



OPINION

From: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mariana Nikolova Usheva, International Business School, Scientific specialty 3.7. "Administration and Management"

Subject: *Competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" at the International Business School, field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Labor and organizational psychology), announced in the State Gazette, issue 8 of January 28, 2025.*

1. Competition information

The competition for the position of "Associate Professor", in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Labor and organizational psychology) was announced in the State Gazette, issue 8 of January 28, 2025, for the International Business School.

This opinion was assigned by a decision of the Scientific Jury, determined by Order 032/31.03.2025 of the Rector of the International Business School, Botevgrad.

2. Brief information about the candidates in the competition

The only candidate in the competition is Dr. Irina Topuzova, Chief Assistant Professor at the International Graduate School of Business.

Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Topuzova holds a Bachelor's degree in Primary School Pedagogy and English Language (2007) and a Master's degree in Psychology with a specialization in Legal Psychology (2010) from Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad.

The educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional field 3.2. Psychology was defended in 2016 again at Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, with the topic of the dissertation "Educational Reform and Motivation of the University Lecturer".

Her professional path includes many years of teaching at the Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski", where, starting as the administrative head of the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Philosophy (Sept. 2007 - Dec. 2015), she successively held the positions of part-time assistant (Sept. 2007 - Dec. 2015), assistant (Sept. 2016 - June 2018) and chief assistant (June 2018 - Nov. 2021) in the professional field 3.2. Psychology (Labor and Organizational Psychology). Since November 2021, she has been a chief assistant in the PN 3.2 Psychology/Labor and Organizational Psychology at the International Business School (IBS), Sofia.

Dr. Irina Topuzova is an external evaluator of project proposals under the Erasmus + Program at the Center for Human Resources Development (CHRD) - Sofia, and participates in several projects funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, 7th EU Framework Programme, ERASMUS Programme. From 2020 to 2021 she is an expert - trainer under the Operational Programme "Science and Education for Smart Growth", co-financed by the European Union through the European Structural and Investment Funds., FIVE CONSULT Ltd, Sofia and the Operational Programme for Administrative Capacity (OPAC)., Alexander Business Center – ABC Ltd., Blagoevgrad.

Dr. Topuzova is the editor-in-chief of the journal "Psychological Thought", published by Southwestern University "Neofit Rilski" from 2019 to 2020.

He is the Secretary of the "Work and Organizational Psychology" section of the Society of Psychologists in the Republic of Bulgaria.

She is currently a leading administrative figure at the University of Business Administration - head of master's programs ("Business Psychology", "Human Resources Management and Work Psychology" and "Organizational and Business Psychology" (in English), head of the Center for Women's Leadership and institutional coordinator for the Erasmus+ program.

3. Fulfillment of the requirements for holding the academic position

3.1. Fulfillment of quantitative requirements

According to the submitted report, Dr. Topuzova has accumulated a total of 563 points by indicator groups, with a minimum requirement of 400 points for the position of associate professor in professional field 3.2. Psychology. The candidate fully meets the requirements for volume, type and structure of scientific publications, citations and teaching experience

3.2. Fulfillment of quality requirements

14 scientific works are presented, of which two are independent monographs, a book based on a defended dissertation, one chapter of a collective monograph, two studies and eight articles, as follows:

| Post type | Description | Co-authorship | Year | Language |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------|-----------------|
| Habilitation thesis | Topuzova, I. Organizational culture and leadership. Cultural leadership code. Botevgrad: Publishing house of MVBU. ISBN: 978-619-7610-34-5 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15068456 | | 2025 | Bulgarian |
| Monograph | Topuzova, I. Psychological Dimensions of Organizational Effectiveness. Botevgrad: Publishing House of the Bulgarian Institute of Management. ISBN 978-619-7610-40-6 https://zenodo.org/records/15105625 | | 2025 | Bulgarian |
| Chapter from a collective monograph | Topuzova, I. et al. Family, Career Progression and Gendered Academic Citizenship. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. ISBN 978-3-030-52599-6 / 978-3-030-52600-9 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-52600-9_5 | Tan, Sağlamer, Çaglayan, O'Hagan, O'Connor, Baisner, Myers, Apostolov | 2020 | English |

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|--|---|--|------|-----------|
| A book based on a dissertation | Topuzova, I. Motivation Management. Application of a Motivational Diagnosis Model in a University Environment. Botevgrad: Publishing House of the Bulgarian University of Business Administration. ISBN: 978-619-7610-30-7 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14713163 | | 2024 | Bulgarian |
| Studies (unrefereed edition) | Topuzova, I. Human resource management practices and organizational commitment among workers in online and physical environments. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14637613 | | 2024 | Bulgarian |
| Studies (refereed edition, Scopus & WoS) | Topuzova, I. et al. Perpetuating academic capitalism and maintaining gender orders through career practices in STEM in universities. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2016.1238403 | O'Hagan, O'Connor, Myers, Baisner, Apostolov, Çağlayan | 2016 | English |
| Article (refereed edition, Scopus & WoS) | Topuzova, I. et al. Mentoring and sponsorship in higher education institutions: men's invisible advantage in STEM? https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1686468 | O'Connor, O'Hagan, Myers, Baisner, Apostolov, Çağlayan | 2019 | English |
| Article (refereed edition, Scopus & WoS) | Topuzova, I. et al. Micro-political practices in higher education: a challenge to excellence as a rationalizing myth? https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2017.1381629 | López, O'Hagan, Wolfram, Aye, Chizzola, Çağlayan | 2017 | English |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Topuzova, I. Demographic factors and their influence on stress coping strategies in an organizational environment. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12641/81990 | | 2024 | Bulgarian |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Topuzova, I. Cognitive biases: nature and influence in a business environment. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12641/81991 | | 2024 | Bulgarian |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Ilieva, S., Topuzova, I. Educational reform and human resource management practices in an academic environment. | Ilieva | 2018 | English |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Ilieva, S., Topuzova, I. Changes in the human resource management practices and work motivation in academic environment. | Ilieva | 2016 | English |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Topuzova, I. Structure of work motivation and relationships with job satisfaction among university lecturers. | | 2016 | Bulgarian |
| Article (non-refereed edition) | Ilieva, S., Topuzova, I. Organizational effectiveness and motivation of university lecturers. | Ilieva | 2016 | Bulgarian |

Three of the publications are indexed in international databases (WoS and Scopus), and the total number of citations reaches 187, of which 114 in Scopus and 73 in Web of Science. All works meet the requirements of the Law on Scientific and Technical Research of the Republic of Bulgaria and are relevant to the topic of the competition.

4. Evaluation of teaching and learning activities

Dr. Topuzova has proven teaching experience in the field of work and organizational psychology, teaching at the bachelor's and master's levels. She directs master's programs in "Business Psychology", "Human Resources Management and Work Psychology" and "Organizational and Business Psychology" (in English). She is the author of educational and methodological developments, supervises graduate students and participates in numerous initiatives related to the development of higher education.

5. Brief description of the presented scientific papers/publications

The candidate's scientific output is distinguished by a variety of topics, depth of analysis and high quality of research approaches. The monographs "Organizational Culture and Leadership. Cultural Leadership Code" (463 pp.) and "Psychological Dimensions of Organizational Effectiveness" (136 pp.) are significant works that offer innovative models for studying the cultural and psychological aspects of organizational behavior and leadership. The remaining publications address important topics such as cognitive biases, organizational commitment, equality and management strategies in the academic and public sectors.

6. A synthesized assessment of the candidate's main scientific and applied scientific contributions

The presented scientific works of Senior Asst. Prof. Dr. Irina Topuzova are characterized by high theoretical validity, clearly defined research goals and empirically confirmed results. They offer modern and original solutions to key issues in the field of labor and organizational psychology, demonstrating the ability for interdisciplinary analysis and strategic thinking. Her main scientific and applied scientific contributions are synthesized as follows:

1. Formulation and validation of the concept of a cultural leadership code (CLC) – an innovative model for diagnosing and developing leadership practices in a multicultural organizational context.
2. Development of a model for motivational diagnostics in the academic environment, linking individual and organizational factors with teaching and research effectiveness.
3. Comparative analysis of organizational cultures in higher education in a European context, with identification of good practices and recommendations for structural adaptation in the Bulgarian academic environment.
4. Empirical evidence on the relationship between reward systems and academic productivity, including the influence of social incentives such as recognition and development.
5. An analysis of the importance of mentoring and sponsorship in the academic sector, with guidelines for building sustainable models for supporting young and marginalized scholars.
6. Identification of structural barriers to the career development of women in science and proposals for overcoming them through institutional policies and good European practices.
7. Conceptualizing the role of work-life balance for organizational commitment and policy proposals for flexible employment.
8. Identifying psychological factors as predictors of organizational effectiveness, including

emotional intelligence and perceptions of justice.

9. Identifying the challenges and mechanisms for successful governance reforms in higher education with proposals for effective institutional approaches.

10. Developing strategic guidelines for improving organizational culture in the public sector with specific recommendations to promote innovation, accountability and effective management.

I fully accept the formulated scientific and applied scientific contributions of the candidate, as they are the result of a thorough theoretical basis, a clearly defined research strategy and rich empirical material. The contributions reflect current challenges in the field of labor and organizational psychology and offer applicable solutions with high scientific, social and practical value. They demonstrate the candidate's ability to build interdisciplinary models, integrate international experience and propose specific policies and tools aimed at improving management practices and human capital development.

7. Main criticisms and recommendations

The candidate demonstrates high theoretical preparation, empirical competence and an interdisciplinary approach. I recommend that in her future scientific activity, the scope of applied research be expanded, by strengthening the transfer of results to practice and working towards the creation of international research networks.

8. Conclusion

Based on the submitted materials, the scientific research output and the proven teaching qualifications, I give **a categorically positive opinion** to the candidate for the academic position of "associate professor" and recommend to the esteemed Scientific Jury to propose, in accordance with the procedure determined at the International Business School, that **Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Irina Topuzova be elected to occupy the academic position of "associate professor"** in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Labor and organizational psychology).

Sofia,
25. 04. 2025

Signature:
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