate chapter 8 of the work. It can be confirmed the target was achieved.

c) The analysis of thesis, the methodology and results

The structure of work follows a recommended standard of doctoral dissertations at the Faculty. The first three chapters analyze the current state of the problem based on critical literature review. They briefly summarize the concept of social networks, organizational networks and network management. Here she also introduces and defines the model of Strategic Networking as: *"the strategic and target-oriented analysis, development, fostering and control of (inter- as well as intra-organizational) networks on the basis of trust, with the intention to reach certain (organizational) goals"*, which is one of her own contributions and benefits in the work.

In chapter four she presents the objective and methodology of the work including the data structure and their collection at the micro, meso and macro level in Czech and Austrian companies and clusters. She also explains the theoretical foundations of SNA method, qualitative content analysis and statistical analysis which are further used for the data evaluation.

In following chapters five, six and seven she gradually presents the results and findings from the analysis. At the micro-level the networks of organizational culture of three Austrian companies are presented; the the meso-level the inter-organizational networks of eight small and medium-sized firms and their network management according to the aspects of Strategic Networking model are evaluated; and finally at the macro-level there are the results and conclusions of the analysis of the socio-centric cluster network in Austria and the Czech Republic as well as the network management of four specific clusters. In these chapters very detailed graphical presentations of networks are presented, the mutual ties and links assessed and their impact upon networks performance evaluated including statistical analysis and benchmarking. The author proved here the good knowledge of proposed research methods and their application in the solution of specific task with real data.

d) The statement on the significance of thesis for the theory and practice

The presented thesis is focused to the field which started to be investigated in the business and management science only recently and also the use of Social Network Analysis with the graphical presentation is not very common. Also the own enhancement of the model Strategic Networking is to some extent a novelty. From this point of view I regard the work very beneficial and I agree with author's assessment of gains for science and practice.

e) The statement on formal presentation and language level

Presentation of work is very good and follows the standards-based school. The work is written very carefully with good layout and with clear and readable English. The thesis covers 139 pages and 5 annexes. The text is accompanied by 38 figures 21 tables which make it very understandable. Total number of 148 references to mostly contemporary and academic sources prove deep author's interest in the studied issues and their knowledge.

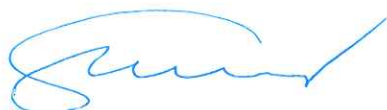
f) The statement on student publications

The list of 16 published student works is quite sufficient and impressive. She is author or co-author of 4 articles in journals and twelve international conference papers, which are mostly close to the content of the work.

Conclusion:

The presented doctoral thesis I found beneficial both in terms of a summary of theoretical approaches and in terms of gaining practical experience and opportunities to further support of social network analyses and Strategic Networking model.

I recommend definitely to approve the doctoral thesis of Mag. Eva Maria Eckenhofer for defense and after its successful performance to award her the degree Ph.D. in accordance with the Czech university law.



In Ostrava, 4th November, 2011
prof. Ing. Karel Skokan, Ph.D.