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## Leadership competencies of Polish and foreign managers

**Abstract:** *This abstract presents results of a pilot questionnaire study, conducted among the executives of international companies, based in Poland. Studies show the differences and similarities between the Polish and foreign managers, particularly in terms of how they fulfill the management role and assessment of their own personality attributes.*

**Key words:** *international staff managers, leadership, traits of personality*

### **Introduction**

The importance of leaders and managers in organizations are still current and important issue. Leadership theories and management practices are proving the need to develop an effective leadership in organizations that want to achieve their intended results. This is not an easy or simple task, especially in terms of constant and rapid change, both in the technology, as well as socio-cultural class change.

The realization of leadership function, personal qualities of effective and ineffective managers, competences needed for working with groups, diagnosis of management styles are only some of issues examples that for years are still in the interest area for representatives of various scientific disciplines dealing with the problems of management. The results of empirical researches in leadership, interest of not only theorists, but also those who perform managerial tasks - the management practitioners.

Favorable conditions for researches on leadership issues formed these companies that pursue their goals in many countries, sometimes on different

continents, employing managers of different nationalities, from different cultures, different religious and philosophical systems. Due to the nature of the company executives participating in the studies presented in this article, we will use the term of “international company”.

The article is empirical and was based on the results of the survey, attended by management representatives of several nationalities including Poles, Dutches, English, Bulgarians and Germans employed in a multinational corporation, in one of its Polish branch. Due to the small size of the study, analysis of researches results was limited to two categories of managers - Poles and other nationalities.

### **Management in international companies**

G. Hofstede’s researches on cultural dissimilarities contributed to the new understanding of the management quality in companies operating on global markets. Three dimensions, which were distinguished on the basis of international research, the power distance, individualism and tolerance for uncertainty become a useful categories, allowing to better understand the problems that arise in multicultural companies, especially if they involve national cultures far distant from each other, not only in geographical terms, but above all in terms of outlook.

In the globalization process studies showing the complexity of mutual adaptation process between employees, especially executives, representing different nationalities, and thus more or less different cultural elements are becoming increasingly important. It’s accompanied by a growing awareness of the application advantages of this type of research.

There is consensus among researchers that culture affects various aspects of the organization, including individual attitudes towards work and presented organizational behavior, resulting from personality traits of individual members in the organization. Those are the basis for understanding why some organizations are more innovative, can easy assimilate to new technologies and adapt to changes quicker than others; why some are more successful than others, although in the objective measures they are operating in similar conditions and have the same advantages. The literature usually indicates a special role of these managers who skillfully exploit the opportunities created by multiculturalism, especially in terms of maximizing employees potential [Barabasz, A., 2011, pp. 27-46]. Based on the assumption that not only the cultural background but most of all the attributes of personality affect the power of government, in the reported studies there is an attempt made to diagnose personality attributes of international companies’ executives operating on the Polish market.

### **Personality of managers as a success determinant in the management process**

Researchers interested in the organizations functioning are usually focused on representatives of *top management* who have the greatest impact on the organization. Well-known and often quoted in various circumstances saying “The house shows the owner” is a kind of thesis illustration, which scientists try to confirm in more or less systematic way. It states that strategy, organizational culture, and even the structure are strongly influenced by the *top management* representatives’ personality [Kets de Vries M.F., 1984; Barabasz A., 2008].. The biggest challenge for researchers is to understand the mechanisms that are responsible for the spread of patterns presented by the leader in the entire organization (or part thereof). This is not only about the conscious determination of the mission, objectives, and strategies, but also about “non-aware” impact on the operation of the organization making by copying patterns presented by the by members of the organization. Current knowledge leads to the conclusion, that the influence of dominant individuals to other members of the organization is carried out by the fact, that the representatives of *top management* generate some common ideas and visions, which through a process of communication (formal and informal) and at least part of the imitation mechanism, penetrate to all levels of the organization.

It forms the dominant ways of adapting the organization to the environment [Kernberg O., 1976, pp. 641-685; Stapley L., 1996]. Way of adapting to the environment has an impact on decision-making, both at the strategic and operational level.

The objective conditions in which the company operates, play a significant role in shaping the volitional actions of management, because the impact on the rational level of decision-making process by the leaders. At the same time among all stakeholders of the organization, there is a consensus that personality, experience and value system have all a significant impact on the strategic choices and leaders behavior in the organization [Finkelstein S., Hambrick D.C., 1990, pp. 489-500; Chatterjee A., Hambrick D.C., 2007, pp. 351-386]. Self-awareness, including the awareness of emotions experienced, understanding the intrapsychological and interpsychological relationships, intra- and inter-organizational, these are managers’ attributes that seem to be the most important from the perspective of a psychological approach on leadership. M.F. Kets de Vries [2003] emphasizes that the personality of the leaders is the essence of leadership. Leaders perpetuate and maintain the psychological contract for the expectations in the relationship between leaders and employees. This implies the presence of emotion in their relationship. Because of the emotions, often violently expressed element of the supervisor

– employee relation, it is necessary to understand and accept the role of emotional intelligence [Goleman, D., 2000, pp. 2-14]. Taking into account the personality traits of leaders – it helps to better understand how each company behave, and thus more fully explain the role of the factors that determine the results achieved by the organization.

### **Results of the research - comparison of Polish and foreign managers**

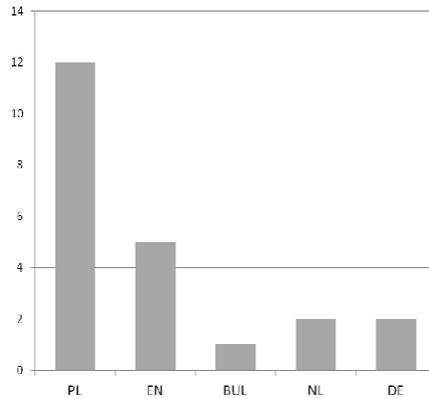
Research conducted in May 2012 was attended in total by 22 Polish and foreign managers, working for X company. An anonymous questionnaire was used, which included questions of preferences in the leadership style, the employees assessment criteria, realization of the leadership functions and the evaluation of the identified personality traits and managerial competences. The nationality of the surveyed managers was adopted as a criterion for differentiating the results. In the assumptions of the research the target was to diagnose leadership styles preferred by each of the managers categories (Polish and foreign managers) and to obtain self-report characteristics of the individual nations managers. The study sought the answer for a question whether executives of international companies, consisting of a several nationalities representatives, present a coherent and homogeneous view. The purpose of the planned further research is seeking answers for the question if managers membership in international business determine r how to implement the leadership functions stronger than the individual personality traits of individual executives.

Due to the pilot nature of this study, we limit results only to identify similarities and differences in management styles and dominant personality traits of domestic and foreign managers in their self-report.

### **Characteristic of the trial**

12 domestic and 10 foreign managers in age from 28 years to 50 years were examined. Managers strongly represented in the trial are Poles (12 persons) representing 55% of all respondents. The remaining 45% of managers are: English - 5 people (23%), the Netherlands - 2 people (9%), Germany - 2 people (9%) and one manager from Bulgaria. Among the respondents, males far outnumber females - 19 people (82%). Most strongly represented age range of the respondents is 31-35 years, two people are under the age of 30 years old, the oldest person is less than 50 years old. All managers have a university degree. Nineteen people (82%) are managers of various departments in the company; the other three people occupy director positions.

Figure 1. Nationality of respondents

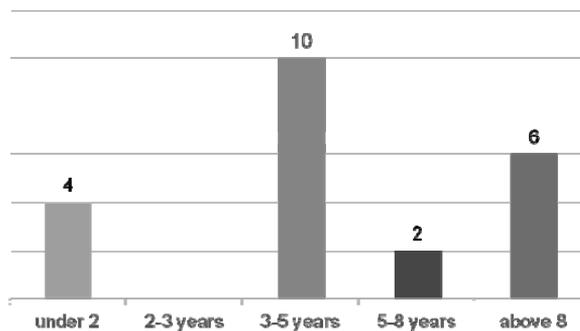


Source: Own researches

Most of the respondents are those whose seniority in the company ranges from 2 to 5 years, the lowest percentage of respondents are people with work experience between 5 years and 8 years. The same percentage of respondents are managers who have the shortest experience (less than 2 years), or those who work the longest - more than 8 years in the company.

Almost half of the respondents (46%), working in management positions from 3 to 5 years; the second group is managers with over 7 years of managerial experience (27%). A relatively large group is also managers with a short experience in management positions - 18% of managers are in the position less than 2 years, which is understandable due to the age structure of managers surveyed. Only two people occupy managerial positions for 5-7 years.

Figure 2. Work experience in managerial role



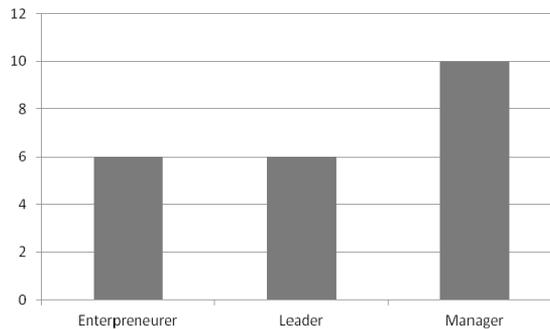
Source: Own researches

### Roles and management style

Surveyed managers indicated which of the three roles (leader, entrepreneur, manager) they identify themselves greatest performing their managerial tasks. Following distribution of answers obtained:

- a little less than a half of respondents (46%) describes themselves as managers,
- 27% of respondents in their own self-assessment play the role of leaders,
- 27% perceive themselves more as entrepreneurs

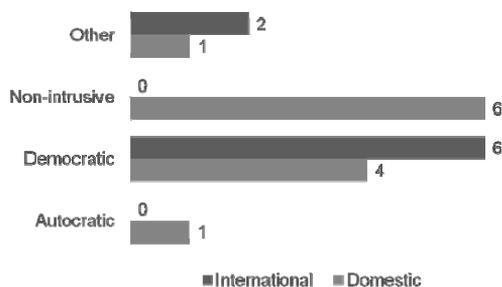
**Figure 3. Identification of roles**



Source: Own researches

In response to the question about dominant management style most of surveyed managers, both domestic and foreign, concluded that the preferred management style in corporation is democratic and in the company they do not feel pressure to apply a different style (not-intrusive or autocratic).

**Figure 4. Preferred leadership style**



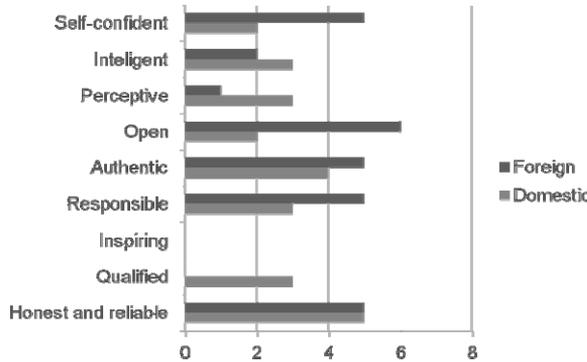
Source: Own researches

Managers were asked to indicate their preferences to the leadership style, they gave answers indicating that domestic managers prefer the not-intrusive style, while foreign managers – democratic style. At the same time three Polish managers identified their own management style called flexible, it was defined as a style to suit the needs of the employees.

**Leadership attributes**

In the survey, managers have made a self-diagnosis of traits and behaviors severity, such as self-confidence, intelligence, perception, openness and availability for others, authenticity, responsibility, inspiring others, competence, honesty and integrity. The following graphs show distribution of the results of Polish and foreign managers, including those attributes.

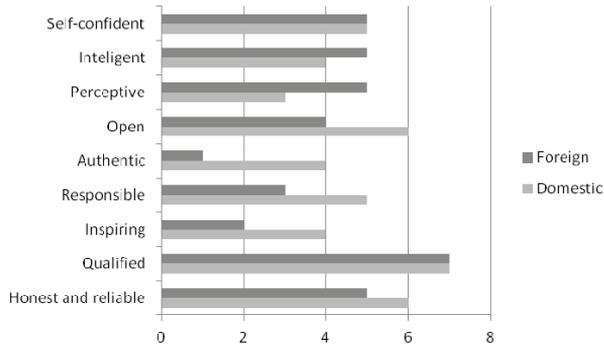
Figure 5. Self-report – answer “definitely yes”



Source: Own researches

Characteristics and behaviors that Polish managers claim are the greatest honesty and integrity, and authenticity. However foreign managers describe themselves mostly as open and available for others, but also confident, authentic and responsible; they definitely value higher their self-confidence, openness and responsibility than Poles, but to the same extent as the Polish managers they value themselves in terms of the integrity and reliability. Polish managers value higher than foreign managers their intelligence and perception, but also strongly consider themselves as competent, while none of the managers of other nationalities value their competence on such a high level of complacency. Neither Polish and foreign managers, consider themselves to be highly inspirational for employees.

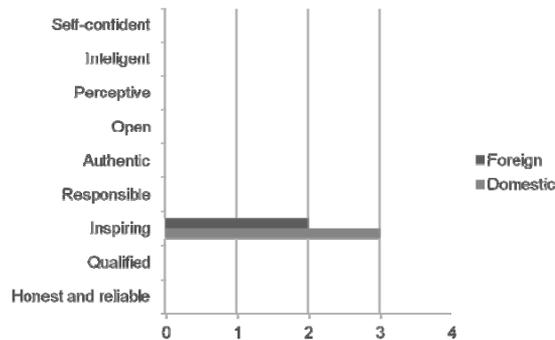
Figure 6. Self-report – answers „rather yes”



Source: Own researches

Distribution of answers “cautiously positive” in the assessment of these characteristics and behaviors shows that Polish and foreign managers are similar in the assessment of competence and self-confidence - each of these attributes is assigned to the same extent for both. They value themselves similarly also in terms of intelligence, integrity and reliability. The largest discrepancy concerns “authenticity” - Polish managers more often chose the answer “rather yes” than strongly positive response. However managers from other countries consider themselves to be more far authentic than the Poles.

Figure 7. Self-report– answers „rather not”



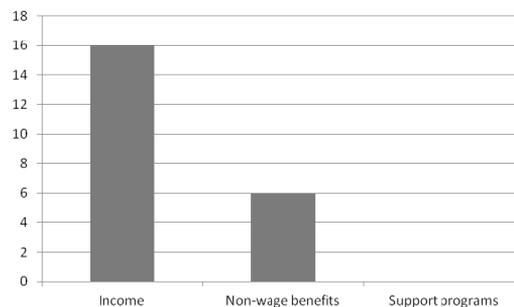
Source: Own researches

The only attribute which is not at a high level in the opinion of all surveyed managers is “being inspiring” - both domestic and foreign managers value

same this feature. It can be assumed that all managers perceive their ability to be an inspiring supervisor or co-worker quite self-critical. Other features and behaviors are being for the surveyed managers identified in at least average degree.

Managers were also asked about their opinion on motivational factors used in the company. The results were that for 73% of surveyed managers the most attractive factor is an income, other (27% of all respondents) indicated the non-wage benefits. None of the respondents indicated the support programs for managers as an important motivational factor.

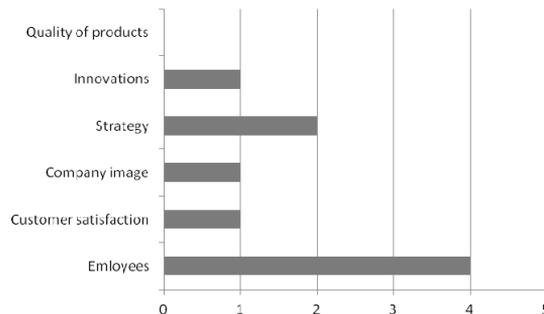
Figure 8. Evaluation of selected motivation factors



Source: Own researches

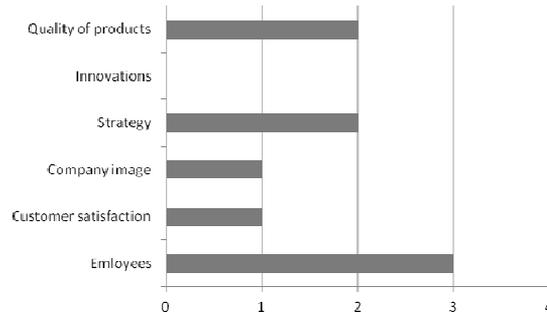
Another studied issue concerned the important factors for the success of the company. Distribution of the results are shown on the next two charts, varied according to the criterion - Polish and foreign managers.

Figure 9. Factors determining the company success by domestic managers



Source: Own researches

Figure 10. Factors determining the company success by foreign managers



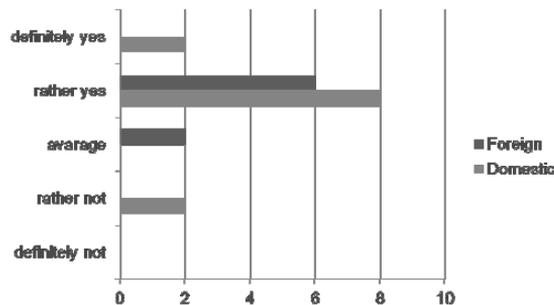
Source: Own researches

In the opinion of surveyed managers, both domestic and foreign, the factor with the greatest impact on the company success are the people and the strategy implemented by the company. The largest differences occur in the evaluation of the product quality role, which foreign managers assign a significant role, and the Poles do not take this factor into account. The Polish managers take into account the role of innovation; foreign managers ignore this as a significant factor for the company success. However, the same meaning for Polish and foreign managers have customer satisfaction and company image.

#### Employee assessment criteria

In the employee assessment such criteria are taken into account as readiness for change, willingness to take risks, commitment, adaptability, self-confidence and tolerance for uncertainty.

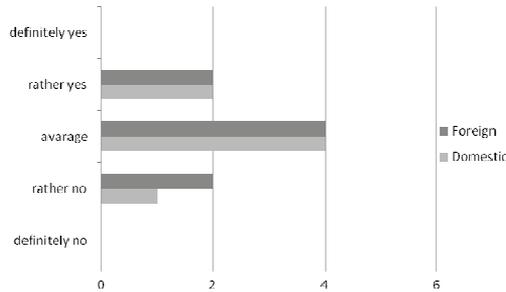
Figure 11. Readiness for change



Source: Own researches

Results analysis shows that the foreign managers seem to be more coherent to readiness for change as a criterion for employees assessment than the Poles. Although most domestic managers (67%) admitted that the readiness for change is an important part of employee assessment, but at the same time 16% expressed a moderately negative attitude to this criterion. However the vast majority of foreign managers (75%) considered it as an important criterion or “indifferently” important (25%) in the employees assessment.

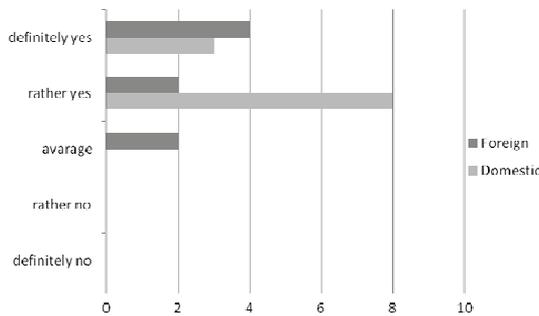
Figure 12. Taking risk



Source: Own researches

Surveyed managers’ reviews are similar to each other in relation to the next criterion, which is the willingness to take risks by employees. More than half of the domestic and foreign managers admitted that taking risk is an indifferently important in assessment. Foreign managers rather than Polish managers, seem to be a bit more skeptical in comparison to taking risk by employees, as a criterion of assessment.

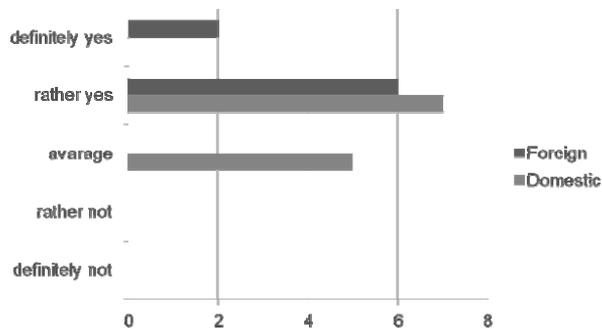
Figure 13. Engagement



Source: Own researches

Engagement is definitely important assessment criterion indicated by Polish and foreign managers. Half of the foreign managers (50%) admitted this criterion as definitely important, the other as fairly important or indifferently important (25%). There is a greater diversity of attitudes towards this criterion among the foreign managers. More clear in their views are Polish managers - the vast majority of domestic managers (73%) believe that motivation is fairly important part of employee assessment, while 27% considered it as definitely important criterion.

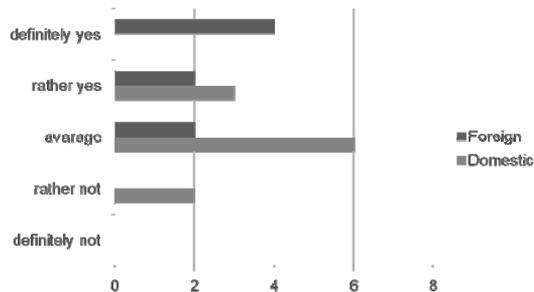
Figure 14. Adaptability



Source: Own researches

The adaptability of employees is more important for the foreign managers than for Polish managers. More than half (58%) of domestic managers admitted adaptability as fairly important criterion for employees assessment, but the rest of Poles (42%) considered them to be “medium importance”. However, among the foreign managers, the vast majority (75%) recognized the adaptability as important criterion, and the other (25%) even as very important.

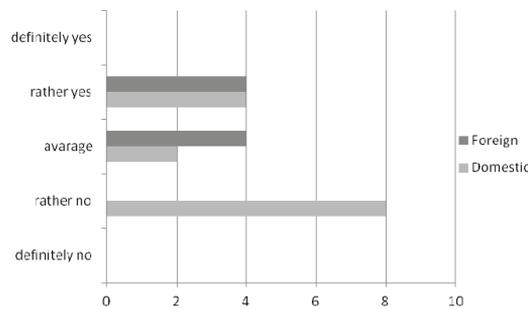
Figure 15. Self-confidence



Source: Own researches

Employee's self-confidence is considered as relevant criterion for assessment more by the foreign managers than the Poles; some of them even refuse the importance of this criterion. More than half of the domestic managers (55%) admitted that the employee's self-confidence is an indifferently important criterion. 27% answered "rather yes" and another 18% "rather not." Foreign managers' answers looked differently. Half of the respondents admitted that this is definitely important assessment criterion, and the other admitted it equally to be fairly important (25%) or "medium" important (also 25%).

Figure 16. Tolerance for uncertainty



Source: Own researches

Employee's tolerance of uncertainty in the assessment process is relatively less important in the opinion of Polish managers - 57% of Poles admitted that tolerance for uncertainty is probably not an important criterion in employees' assessment. Foreign managers considered this criterion as important, although not the most important.

Analysis of the results shows some similarities for employees assessment criteria used by domestic and foreign managers. For both groups of managers, important are commitment, adaptability and willingness for change. For less important criterion managers admitted ability to take risk. The biggest differences in the opinions of both Polish and foreign managers relate to employees' self-confidence and tolerance for uncertainty. According to the domestic managers self-confidence is an indifferently important criterion, while foreign managers found them to be definitely important. However, while the majority of Polish managers believe that tolerance for uncertainty isn't an important part of the assessment, the foreign managers consider it to be an important criterion in the assessment.

Surveyed managers were also asked to say what kind of people the organization is attractive for, and can be attracted by job offer. Here are examples of Polish and foreign managers responses:

- young, ambitious and well-educated;
- people who like and know how to work in a group;
- specialists in various fields - open to international contacts and result-oriented, resistant to employee and want to grow;
- people looking for a job in corporations with clear, unchanging principles, awaiting opportunities to broaden knowledge, looking for rapid career development opportunities.

### **Conclusions of the research**

Both domestic and foreign managers have found that the dominant leadership style in the corporation is democratic. The results show that domestic managers prefer non-intrusive style, foreign managers' democratic style. Foreign managers often than Poles claim to be self-confident, open to others and responsible. However domestic managers more often claim managerial competences and intelligence. It can be assumed that the foreign managers are increasing their abilities to work in a team, and the Poles do better with personal challenges. Both Polish and foreign managers consider themselves to be authentic, and not only open to contacts with other people, but above all consistent in their attitudes, one that honestly and openly reveal their beliefs, assessments and emotional relationship to the outside world. So we can believe that they both have similar strengths in interpersonal relations. Interesting is that the surveyed managers (Polish and foreign) value themselves low on their ability to be an inspiring supervisor or co-worker.

In the opinion of the majority of respondents, both domestic and foreign managers, factors that were having the greatest impact on the company success are its employees and implemented by the company strategy. At the same time, regarding strategy, Polish managers show innovation as an important success factor, but in the opinion of the foreign managers more important is the quality of the product. In terms of criteria for employees assessment, both Polish and foreign managers value willingness to change, adaptability and commitment to the job. For less important criterion they considered ability to take risks. The differences between the Polish and other managers are on two criteria - self-confidence and readiness for change. According to the domestic managers employee's self-confidence is less important criterion than in the opinion of the foreign managers. Inverse relationship applies to readiness for change. In this case, the foreign managers apply less attention to this criterion, rather than Poles managers who consider them to be fairly important criterion in the employees assessment.

### **Some remarks – about future research**

Empirical studies indicate a relationship between manager's personality attributes and the functioning of the organization [Miller D., Kets de Vries

M.F., Toulouse M., 1982; Bartlett Ch., Ghoshal S., 1989; Bass B.M., 1990; Smith P.B., Peterson M.F., 1998; Deresky H., 2000; Barabasz A., 2008]. Relationship between the studied variables at the individual level and at the variables operating at the level of organization as a whole, require further research, both quantitative and qualitative. The pilot study results provide the starting material for the research of relationships between variables on individual basis, and the variables occurring at organizational level in conditions of the international operating corporations. The main target would be to search answers to the question, whether managers' membership in the international business determines how to implement the leadership functions, and individual personality traits of executives are irrelevant, because culture pressured or intercompany factors are undergoing a unification process.

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