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Intercultural interactions in the German subsidiary operating in Poland-a case study

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to identify the benefits and weaknesses arising from intercultural interactions arising between foreigners and local staff in the German subsidiary operating in Poland. The research procedure was a case study, and a method was 12 semi-structured interviews with Polish managers.

Research problems concerned the general perception of the Polish managers in relation to cooperation with foreigners. The respondents indicated the benefits and problems of this cooperation, as well as practical guidance (advice) to improve these interactions. This case study enriched the empirical achievements in the area of the new trend in management sciences, which is the positive organizational scholarship (POS).

Key words: intercultural interactions, expatriates, positive organizational scholarship (POS)

Introduction

The development and geographical expansion of international corporations causes that increasingly more often it is necessary to deal with cultural diversity and teams consisting of employees of different nationalities. The cooperation of expatriates with local management results in a number of intercultural interactions which are both negative and positive.

Individuals who work with foreigners in multinational subsidiaries are involved in intercultural (cross-cultural) interactions. These contacts can be seen as a particular form of interpersonal relationships where universal elements (human nature) and specific ones (personality and culture), all in all, collide one another [Rozk-witalska, 2011, p.57].

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Significance of cultural factor in business activity of international companies

The significance of culture is a very important factor of international business environment as it determines the needs of people and - thus - of the market. This, in turn, implies the selection and adaptation of marketing, financial, personal and other strategies. Different values acquired in the process of socialization by people from different cultures influence their attitudes and behavior in their workplace, define their interpersonal relationships. In an international company, the inclusion of the cultural factor in personnel-related activities has the form of - to give an example - different approach to motivation of employees, manner of work organisation, solution of conflicts, or conduct of negotiations.

The research by R. Reida [2008] reveals that 79% of polled American employees work for companies that have branches throughout the world, and 88% of respondents work with people representing different cultures.

The necessity of working and spending time with foreigners at workplace or in private life makes people reflect and take a stance on the unknown 'Other'. According to R. Kapuściński [2006], encountering the Other is a real challenge for the 21st century as, admittedly, others are the Others but for the Others - I am the Other in fact. In the age of global society, revolution in technology, communication and relocation, we will meet a new Other all the time and we should be prepared for such a meeting. This individual aspect of perceiving the cultural diversity is noticed by the authors of UNDP Human Development Report [2004]: "*Expanding cultural freedoms needs urgent attention in the world of the 21st century that needs both greater respect for diversity and stronger commitment to unity.*"

However, according to M. Kostera and M. Śliwa [2012, p. 74], though it is important to recognize the significance of knowledge about cultural differences, its acquisition is not an easy issue. Culture constitutes a kind of "glasses" through which we perceive the surrounding world and also a point of reference for assessing other cultures. Looking at others from the angle of our own culture defines before-

hand what we consider as 'normal' even if we are not aware that some solutions and systems developed within a given context are treated by us as universal ones.

The significance of culture in relation to organisation is considerable. From among 16 main reasons for failures of mergers and takeovers, almost half of them is related to cultural determinants [Purgal-Popiela, 2004, p.73]. At this point, we can quote F. Trompenaars [2002, p. 21]: "*Culture is the context in which things happen; out of context, even legal matters lack significance*". And pursuant to G. Hofstede, "*cultural factors plus economic factors explain in 85% the values characteristic of a given society*" [as cited in Durska, 2003, p. 29].

Cultural diversity in work teams - positive and negative outcomes

Even if we can define some common core of values (e.g. the employees are convinced that the values declared in the corporate mission are right) or we unify the external form (e.g. physical artefacts such as clothing), than we have still plenty of space left for differences. Thus, the organisations incorporate the spheres of shared and unified values but also the spheres of differences [Glinka, Jelonek, 2010, p. 57].

Cultural diversity may be defined as co-existence in a group whose members are different in terms of sex, age, nationality, and other characteristics. The essence of diversity is not only the aspect of multinationality but also of other characteristics which may divide and cause conflicts in a group [Griffin, 2004, p. 178]. According to N. Adler [as cited in Glinka, Kostera, Brzozowska, 2012, p. 295], cultural diversity has both **positive** and **negative** outcomes. The first group includes expansion of meanings, greater openness to new ideas and points of view, increase in the possibilities of choice in the organisation due to the possibility of creating more diverse options.

In response to changes in this area in the markets and the social sphere, the concept of 'diversity management' is emerging [Wziątek-Staśko, 2012], which concept has been more and more popular in the world and Poland for two decades. Diversity management refers mainly to building the awareness and acceptance of sociodemographic differences in an organisation and to undertaking activities that give the possibility of using such differences to the benefit of the organisation. They may be of **observable** character and be related to sex, age, race, ethnic origin. The second type of differences is of **non-observable** character and refers to people's feeling of identity in relation to other groups of employees. It refers to - for example - the area of professional experiences, work seniority in an organisation, attitude to life, life style [Juchnowicz, 2014, p. 23].

In the mid of the 90s of the last century in the literature the distinction between **multiculturalism** and **interculturalism** has been established. Multiculturalism requires first of all the recognition of cultural diversity in a given area and the guaranteed right of peaceful coexistence for all cultures [Bolten, 2006]. Multicultural

coexistence means a situation in a particular social space groups representing different cultural traditions.

Interculturalism emphasizes the interpenetration of cultures and cooperation. Furthermore, F. G. Stevens et al. [as cited in Rozkwitalska, 2012, p. 21] notice that interculturalism acts as a catalyst for changes through the development of social capital and positive interpersonal relationships. Other positive effects of intercultural interactions described in the literature on the subject include the increase in creativity, productivity, adaptability, satisfaction, improvement in communication [Stahl et al., 2010], better understanding of foreign employees, more effective cooperation with foreign clients, better marketing qualifications in the scope of foreign client services, improved creativity [Glinka, Kostera, Brzozowska, 2012].

Negative outcomes of cultural diversity and specified barriers in multicultural teams may include increased uncertainty connected with a higher level of diversity, problems in agreeing on activities and meanings, problems and errors in communication which make shared understanding difficult [Glinka, Kostera, Brzozowska, 2012, p. 295]. The sources of cultural barriers which hinder the effective functioning of multicultural teams include such factors as [Rozkwitalska, 2011, p. 176]:

- cultural distance,
- organisational factors (e.g. strategic orientation of the headquarters, limitations in the scope of HRM practices),
- factors rooted in an individual (e.g. ethnocentric attitudes¹, weak communication, making initial assumptions and being directed by stereotypes in relation to foreigners).

Given the foregoing positive and negative outcomes of cultural diversity, it is worth emphasising at this point that the literature on the subject from the last decade is particularly focused on the issue of influence of positive interactions on the effectiveness of multicultural teams and the entire organisation [Stahl et al., 2010; Luthans et al., 2007]. The concept known as Positive Organisational Scholarship by Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton and Robert E. Quinn [2003] is rooted in positive psychology and is focused on studying and description of the so-called positive deviance cases in organisations [Stahl et al., 2010, p. 441]. The representatives of the POS try to highlight those mechanisms in organisations, the so-called positive spirals of flourishing [Bernstein, 2003], which contribute to the creation of superior or unexpected (but positive) effects at the level of individuals, groups and organisations.

The followers of this trend notice that the organisations that are focused on cultivating positive emotions and characteristics in their employees such as trust, optimism and vigour, contribute to the achievement of much higher level of such

¹ More information about the causes and effects of individual and institutional ethnocentrism can be found in Przytuła S., 2014, pp. 131-132.

employees' commitment and job satisfaction [Youssef & Luthans, 2007, pp. 774–800] and better financial results [Ramlall, 2008, pp. 1580-1600].

Positive psychology specifies well-being in relation to an individual which includes four elements: positive emotion, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment. An organisation may build on positive potential of individuals and the level of such positives depends on how many positive emotions a human being has, what meaning a human being finds in their life, how much positive are their relationships with others, and whether a human being has any accomplishments [Seligman, 2011].

According to M. Rozkwitalska [2012, p. 17], **intercultural interactions** - as a special form of interpersonal relations in terms of the POS - constitute the mechanisms explaining the creation of positive effects in organisations.

For a long time, the Gallup Institute has been realising the potential of studying positive phenomena in organisations. For 30 years, it has carried out the research on people's talents and strengths. Their results have become the basis for constructing a new tool being the StrengthFinder which enables the managers to manage their people based on their strengths and not competence gaps. In turn, the researchers from the University of Michigan developed a workshop method called Reflected Best Self (RBS) which enables the identification of workshop participants' strengths and the development of appropriate activities in managing their personal and professional development [as cited in Kalinowska, 2006].

At this point, it seems appropriate to discuss the study conducted in the scope of international managerial staff in relation to mutual perception in business relationships. Its objective is to specify both positive and negative aspects of mutual cooperation between foreigners and Polish staff being the result of subjective perspective and judgement of multicultural team members.

And thus, in the foreigners' opinion, Polish managers are hard-working, courageous, friendly, resourceful, with good knowledge of foreign languages. The English and the Germans view Polish managers as individualists while they consider themselves as those able to work in teams. On the other hand, it is also worth showing how Polish managers perceive their work with foreigners. Conducted studies show that the level of cultural tolerance in Polish managerial staff is quite high. Polish managers would be the most willing to hire an European, then an Asian, and further places were taken by the Americans, employees originating in South America and Africa. Polish managers attached the greatest significance to education and professionalism of co-employees and not to skin colour, religion or country of origin. The results of the study also showed that Polish managers have problems with overcoming stereotypes which function in general consciousness of the Poles - as stated by 28% of respondents; 39% of respondents were not able to give an explicit response [Simpson, 2010, p. 58].

The studies including the employees in subsidiaries of international corporation in Poland prove that the positives prevail in the intercultural interactions, which grossly contributes to the development and “flourishing” of individuals. The respondents specified such benefits from the cooperation with foreigners as personal development, flexible management style, auto-reflexivity, expansion of perspectives, willingness to learn, more effective communication, confrontation with stereotypes [Rozkwitalska et al., 2014].

The group of 29 Polish managers covered by the study who cooperate with foreigners on an everyday basis were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of such cooperation. Pursuant to 85% of Polish managers, expatriates are needed in Polish subsidiaries, and the balance of *pros and cons* of their presence in Polish subsidiaries gives a positive result. Polish staff indicated the international experience as the foreigners’ strength: “Expats’ horizons of experience are wide - they have usually worked in several countries”, “They know Western practices and standards in the scope of staff management”. In addition, Polish staff emphasised the expatriates’ roles as ambassadors and liaisons between the headquarters and a subsidiary: “Expats usually have contacts in the headquarters and the corporate culture is rooted in their minds”, “They single out with their knowledge of procedures and corporate methods of work”. Yet, the highest number of positives referred to expats’ knowledge and competencies: “They are often depositories of know-how and are experts in a given area; they also have the ability to transfer their knowledge to others”, “They are very good in foreign languages (English, French, German)”, “They are communicative”, “They may transfer knowledge, innovation, as well as proven products and solutions (in the countries they have worked, not widespread in Poland yet)” [Przytuła, 2014b, p. 16].

Research methodology and case study results

The case study is a typical procedure for idiographic research focused on the examination of phenomena which - by nature - are difficult to generalise [Chelpa, 2010, p. 472]. Moreover, it is especially recommended in the scope of acquiring the knowledge about those study areas which lack consolidated knowledge. According to K. Jajuga, it is a procedure of exploratory nature, which has just started to search for knowledge and variables that may explain the problem being the subject matter of the research procedure and bring a solution to it closer [as cited in Chelpa, 2010, p. 483]. Given the fact that the issues related to intercultural interactions and their diagnosis in subsidiaries of international corporations operating in Poland are underrepresented in the literature on the subject, and also that we are dealing at present with the formation of a new trend in the sciences related to management, that is Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS), then the choice of this research procedure may be considered as justified.

The objective of the study was to identify the positive and negative forms of intercultural interactions between foreigners and local staff in a subsidiary of a German corporation operating in Poland. The case study discussed in this article is one of five case studies conducted in subsidiaries of foreign corporations in Poland within a wider research project financed by the National Science Center in Poland (the research grant no. 2013/09/B/HS4/00498).

The methods applied in this procedure include the analysis of documentation carried out based on the materials made available by the company, and on the corporate websites of the subsidiary and the headquarters of the corporation, as well as interviews. Semi-structured interviews lasting about 60-75 min. were conducted in April 2014 and involved a group of 12 Polish managers cooperating with foreigners on an everyday basis. The research problems determined in relation to the empirical objective of this study have a form of the following questions:

1. What are the first associations concerning professional cooperation with foreigners?
2. Are described benefits of mutual cooperation with foreigners relate primarily to organization, whether they are also personal benefits?
3. What problems can be observed in association with foreigners?
4. What should be done in order to improve the cooperation with foreigners?

The study was carried out in the German subsidiary that was established on the Polish market in 1997 in the form of greenfield investment. The whole X corporation still has 5 other units (subsidiaries) on Polish territory and operates within such sectors as: automotive and industrial technologies, products and services for professional and private use. In the researched subsidiary R.B. currently work approx. 400 people, including 10 expatriates who were sent directly from the German headquarter. Plant Manager is German and the other foreigners (Turks, Indians, French, Germany) are in the rank of directors or heads of departments. The duration of a foreign mission in Poland for these expatriates is 4 years.

At this point, it is worth paying attention to a special place taken by the issue of cultural diversity in the strategy of the entire corporation. The X corporation employs more than 300,000 employees representing 200 cultures, and it operates in 300 locations in almost 150 countries. About 90 percent of research teams are international teams. The basis of good cooperation within such teams is the intercultural management. The occurrence of regional and cultural differences among the company employees and their individual strengths are treated as a valuable resource and one of global success factors. It is reflected in the code of values and the German Diversity Charter signed by the X corporation and issued by the federal government.

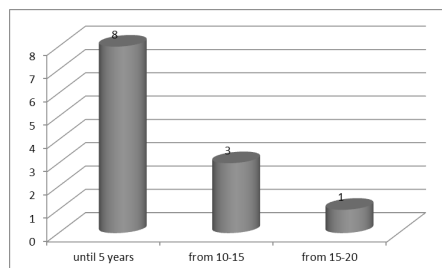
Moreover, within the diversity management program implemented by all subsidiaries of this corporation throughout the world, different forms of diversity are promoted:

- Hiring and promoting female specialists and executives has been one of the strategic priorities in corporate development since 2010. The aim is for 20 percent of all executive positions worldwide to be filled by women by 2020.
- Age management. What matters is the combination of practical experience and fresh ideas. The goal is to create a working environment where up to four generations can work together – from the approximately 6,500 apprentices worldwide to the more than 1,600 former associates over 65 who continue their commitment to corporation as senior experts. This results in an intergenerational exchange
- Intercultural competence. People from over 60 nations come together at corporation X, so intercultural competence is part of daily round. The whole corporation leverage diversity, pooling and sharing the collective cultural knowledge with the help of intercultural courses, language courses and individual development programs. The company also encourage employees to undertake periods of work outside their home countries and also actively promote mutual acceptance and appreciation among the different people who work at corporation X – for instance, through networks, forums and various events.
- Work-life balance. Corporation X promotes a working culture in which associates can balance their professional commitment and their personal goals. Flexible working hours and home office arrangements are established components of this approach.

The area of activity oriented to diversity management is one of the key strategic objectives of the entire corporation, and individual undertakings and activities of local units in this scope show that it is not only about “slogans” but actual initiatives.

As far as the group of respondents in this case study is concerned, the interviews have been done with 12 people, of which 7 women and 5 men. The majority of participants in the study (8 people) are aged 30-39, 3 people are aged 40-49, and there is one respondent aged 20-29. The majority of respondents work in this subsidiary not longer than 5 years (Figure 1).

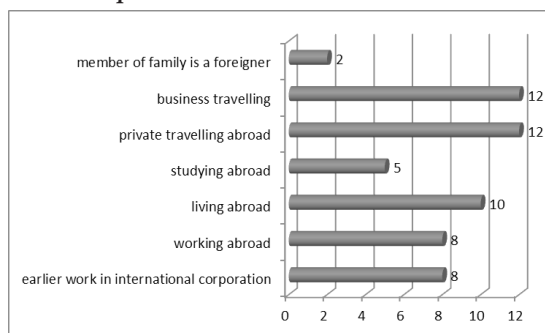
Figure 1. Seniority of respondents in subsidiary



Source: own research

The demographics questions also included the questions about the forms of the respondents' contact with interculturalism in their work so far. All respondents indicated foreign business and private trips, majority of the respondents lived or worked abroad, and also experienced the interculturalism during their earlier work in international corporations (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Contact of respondents with interculturalism



Source: own research

The study results obtained within the interviews which constitute the answers to the formed research questions are presented below:

Ad.1) What are the first associations concerning professional cooperation with foreigners?

The respondents gave the following associations listed herein in a concise manner: difficulties, challenge, nationality, foreign language, behaviour, otherness, new experience, greater knowledge, stereotypes, personal efforts in the scope of establishing relationships, overcoming oneself, administrative problems.

The answers including positive associations referred to personal challenges, contact with foreign language, deriving knowledge and experience from foreigners, obtaining another perspective of perceiving oneself and others. Some examples of quotes from the study:

Respondent C: *“For me, it is first of all a new cultural experience which also facilitates my language and procedural development as upon accepting a foreigner to our subsidiary, I have to learn the procedures and provisions of law that are effective in such a foreigner’s country. I would like to also see how those systems differ from each other to make an expat feel good in our country so he/she is not surprised with some regulations that are not effective in his/her home country.”*

Respondent K: *“I like cooperating with foreigners as I have mastered here English, overcome barriers and learnt new cultural customs.”*

Negative associations connected with the cooperation with foreigners referred to such issues as stereotypes, language problems, effort connected with learning new things, administrative problems. Examples of answers are as follows:

Respondent A: *“The first association is maybe ‘difficulties’ which are a kind of challenge. Besides, the work with foreigners means to me that some activities have to be done ‘in a different way’, translated and adapted to the foreigners’ needs and their level of perception, knowledge.”*

Respondent L: *“A new foreigner means new problems with settlement of invoices, payment of bills for their children’s school, rent of accommodation, and thus - mainly more administrative work. Besides, the time - as it is first necessary to explain in English our specific tax provisions, procedures, regulations, which always prolongs communication.”*

Ad.2) Are described benefits of mutual cooperation with foreigners relate primarily to organization, whether they are also personal benefits?

Table 1 presents all the benefits mentioned by respondents that they held personally, as well as the advantages of working with foreigners, which gains the whole organization:

Table 1. Benefits of working with foreigners, which relates to the individual and to the organization

Personal benefits	Benefits for organization
broadens awareness	Benchmarking-subsiary in Poland can take advantage of solutions already used in other locations
develops tolerance	networking-network of interpersonal contacts around the world
getting to know another culture, style, and organization of work	sharing knowledge and experience
speaking foreign language	over 100 years of business in different markets is a mine of know-how for the Polish subsidiary
learns to look from a different perspective on himself	creativity of a workforce-collaboration of many different people in one place triggers creativity, innovation
there is no monotony in daily work	
pride of working in an intercultural environment	

Source: own research

Examples of answers concerning the benefits derived by an individual:

Respondent B: *“The cooperation in multicultural team develops my tolerance towards other nationalities. I try to better understand such people, acquire knowledge of their culture, and learn how to be patient.”*

Respondent I: *“I have the possibility of polishing a foreign language, learning about different culture, and at the same time gaining distance to my own culture.”*

The benefits obtained by the organisation from multi-cultural teams are given in the following answers:

Respondent F: *“Expats share their personal contacts from the whole world, which creates a platform for experts from specified functional areas throughout the organisation and facilitates cooperation.”*

Respondent C: *“The X corporation has a long record in Germany - it has been operating there for more than 100 years, and therefore in Poland, we can benefit from the experience worked out by this company in other markets. It refers to production improvements, as well as administrative and procedural ones. I think that there is no other place where the procedures are so developed as in the X corporation. Though in Poland this level of formalisation is much lower than in the German units, which is often complained about by German expats.”*

3) What problems can be observed in association with foreigners?

The most frequently mentioned problems arising from cooperation with foreigners, both on a personal as well as organizational level, respondents pointed to the communication. Other issues are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Personal and organizational problems in cooperation with foreigners

Personal problems arising from cooperation with foreigners	Organizational problems arising from cooperation with foreigners
communication-lack of fluency in speaking foreign languages	communication-poor knowledge of the English language on the side of the Poles and foreigners delayed deadlines, resulting in an understatement, creates barriers in the implementation of current tasks
lowered morale among the local staff, when the higher position is taken by a foreigner	frequent rotation of foreigners in managerial positions makes for Poles no sense of follow-up
disappointment with the lack of competence and knowledge of foreigners coming to Polish unit	problems of adaptation of both parties to work together-staff of local and foreign
requires effort, commitment and time to effectively collaborate with a foreigner	

Source: own research

Examples of answers concerning the problems which adversely influence the unit are as follows:

Respondent B: *“I hope all the time that the presence of foreigners relocated here will actually facilitate and improve the model of managing this unit. At the beginning of the operations of this unit, there were about 20 expats here. Now, there are 8 of them and I have not noticed any significant decline in quality and results of our plant as a result of their smaller number. I have an impression that the expats come here to learn something so my expectations have not been met in terms of gaining experience. During my career here, there was only one German Plant Manager who*

had incredible experience and he shared this experience with us - we could use it easily any time we wanted. The others come here like to the testing ground - they usually occupied lower positions in the headquarters than they are offered here in Poland and thus they do not have significant knowledge and experience. I think that it results from lower positioning of the Polish unit in comparison with other units (in Germany, the plants of this corporation generate huge turnover which is even 20-30 times higher than in Poland, and that's why they are better staffed there)."

Respondent C: *"Personal problem encountered by the Polish staff include the undermined morale and jealousy which are noticeable when an expatriate comes to the Polish unit - the motivation in Polish employees is completely missing or reduced as they think they are equally experienced and may occupy a given position."*

Examples of respondents' answers concerning the problems which adversely influence the organisation are as follows:

Respondent A: *"The organisation suffers losses due to the barriers in mutual cooperation between the Poles and foreigners, and Polish employees do not simply understand some activities undertaken by the headquarters like, to give an example, the employment of engineers from Turkey. In addition, poor knowledge of the English language by some foreigners causes that each meeting or valuation interview has to be held with an interpreter, which is burdensome and cost- and time consuming."*

Respondent H: *"I am not a native speaker of German and English, and some of my statements may be oversimplified when the procedure is interpreted/translated, the time is also wasted. And when I do not understand something well, then I make mistakes - and thus the entire organisation suffers loss. Frequent rotation of foreigners and lack of management continuity are also bothersome. An expat will not make any long-term decision because they are here for 4 years and then there is another one who completely changes the rhythm of the work."*

Ad. 4) What should be done in order to improve the cooperation with foreigners?

Improvement ideas concerning the facilitation of cooperation between the local staff and foreigners and elimination of adverse phenomena also refer to three fundamental areas:

- the activities undertaken by foreigners, e.g. learning Polish, being prepared in the scope of basic knowledge concerning culture, religion, labor law in Poland, assuming the open-minded attitude and not ethnocentrism;
- the activities undertaken by local staff, e.g. undertaking initiatives directed at building own international career, gaining intercultural experience (in private and professional life), considering the fact of learning foreign languages as an investment, being open-minded and tolerant to others;
- the activities undertaken by the organisation, e.g. conducting the information campaign for local staff about the foreigners' mission in a Polish subsidiary; organizing common intercultural trainings for expats and local staff.

Selected answers being a kind of practical recommendations are given in table 3:

Table 3. Actions improving the mutual cooperation of foreign and local staff

Respondent	Quotation
A	„Expats should learn Polish language not only from compulsion, but from conviction. In contrast, the Polish workers should be aware of this, what is the purpose of expatriates and how much a factory in Poland will benefit from their presence”.
B	„A joint cross-cultural workshop for expats and Poles should be organized, so that the local managers know what to expect in the attitudes of foreigners and what a religious and cultural behavior has expats”.
C	„The corporation should organize more training in the field of cultural differences, as the 2-day training for expat from the different country is rather too little. Intercultural training should be carried out at the headquarters in Germany before moving to Polish, and upon arrival at the Polish unit again it should be repeated with emphasis on eliminating stereotypes”.
D	Would recommend quite a global solution, not only in relation to our corporate. I think we should sent more Europeans to India and employ more Indians in Europe. I believe that the only direct contact let us known the nation. There are so many small things that being in a foreign country a person absorbs “from the air” and no training is not able to convey. Intercultural training does not fulfill its role without contact „face to face” and a real immersion in a foreign culture”.
E	„ I would recommend to raise cross-cultural awareness, but not only with poster but with workshop ”.
F	„ You can organize more training or workshops on cultural differences, which are conducted at headquarter and adapt them in the Polish subsidiary ”.
G	“There is a need for more information training about the cultures distant from the Polish. For example about the customs of Turks and Indians”.
H	„There should be short workshops on culture of the country. Such knowledge would let us to avoid surprise, and even shock in mutual interactions. For example, expat from India was shocked when he saw that we discuss with our boss, or even negate some of his ideas”.
I	„There should be more training oriented to eliminate stereotypes on both sides. Still it is hard at our headquarters to find someone who would like to come on assignment to Poland, because they have very poor knowledge of our country. When you come here, you are pleasantly surprised to find that, for example, in stores you can buy the same chocolate, as in Germany”.
J	„I could propose work in project teams, but mixed- international. Unfortunately, people are afraid to break their own language barriers, afraid of contact with strangers”.
L	„Expats should learn Polish language. On the other hand, the Polish staff should be informed about: why the expatriate has to come here, and what is its added value? Expats should know in advance the specific culture and patterns of behavior of the Polish staff”.

Source: own research

Summary of and conclusions from the study

Scientific explorations speak with one voice that national culture in interactions influences the group members' behavior. The results of the study show in fact that the groups which are culturally diverse function in a different way than uniform groups. Yet, it is not possible to explicitly answer the question which kind of group achieves better results. Numerous researchers emphasize that cultural differences occurring in a given group and the multitude of values, perspectives and types of behavior have positive influence on the ability to solve problems by a group and its creativity [Kostera, Śliwa, 2012, p. 119].

The most important results obtained in own research and concerning the interaction between Polish staff and foreigners in a subsidiary of a German corporation operating in Poland show the following:

- The perspective of cooperation with foreigners trigger numerous positive associations in Polish staff: personal challenges, contact with foreign language, deriving knowledge and experience from foreigners, obtaining another perspective of perceiving oneself and others. The respondents indicate also fears and problems related to such cooperation as stereotypes, language problems, effort connected with learning new things, administrative problems. Yet, pursuant to majority of Polish managers, positive interactions prevail in cooperation with foreigners;
- Undoubtedly, personal benefits derived by Polish managers cooperating with foreigners on an everyday basis in workgroups are such that they expand their own awareness of cultural differences, develop their tolerance, learn about different culture, style and organisation of work, have contact with foreign language, feel proud that they work in intercultural environment.
- The benefits gained by an organisation from multicultural workgroups include first of all the transfer of know-how (using the expatriates' knowledge and experience and the solutions suggested by them that have been already applied in other locations), increase in creativity and innovativeness of teams of employees.
- The most often indicated problems within the cooperation with foreigners include communication issues restricting personal contacts (lack of knowledge of a foreign language), and also influencing the operation of the entire organisation (the necessity of hiring an interpreter/translator, prolongation of decision-making process, delays in fulfilment of on-going tasks). We may say that for someone who comes to a foreign country for a several-year contract, the learning of a given language seems to be a necessity not only because of the efficient management of local staff but also because of everyday life issues. At this point, it should be noted that the knowledge of the local language of a host country positively influences the perception of foreigners by local employees. It is confirmed by the survey conducted by J. Eisenberg et al. (2009, p. 4) concerning

the leadership styles among managers-expatriates in Poland. According to it, the expatriates were viewed as sensitive, tolerant, open and friendly, although 65% of Polish employees think that the knowledge of the Polish language would give the managers from Western Europe greater approval and sympathy from their Polish subordinates. It means that it is enough for a foreigner to make an effort to learn the language of a host country to be more positively perceived by local staff.

- Other problems of personal character include undermined morale of local staff when a higher position has been assumed by a foreigner, disappointment with lack of expats' competence and knowledge.
- A significant problem related to the employment of foreigners in key positions in a studied German subsidiary was the lack of sense of continuity of activities arising from frequent rotation of expatriates.
- The managers who were respondents also gave several guidelines which - when taken into account by the organisation, prospective expats and local employees - would influence the increase in positive interactions in multicultural teams.

At this point, we can quote the guidelines formulated by N. Adler [as cited in Sikorski, 2002, p. 40] which seem to be helpful in the scope of mutual multicultural cooperation:

- It is better to assume rather cultural differences than similarities until the latter ones are proven.
- One should be empathetic, which means attempts to understand or interpret a given situation looking at it from the point of view usual for a representative of a different culture.
- It is better to rather describe than interpret or assess what someone said or did.
- The explanation of a situation should be considered as probable and not certain.

In the context of interpersonal relations between foreigners and local managers, what would be of interest in further research perspectives is an individual viewpoint, that is identification of 'positive deviance' cases which facilitate the achievement of positive results at the level of individuals (e.g. mutual respect, self-development, tolerance, sense of fulfilment, expertness, well-being). Thus, it would be necessary to diagnose such personal traits as for example optimism, open-mindedness, self-effectiveness, cognitive curiosity, and cultural flexibility. Moreover, the analysis in the paper is also limited because of the drawbacks of the applied methods to select the sample and collect the data as well as its explorative character. Future research is recommended to deepen the conducted study.

Summary

Development and geographical expansion of multinational corporations makes it more complex and more often we are dealing with cultural diversity within teams

of employees. Mutual cooperation of foreigners and local staff raises many intercultural interactions, of both negative and positive.

The purpose of this article is to identify the benefits and weaknesses arising from intercultural interactions arising between foreigners and local staff in the German subsidiary operating in Poland. The research procedure was a case study, and a method was 12 structured interviews with Polish managers. Research problems concerned the general perception of the Polish managers in relation to cooperation with foreigners. The respondents indicated the benefits and problems of this cooperation, as well as practical guidance (advice) to improve these interactions. This case study enriched the empirical achievements in the area of the new trend in management sciences, which is the positive organizational scholarship (POS).

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