

THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SCHOOL - BOTEVGRAD

REVIEW

Regarding: the scientific, scientifically-applied and professional-academic activity and research output, presented in the competition for the academic position Associate Professor, announced by the International Business School – Botevgrad in the State Gazette, issue no. 8 of January 28, 2025

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Ivanka Vasileva Asenova, International Business School – Botevgrad

Candidate: Chief Assistant Dr. Irina Topuzova

I. Brief Biographical Data of the Candidate

The scientific output submitted for review by Dr. Irina Topuzova, the sole candidate in this competition, reflects her research and teaching activities following the award of her doctoral degree, covering the period from 2016 to 2025. The submitted documentation meets all the requirements set out in the procedure for conducting the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor.

The report on research metrics, prepared in accordance with current regulatory requirements and the rules of the International Business School, confirms that the candidate meets the minimum criteria across all six groups of indicators required for participation in the competition. Moreover, with a total of 563 points, she exceeds the minimum threshold for the academic position *Associate Professor*. I found no evidence of plagiarism in the submitted scientific works, nor am I aware of any proven instances of plagiarism, established through the legally prescribed procedure, in the candidate's academic output.

The information presented in the academic autobiography of Dr. Irina Topuzova clearly outlines her purposeful pursuit of sustainable professional development, the deepening of her scientific expertise, and her establishment in the theoretical and applied research of labor and organizational psychology, as well as gender psychology – fields that are dynamically evolving in contemporary psychological science. The stated focus of Dr. Topuzova's research, teaching, and project activities is thematically fully aligned with the professional domain in which the announced competition is being held.

Irina Topuzova obtained the educational and scientific degree *Doctor* (PhD) in the

professional field 3.2 Psychology, in PhD program “ Work Psychology and Professional Psychodiagnostics” in 2016 at South-West University “Neofit Rilski.” She also completed her higher education at the same university, earning a Master’s degree in Legal Psychology in 2010 and a Bachelor’s degree in Primary School Pedagogy and English in 2007.

Since 2011, she has held various academic positions at South-West University “Neofit Rilski”: part-time assistant (2011), assistant professor (2016), and chief assistant professor (2018) in Psychology / Work and Organizational Psychology/ in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy. Since 2021, she has been serving as a Chief Assistant Professor at the International Business School – Botevgrad.

The teaching workload report shows that Dr. Irina Topuzova is the principal lecturer for courses such as Social Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology, Intercultural Leadership and Teams, Organizational Development and Change Management, Fundamentals of Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences, among others, taught at both bachelor’s and master’s levels.

She is also the head of several master’s programs: Business Psychology, Human Resource Management and Work Psychology, and Organizational and Business Psychology, the latter of which is delivered in English.

Since obtaining her PhD, the candidate has participated in four international projects funded by EU programs and has authored a total of 18 publications, including two monographs, a book based on her dissertation, a chapter in a collective monograph, two studies, and twelve articles.

This does not fully encompass the professional activities of Dr. Irina Topuzova. She has been a member and official representative of Bulgaria in the Union of Young Researchers (ERU) (2014–2016), a member of the European Association of Developmental Psychology (EADP) (since 2021), and the Editor-in-Chief of the journal “Psychological Thought” (PsychOpen, Scopus), published by South-West University "Neofit Rilski" (2019–2020). Currently, Dr. Topuzova is the Secretary and a member of the Labor and Organizational Psychology section of the Bulgarian Psychological Society (since 2020), a member of the International Scientific Council of the annual international scientific conference at IBS (since 2022), and a reviewer for the journal Philosophy – a scientific and methodological publication of the "AzBuki" Publishing House, affiliated with the Ministry of Education and Science (since 2018).

The candidate also possesses impressive expert and administrative experience of in various fields: Expert (external evaluator) of project proposals under the Erasmus+ Program at

the Human Resources Development Center (HRDC) of the National Agency for the Republic of Bulgaria (since 2017), expert-trainer under the Operational Program “Science and Education for Smart Growth” (2020–2021) and the Operational Program for Administrative Capacity (2014–2016), Head of the Women’s Leadership Center at IBS (since 2021), Institutional Erasmus+ Coordinator at IBS (since 2021), and an expert witness for the Regional and Administrative Court, Blagoevgrad (class “Forensic Psychological Expertise of Mental State” – since 2020).

II. Assessment of the Candidate’s Scientific and Scientifically-Applied Output

The scientific works submitted for review (covering the period 2016–2025) provides an adequate theoretical foundation for the candidate’s public, administrative, and practical professional activities to date. In the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, Dr. Irina Topuzova participates with a scientific portfolio of 14 academic works, including: 2 monographs, 1 book developed based on her doctoral dissertation, 1 extended article (study), and 4 articles (only one co-authored) in Bulgarian; as well as, in English and in co-authorship – 1 chapter in a collective monograph, 1 extended article (study), and 4 articles, with the study and two of the articles published in scientific journals indexed and referenced in internationally recognized databases (Scopus & Web of Science).

The list of publications not submitted for review includes 4 articles, also in the thematic field of work and organizational psychology.

A review of the submitted research papers allows for their conditional grouping into six semantic fields, which highlight the dominant areas of Dr. Topuzova’s research interest, namely:

1. *Cross-cultural Psychology, Leadership, and Organizational Culture* (Monograph: (2025). *Organizational Culture and Leadership. The Cultural Leadership Code*. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House;

2. *Motivation Management in Organizational Settings* (Book based on the defended dissertation: (2024). *Motivation Management. Applying a Model for Motivational Diagnosis in a University Environment*. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House; Study: (2024). *Human Resource Management Practices and Organizational Commitment among Employees Working Online and On-site*. Research papers of IBS, Vol. 16, pp. 58–77; Article: (2018). *Educational Reform and Human Resource Management Practices in an Academic Environment*. In: *The Education at the Crossroads – Conditions, Challenges, Solutions and Perspectives* (pp. 72–76), Publisher:

Macedonian Science Society – Bitola, Republic of Macedonia; Article: Micro-political Practices in Higher Education: A Challenge to Excellence as a Rationalising Myth? *Critical Studies in Education* (Scopus & WoS), 61(2), 195–211; Article: (2016). Changes in Human Resource Management Practices and Work Motivation in an Academic Environment. In: *Achieving Excellence in Education, Employment and Human Resource Management*. "ValjevoPrint", Valjevo (pp. 147–162); Article: (2016). Structure of Work Motivation and Its Relationship with Job Satisfaction among University Lecturers. In: *Leadership and Organizational Development* (pp. 460–471), University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski"; Article: (2016). Organizational Effectiveness and Motivation of University Lecturers. In: *Leadership and Organizational Development* (pp. 90–99), University Press "St. Kliment Ohridski".

3. *Organizational Development and Organizational Diagnosis* (Monograph: (2025). Psychological Dimensions of Organizational Effectiveness. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House.

4. *The Role of Work-Life Balance and Its Relationship to Workplace Stress and Burnout* (Article: (2024). Demographic Factors and Their Influence on Coping Strategies for Stress in Organizational Settings. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Economic Growth, Business Perspectives, Market Positioning in Times of Crisis", Sofia, pp. 406–423. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House.

5. *Psychological Phenomena and Cognitive Biases in Organizational Settings* (Article: (2024). Cognitive Biases: Nature and Impact in the Business Environment. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference "Economic Growth, Business Perspectives, Market Positioning in Times of Crisis", Sofia, pp. 424–439. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House.

6. *Gender Psychology* (Book Chapter: (2020). Family, Career Progression and Gendered Academic Citizenship. Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.; Study: (2016). Perpetuating Academic Capitalism and Maintaining Gender Orders through Career Practices in STEM in Universities. *Critical Studies in Education*, 60(2), 205–225.; Article: (2019). Mentoring and Sponsorship in Higher Education Institutions: Men's Invisible Advantage in STEM? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(4), 764–777.

The candidate's research contribution and creative presence are clearly evident in the two monographs: (1) *Organizational Culture and Leadership. Cultural Leadership Code*. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House, and (2) *Psychological Dimensions of Organizational Effectiveness*. Botevgrad: IBS Publishing House.

The monograph "Organizational Culture and Leadership. Cultural Leadership Code" presents an original and interdisciplinary perspective on the complex interrelation between organizational cultural characteristics and leadership practices. At the core of the study is the

concept of the Cultural Leadership Code (CLC) – an analytical framework through which the mechanisms of compatibility or tension between organizational culture and leadership style are interpreted. Dr. Topuzova traces how traditionally established models that assume a logical alignment between cultural profiles and leadership approaches often diverge from actual management practices, which require the search for adaptive and at times paradoxical solutions. She explores the Cultural Leadership Code (CLC) in both theoretical and applied contexts, developing a typology, a methodological framework for analysis, and a comparative evaluation of cultural and leadership parameters. A key contribution of the work lies in the author's ability to connect internal organizational cultural dynamics with external (national and cross-cultural) influences, offering a model for interpreting leadership in contexts of diversity, transformation, and crisis. The author demonstrates a profound understanding of the psychological and emotional aspects of leadership, as well as the importance of the leader's personal qualities in processes of cultural adaptation. The included case studies and practical observations enrich the theoretical foundations and emphasize the importance of flexible, contextually grounded leadership strategies. The monograph is a valuable addition to contemporary organizational theory, offering innovative tools for analyzing and managing cultural complexity within leadership processes.

The second monograph – “Psychological Dimensions of Organizational Effectiveness” – presents an in-depth study of organizational effectiveness through the lens of psychological factors, with a focus on the specific characteristics of the public sector. Dr. Topuzova constructs a conceptual and empirical framework that integrates classical and contemporary theories of organizational effectiveness with psychological approaches, demonstrating that effectiveness cannot be fully understood outside the context of cultural, leadership, and individual-behavioral determinants. A particular contribution of the study is its emphasis on the interaction between organizational culture, leadership styles, and human resource management practices. The monograph presents a rich body of empirical data collected from public higher education institutions in Bulgaria, which makes it possible to identify dominant cultural models, leadership profiles, and corresponding management practices. The concluding section offers a comprehensive analysis outlining significant variations depending on the institutional environment, individual characteristics of the employees, and their positional role within the organization. With this monograph, Dr. Irina Topuzova successfully argues for the necessity of an integrated and multilayered approach to organizational effectiveness, showing how psychological dimensions play a key role in the sustainable development of organizations. The proposed framework outlines valuable theoretical and practical perspectives for application

across various organizational contexts, particularly in times of change, transformation, and the need to adapt to the contemporary environment.

III. Citations

The citation report lists an impressive total of 187 citations in scientific publications that are referenced and indexed in internationally recognized scientific databases, with 114 citations in Scopus and 73 in Web of Science. This fact clearly attests to the significant impact of the candidate's scholarly work within the global academic community, as well as to her recognition in the research field, particularly in the areas of gender psychology, cross-cultural psychology, and work and organizational psychology.

IV. Key Contributions to the Candidate's Scientific, Applied, and Teaching Activities

Among the qualities of Dr. Irina Topuzova is her ability, on the one hand, to summarize and structure scientific knowledge with clarity and precision in the development of original theoretical models, and on the other, to test these models through well-planned and methodologically grounded empirical research. It is particularly noteworthy that her studies are based on a solid theoretical foundation, supported by empirical data, and the results obtained show potential for practical application in the fields of human resource management, organizational behavior, and strategic development.

I fully support the stated contributions related to the broad range of conceptual and empirical developments aimed at diagnosing and optimizing leadership and organizational processes, which I would comment on as follows:

1. Creatively formulated concept of the Cultural Leadership Code (CLC) and a model developed on its basis, which integrates specific cultural characteristics and leadership behaviors, and can be used for diagnosing and optimizing managerial practices.

2. Development of a scientifically grounded model for motivational diagnostics in academic settings, which analyzes the relationship between the psychological needs of faculty members and their productivity, and holds significance for the effective management of human capital in the academic sector.

3. A large-scale cross-cultural study has been conducted, identifying key organizational models in European universities and comparing their practices with those in the Bulgarian academic environment. This provides a foundation for reforms and the implementation of best practices aimed at improving governance and academic productivity.

4. Research contributing to the understanding of the impact of reward systems, mentorship, and institutional barriers related to gender equality on academic productivity and career development, as well as on the challenges and mechanisms for successful management reforms in higher education.

5. Research contributing to the understanding of the factors that influence organizational commitment, organizational effectiveness, innovation, and management across various professional and institutional contexts.

VII. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

The identified contributions in Dr. Irina Topuzova's scholarly work reflect, in a synthesized form, the main focal points, thematic cores, and achievements of her overall research activity. They demonstrate consistency, academic depth, and a sustained interest in contemporary issues of high theoretical and practical relevance.

VIII. Summary Conclusion

Based on the above findings, resulting from the review of the complete documentation provided in the procedure, as well as the analysis of the scholarly work, I hereby express, with full professional satisfaction and conviction, my strong support for the awarding of the academic position of Associate Professor to Dr. Irina Topuzova in Field of Higher Education: Social, Economic, and Legal Sciences, Professional Field 3.2: Psychology (Work and Organizational Psychology).

23.04.2025 г.

Signature: