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Opponent's Review of the Doctoral Dissertation

Candidate: **Mag Milomir Vojvodic, M.Sc.**

Title of the Dissertation: **Data Compliance with Cross-Functional Governance
Team Leadership and Customer-Centric Operating Model**

Supervisor: prof. Ing. Jindřich Špička, Ph.D.

On August 9, 2019, Prof. Ing. Milan Nový, CSc. Dean of the Faculty of Business Administration commissioned with me an examiner's review of the doctoral dissertation entitled "Data Compliance with Cross-Functional Governance Team Leadership and Customer-Centric Operating Model" authored by Mag Milomir Vojvodic, M.Sc.

I provide this review as impartial and my efforts have been guided by the Exam and Study Regulations for doctoral programs at the University of Economics, Prague, whereas common attributes and requirements for doctoral theses in the Czech Republic, current state of knowledge in the field of the degree program and best academic practice for doctoral studies in business disciplines have been considered as well.

Research Problem, Goals and Hypotheses

The research problem as it is outlined in the introduction (thesis assignment has not been bound in the dissertation) is worth a scientific inquiry. The overall aim of the thesis is somewhat contradictory attempting to develop a model which is exploratory, practice oriented and predictive in nature.

Hypotheses should have been numbered in a way, which would enable primary hypotheses to be listed as H1-H4 and secondary hypotheses would come hereinafter. Hypothesis could have been more explicitly linked to the research problem and goals. It appears that the idea of inquiring about IT projects connected implementation of GDPR was a second thought.

Structure and Scientific Arguments

The thesis has been structured logically from broader to narrower topics. The thesis is developed from theoretical review across a research model, methodology and analysis, to results, discussion and a concluding section. Overall, the structure belongs to the stronger points of the thesis. Minor opportunities for further improvement include merging some sections together (possibly tucking 3.5 into 3.1; merging 3.4 and 3.6; or developing a research model at the end of literature review section). Discussion should have included references to the initial literature (how and which literature was extended). Conclusions should have explicitly stated implications/suggestions for theory, practice and/or policy.

Arguments have been mostly carefully developed from definitions to interpretation. Paragraphs and sections are discrete; linkages and cross-references have not been provided. Synthesis as well as clean cut definitions for certain key terms have been fuzzy. For instance, section 3.1.2 is supposed to develop a notion of business-line stakeholders. Nowhere in the section (or anywhere else in the thesis), it is mentioned who these stakeholders might be. It is then impossible to appreciate the flow of ideas, development of constructs or the research endeavors if it remains unclear, what was investigated. One group of business-line stakeholders are clearly customers, which means customers are both the input (labeled as “Line-of-Business Stakeholder Participation”) and the moderator/mediator variable (labeled as “Customer-Centric Orientation”) in the model.

Literature review is extensive and excessive. The thesis would benefit if the literature review was streamlined and if it was focused. Commonly, doctoral candidates struggle to narrow down their topic as they may tend to see connections of their domain to any walk of life (it is certainly the case here). Perhaps defining a list of key words and performing a systematic literature review could yield more targeted results. In addition, it is against principles of scientific work to come up with new notions and terms for established research constructs and to develop a completely distinct set of vocabulary. As a result, the model offered in the thesis is hazy and buried under empty words. It lacks disclosure of assumptions.

For example, nowhere it was documented why data governance leaders should use transformational leadership (see e.g. section 3.2.4) as opposed to transactional or versatile leadership styles (for instance). Whereas the thesis talks about IT/data governance projects, it does not consider project leaders (or project team leaders in the phraseology of PM Book). Project teams are cross-functional by definition and team leaders may not be the ones taking decisions on a number of team members or their backgrounds. The thesis does not provide any evidence (neither in the literature review, nor in the survey) that data governance/compliance is a source of innovation. And I could continue contesting just about every domain.

Language and Formal Aspects

The language of the thesis is understandable and meets expectations. At places, the candidate should have used less complicated phrases and break down sentences into brief statements (to both write in plain English and follow usual scientific logic of Occam's principles). The prime example of unnecessary and detrimental grandiloquence is the very title of the thesis, which lacks a meaning and does not capture the essence of the dissertation (the thesis does not focus on team leadership and/or on customer-centric operations).

Overall, the thesis meets formatting and citation guidelines. Frequent citations have been made throughout the thesis. Bibliographical references are not consistent – at places first names for authors are given, at places only initials are mentioned, at places a reference starts with a first name – e.g. “Chuck...”). There is no need to acknowledge a source “author” or “author’s own processing” [sic]. Each first level chapter shall start on a new page (incl. chapter 2, pg. 19). At places, minor typos or formatting omissions (e.g. repeated lines in table 6., pg. 129) can be identified.

Methods

Empirical research approach and methods have been a major weakness of the thesis. I am not aware of any established methodological literature, which would allow for a research to be exploratory and predictive at the same time (see pg. 112 at the bottom, for instance). The entire literature review is geared towards new conceptualization, hence exploratory research. Such a research would be unlikely to generate any implications for business practice (there are none offered in the concluding section anyway). The primary target of exploratory research could have been model validation, scale and measure development, in short some sort of contribution to the theory (however, the conclusion does not offer any implications for theory either).

The thesis builds on a survey among 98 IT professionals administered through social media (Linkedin) as a convenience sample. Again, a survey could have been used for exploratory research if the list of questions was rather extensive. However, the questionnaire consisted out of 11 statements and took 4 minutes to complete. Statements were rated by informants on a 5-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire should have been appended (well, the thesis claims there is an Appendix 1; on the contrary a thesis with no appendices was submitted). I object the development of the variables and constructs. There is a lack of understanding, how psychometric variables, measures and constructs shall be developed in social research (for instance, refer to seminal work of J.C. Nunnally).

Let me offer the following typical example from the thesis - the “construct” of “Data Compliance Innovation” is built on response to one (!) question of the following wording (see pg. 122):

“GDPR channel starts to be used in innovative ways to add value to customer engagement and to act on customer behaviors in order to drive trust, loyalty and even new services.”

Problems with such a common wording of “questions” in the survey include: multiple domains in one question (does value equal trust?, is trust the same as loyalty?, is there only service innovations?, what does that mean “GDPR channel”, is data compliance only GDPR?), empty phraseology (what is “starts to be used”) and misleading labelling (innovation is a not the main topic of the statement). Additionally, constructs by definition are not built on a single question/variable. Off course, Cronbach alphas for “constructs” built on one variable equal 1, there is no need to calculate that. It is unclear how the variable of “moderating effect 1” differs from the construct of “COO”.

Utilization of analytical (statistical) apparatus seems to be technically correct. Based on the ill methods mentioned above it does not come as a surprise, that the overall model validation produces inconclusive results. In short, the idea and its theoretical development have been worthwhile, but the operationalization and further empirical exploration are unlikely to receive any further scientific attention.

Questions to Be Asked at the Oral Defense

I suggest a discussion in front of the committee could evolve around the following questions:

1. What is the difference between a moderating and a mediating variable? What other factors beyond customer-centricity could moderate or mediate the relationship between data governance span and data governance project efficiency?
2. Provide a list of arguments supporting that GDPR adjustment was a typical data compliance project for businesses. Provide a list of arguments favoring that GDPR adjustment was not a typical data compliance project for businesses.
3. What is the difference between data governance and data compliance? Is the gap between data governance and data compliance in the European Union likely to be closing or getting wider?

Final Recommendation

The thesis presents an independent and original attempt for scientific inquiry. It provides new ideas for future research (especially in formulation of the research problem and in part in the literature review). Although it fails in sketching the empirical and analytical milieu for the problem, the candidate has been well aware of thesis' shortcomings (see section 7.3). Therefore, the thesis demonstrates the candidate had certainly learned along the doctoral path.

I suggest the doctoral dissertation to be defended in front of the doctoral committee. I believe the dissertation **meets the key requirements** for a candidate to be awarded **a doctoral degree** in the field of “Business Administration and Management”.

Nanjing, August 26, 2019