EXPERT OPINION
on the doctoral thesis titled
Clusters as a Tool for the Development of Human Resources to Strengthen the Competitive Advantage of the Firms

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

This doctoral thesis is focused on the role of human resource management within the implementation of cluster activities, which are related to efficiency and competitive ability of the firms. Clusters have become the significant topic in the economic and regional policies in both advanced and underdeveloped countries and international organizations in the last two decades. The majority of national and regional governments in the European Union gave the cluster policies their priorities and the European Commission organised after 2000 several studies on clusters and cluster policies in the member states. The clusters and innovation were involved in the economic policy strategies almost in all new member states, the successful examples may serve the Czech Republic. From this point of view the theme of doctoral dissertation is very timely and very demanding.

The achievements of defined aims and objectives

The author identified the main aim of the thesis as "to identify the impact of *HRM* and *Cluster* on the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)" and the main objective was to identify *the value of human resources in cluster activities* that enhance the competitive advantage of the firms. While the aim is expressed rather generally and broadly, the objective of the thesis is more explained in three research questions. Based upon the primary research in a quite large sample of respondents gained in three research tasks and the elaborated results in many comparable tables I am of the opinion the objective of the thesis was achieved. However the aim could be formulated also from different point of view as e.g. comparison of Indian and Czech clusters bring further valuable outputs.

The analysis of thesis, the methodology and results

The structure of work follows a prescribed standard of doctoral dissertations at the Faculty. The first chapter analyzes the current state of subject area. Briefly summarizes the concept of clusters and their theoretical background in a connection with human resources management and development and the significance of clustering and HRM to achieve the competitive advantage of firms. It emphasises or better tries to outline the role of HRM in clusters. The second chapter identifies the aim and objectives and offers the expected achievements from the theoretical, practical and academic point of view. According to the methodology of the thesis the primary research is based upon the survey of 165 clusters from 23 countries in the time span between 2007 – 2011. It is worth to question whether the 4 years period and in so

many countries in cluster research can bring the relevant results. The majority of investigated clusters come from Czechia, Poland, others from Slovakia, India and other so called developed countries. The last group is very heterogeneous and does not seem to have valuable or relevant meaning for the research. The author could explain according to which criteria these countries were selected and why. Anyway the methodological approach is described rather briefly and would deserve more explanation.

The main body of the thesis is presented in chapter four in which the experimental data from questionnaires are presented and the results are discussed. At first cluster activities from different countries are explored according to groups of countries and with the emphasis to HR activities. Then follows the assessment of cluster activities from different points of view. The results give an interesting picture of different groups of clusters (old and young or CEE and Developed countries), however the large amount of different views makes the results rather messy and would deserve their summarising and clear conclusions. Anyway, I appreciated the extent of research. On the other hand the forms of presented results are rather trivial, even if the attempt of description the statistical evidence about the significance of cluster activities is added in chapter 4.4.

In the second part of the research two case studies are presented based upon analysis of selected Czech clusters and Indian clusters. Again the question comes to mind how the clusters were selected and why. This part with final comparison of both studies gives good picture on cluster activities. However could the author explain in a discussion what did she follow and what she wanted to achieve by these case studies?

In final part of this chapter (4.8 Discussion) the author presents theoretical justification of her research question defined in the chapter two of the thesis and it refers to examples from literature. This part should be suited better in the theoretical part one and here the confirmation based on the research results were to be presented. Could the author in brief present, which parts of the research confirm the research questions?

The fifth chapter of the thesis outlines some general recommendations for raising the cluster and SMEs competitiveness which do not seem to be derived directly from the research outcomes but can be also found in literature on clusters.

Even if I raised some additional questions for discussion, the results in previous chapters four and five present a detailed view to the role of HRM in cluster development and can be considered as valuable conclusions for cluster development.

A statement on the significance of thesis for practice and science

I agree with the author on the potential benefits of work for theory and the practice even though the practical aspects of the thesis prevail. In the chapter four some theoretical models (figure 4.13, 4.16) are worth reasoning for the role of HRM and cluster development.

Practical recommendations in chapter 7.2 are rather general and mostly known and but the results of the research seem to confirm them. Another contribution of the thesis I would see in a comparison of Czech and Indian clusters. Could the author briefly present the main differences between them concerning HRM?

A statement on formal presentation and language level

Presentation of work is good and follows the standards-based school. The work of 173 pages includes many figures and tables which improve the comprehensibility of the text and is well written. In English some grammatical errors appear, however they do not have any significant impact upon intelligibility of the work itself.

A statement on student publications

Published student works are sufficient and I would dare to say in the time of submission of doctoral theses above average. She is co-author of five journal articles, one indexed in Scopus, co-author of chapter in three books and author or co-author eleven conference papers, which are close to the content of the work.

Conclusion:

Student in her doctoral thesis proved a good knowledge of studied problems concerning clusters and she also made an extended research in clusters focused to the achievement of defined objective of the thesis and assessment of the results gained.

I recommend to approve this phase of the study of Ms. Nibedita Saha and I recommend to submit the dissertation thesis for defence and to award the degree of Ph.D.

In Ostrava, 17th March, 2012
prof. Ing. Karel Skokan, Ph.D.