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## **GENDER DIVERSITY IN POLISH ENTERPRISES**

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### **Abstract**

In the era of a socially heterogeneous environment, diversity management (DM) should be of primary significance in any company. As the potential within diverse human resources is huge, its proper utilisation may translate into a company's market success. In Poland, the society is relatively uniform in terms of culture, race, and religion. Age and gender are the primary elements that are recognized the fastest. These factors most often constitute the reason for discrimination within Polish enterprises. That is why they are the main field of DM in Poland.

In this paper, the authors have chosen to focus on the issue of gender diversity in enterprises. The subject is specifically significant in terms of its topicality. Diversity at the workplace constitutes one of the most important global employment trends. Analysis of selected aspects of DM in the context of gender diversity in Poland may contribute to better understanding of the problem.

The first part of this paper studies the DM from the theoretical point of view, expressed in source literature and reports. The next chapter focuses on the issue of gender diversity based on research in Poland and abroad. The further part of the article focuses on the limitations of DM and activities aimed at promoting diversity in Polish enterprises.

The main goal of this article is to analyze the level of gender diversity in Polish and foreign companies as well as the selected support tools and barriers in managing diversity in Po-

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land. The undertaken research topic has been executed using the critical literature analysis method, reports, and papers. The Web of Science Core Collection database has been used as a main source of data.

### **Keywords**

Gender diversity, labor, Polish enterprises, labor economics.

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### **Introduction**

Modern labor economics often focuses on imperfections prevailing in the labor market. There is a close link between the labor market and demography. It seems that Polish companies do not achieve good results in terms of gender diversity. Diversity management (DM) constitutes a very important element of organizational culture. It also involves creating a work environment, which contributes to developing human resources. DM may concern such aspects as: age, culture, physical capabilities, physical appearance, disabilities, race, national affinity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or the fact of one having children. In Poland, the society is relatively uniform in terms of culture, race and religion. Age and gender are the primary elements that are recognized the fastest. These factors most often constitute the reason for discrimination within Polish enterprises. That is why they are the main field of DM in Poland. The authors of this paper have focused on the issue of gender diversity in enterprises. That constitutes one of the most significant elements of DM, which poses a challenge for contemporary companies. Many business entities still do not notice the potential within gender diversity, which is exhibited, for instance, by unequal treatment of men and women in some companies. Women constantly face discrimination in the work place due to their gender. Hence, it is worth focusing on gender diversity and the potential lying in this area.

The main objective of the article is to analyze the level of gender diversity in Polish and foreign companies as well as the selected support tools and barriers in DM in Poland. The basic hypothesis of the work is the statement that Polish companies do not look good in terms of ensuring gender diversity.

The undertaken research topic was studied using the critical literature analysis method, reports, papers, and conclusions. The Web of Science Core Collection database was used as a main source of data for analysis.

In the first part of the paper, DM is presented from the theoretical point of view based on source literature and reports. The next chapter focuses on the issue of gender diversity based on research carried out in Poland and abroad. The further part of the article focuses on the limitations of DM and activities aimed at promoting diversity in Polish enterprises.

### **Diversity management and its elements — a theoretical approach**

Diversity consists in both similarities and differences between people, associated with their age, culture, physical abilities, physical appearance, disability, race, nationality,

religion, gender, sexual orientation, having children, and other characteristics. Diversity is a complex of features, visible and invisible ones, that differentiate the society, including people employed in companies. Diversity means opportunities, but also risks for the organization. Diversity in a workplace is the subject of many studies carried out by various institutions and scientific centers. The question of diversity is a point of interest for economists, sociologists, psychologists, and ethicists, which only confirms the complexity and multidimensionality of this concept.

The relevant literature contains many definitions of diversity management [4, p. 238; 18, pp. 83-107], which is why the authors of the article decided to mention those that best express the essence of this concept. The analysis of particular definitions will serve to identify the key features of diversity management. The concept of DM originated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. in the USA and Western Europe. At the beginning, DM was a tool for activating minority groups on the labor market. DM was limited to counteracting prejudice, although the main reason for introducing DM principles were increased profits of the company, not legal arguments, moral obligations or corporate social responsibility [19, p. 158].

The concept of DM was introduced by Roosevelt Thomas (1990) stating that it embraces managing diversity effectively, by changing organizational culture and practices, valuing differences among employees and creating a work environment in which diversity can contribute to organizational goals [15, pp. 757-780]. DM is a personnel management strategy based on the belief that the diversification of the employees constitutes a business asset that, under specific circumstances, may generate business benefits and profits. The aim of DM is to create a working environment in which all the employees feel valued and appreciated and have the opportunity to make the most of their individual capabilities in order to implement the missions of the company. DM means eradication of instances of discrimination, harassment, mobbing based on whatever reason, and creating an inclusive, empowering workplace [3, p. 28].

DM is a human resources management strategy assuming that diversity in a workplace is one of the key resources of an organisation which contribute to its development and achievement of business goals. It is important to notice and accept diversity in a workplace and to build the enterprise's competitive advantage based on it [26, pp. 307-310]. The notion of diversity itself at an enterprise may be interpreted in many ways. Diversity is not only about the age or sex of an employee, but also competence, skills, talents and various life and professional experiences. While managing diversity one must notice differences present at the enterprise, as well as consciously establish strategies, policies and programmes which will encourage the air of respect and utilisation of the said differences to the benefit of the organisation [27, pp. 6-7].

DM can be defined as a collection of activities and practices aimed at the execution of enterprise's assumed goals using employees' heterogeneity. DM requires, in particular, respect, understanding, acceptance and appreciation of people's diversity. DM enables the creation of workplaces in which all employees, regardless of demographic and social differences between them, feel appreciated and respected. Such

activities allow the enterprise to fully utilise the employees' potential and favour their development, which may contribute to making human resources management more efficient [20, pp. 31-46]. At the same time, as J. Taylor Cox [29] assumes, DM is a way of human resources management, which aims to maximize the potential advantages of diversity and minimize its disadvantage.

Definitions of DM, presented in this chapter, show various interpretations of this notion. The analysis of the notion confirms that it is perceived as, *inter alia*: a management strategy, a company's policy, a business philosophy, a direction of changes in management. Despite the lack of a homogenous definition of DM, it is possible to distinguish several features recurring in many definitions. Different authors often point at creating appropriate conditions in a workplace, taking into account the heterogeneity of the personnel. DM consists in identification of particular dimensions of diversity significant in a given company and creating a working environment in which the employees are given the opportunity to make full use of their potential, competence, experience. These conditions must include openness to differences, tolerance and respect to other people as well as acceptance of various methods of operating [31]. Another common feature are the areas of DM: employees and working environment. Definitions of DM often draw attention to its strategic and comprehensive nature, as well as treating diversity as a fundamental asset of the company [22, p. 199]. Another element often mentioned in relation to diversity management is generating a positive impact on the organization. One of the results of diversity management is the improved performance of the organization and its increased competitiveness [7; 11].

### **The level of gender diversity in Polish and foreign companies**

The issue of gender diversity within companies is in the field of interests of many researchers. For example, some authors have examined board and management gender diversity [1; 13] while some others have focused also on non-management level [2, pp. 376-397].

Diversity and integration constitute one of the most important global employment trends. This was confirmed, for example, by research conducted among 10 thousand HR department managers and company CEOs from 140 countries. 69% of respondents have identified diversity as an important issue [9]. Gender-related issues are viewed in various ways, depending on the country, region, and specific situation, including the degree of economic development of a given country or region [14, p. 318].

The contribution of the following paper to the modern science is an attempt to make an analysis of the level of gender diversity in Poland in comparison to other countries.

When analysing diversity in Polish enterprises, attention should be paid to statistical data concerning the Polish society. Here, it is possible to use national census reports, namely studies carried out in Poland approximately every 10 years, which provide valuable statistical information on the demography. The statistical census includes information relating to people, e.g. age, profession, education, religion, etc. According to the last census, Poland is a country, which is almost uniform in terms

of nationality — national and ethnic minorities constitute only ca. 2% of all the people and include Germans, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Russians, and British people. The following constitute the majority of people living in Poland who are not of Polish nationality: Ukrainians (24%), Germans (more than 9%), Russians (7.6%), Belarusians (almost 7%), and Vietnamese (4.7%). Religious differences are often associated with national or ethnic differences. The majority of Poles are Catholic — ca. 35 mln. Furthermore, in Poland there are 107 women per 100 men on average [5]. The key issue with the data presented is the fact that the last census was carried out in 2011. In the recent years, the situation in Poland started to change. It is estimated that in 2017, approximately 2 mln Ukrainians were working in Poland. From the point of view of financial transfers, i.e. funds sent by the citizens, Poland became an immigration country and currently there are more funds sent out of Poland than there are funds incoming from other countries [21].

However, the presented data confirms quite a significant unification of the Polish society. Hence, the specifics of managing diversity on the Polish soil may be a bit different than in other countries with multicultural societies. There is no doubt that issues concerning gender, age, and disability constitute elements, which are the most distinguishing ones for the staff of a Polish company. In the article, the authors have paid attention to the subject of gender diversity, which seems to be of the biggest topical interest in Poland. Many business entities still do not notice the potential within gender diversity, which is exhibited, for instance, by unequal treatment of men and women in some companies

Latest data indicates that women have a 15.2% share in supervisory boards. They are the heads of 6.3% of company management boards among more than 480 stock exchange companies of the primary market. A woman working as a company president or CEO significantly impacts a bigger number of women in the management board of a given company. Whereas in European companies, this indicator amounts to approximately 22%. The best score was achieved by Norwegian companies, where the management boards include as many as 42% of women. In ten countries of the European Union, women constitute at least 25% of management board members. These countries are: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Great Britain [9].

As a reference: in the USA, the average share of women in management boards is 14.2%. The worst scores were achieved by South American and Asian companies, where women constitute 7.2 and 7.8% of management board members, respectively. A woman working as a CEO significantly impacts a bigger number of women in the management board of a given company. When analysing the presented data, one may see that Polish companies do not achieve a good result in terms of gender diversity. Only some of them decided to implement such a policy to the composition of the management board, supervisory board, and the key positions within the company.

### **Barriers of diversity management in Poland**

Much of the discussion about career women and woman leadership continues to focus on ceilings and barriers. These barriers often block social and economic development.

Statistical data shows a lack of gender equality in terms of employment in Poland. According to the Main Statistical Office, 65% of men and only 48.4% of women were professionally active in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2017 [6]. When compared to other European countries this situation is not positive. Furthermore, the average wages of women are lower than those of men. In 2015, women earned PLN 3,400 gross/mo on average, while men earned PLN 4,200 gross [25]. This disproportion becomes larger with the role, meaning that on higher positions the difference is bigger [16, p. 120 and next].

It seems that stereotypes and prejudices are still the main barriers in terms of DM. Discrimination concerning gender, namely unequal treatment of women, is specifically evident, which is not justified by any objective reasons. This situation does not result from lower professional qualifications or skills but simple stereotypes, which stand in the way of women's professional development and promotion. A very popular opinion states that a man makes a better manager due to his congenital, specific character features. The stereotype regarding women does not include leadership, so sometimes women are not even considered as candidates for serving managerial roles. It seems that a standard where a woman brings up children, cooks, and cleans, while a man is responsible for earnings and money, is still in function. Women are often assigned such features as protectiveness, care or sensitivity, which are not as valued on the labour market as those typically assigned to men, e. g., resoluteness. These are social constraints, which have been rooted in the society for years. That is why changing them takes a lot of time and effort. The Commissioner for Human Rights [8] states that the most common effects of gender-related discrimination include:

- using physical, mental and economic violence against women, motivated by the belief of a lesser value of the female gender,
- limiting the possibilities of a professional promotion and unjustified differences in wages for performing equally important work, because of the gender,
- presenting job offers which discriminate one of the genders,
- using profession and position names only in their feminine or masculine forms, aiming at discriminating one of the genders.

When discussing the subject of limitations related to DM it is worth referring to the results of a research conducted in 2016 among signatories of the Diversity Charter. The Diversity Charter constitutes a written obligation of a company to introduce a ban on discrimination and mobbing within the workplace, developing and implementing a policy for equal treatment and managing diversity, promoting diversity, introducing institutional, internal solutions in order to develop the policy for equal treatment and engagement of all employees in a dialogue regarding the Charter, etc. This initiative has been functioning in the European Union since 2011 and in Poland since 2012. The Responsible Business Forum (RBF) is in charge of the Diversity Charter. Signatories believe that the biggest barrier for implementing the DM is insufficient knowledge (42% of respondents). The lack of engagement from the employees (23%) and the lack of a person responsible for the Diversity Charter (18%), were listed as other barriers. In 2016, the Responsible Business Forum has carried out similar studies in enterprises, which do not undertake actions in terms of DM. In that

case the biggest barrier was the lack of interest from the employees — 47%, and the fact that the company was too small and did not notice the need for implementing the Diversity Charter — 35%. Another limitation consisted in insufficient knowledge concerning DM — 26%. It is worth noting that only 26% of Polish companies taking part in RBF's research declare that they undertake actions related to gender equality, while 19% of such companies have implemented activities regarding disabilities [24]. These results confirm that the level of knowledge regarding the Diversity Charter is low. Another barrier may consist of reluctance relating to additional managerial responsibilities. It has to be stated that declarations regarding the lack of knowledge on DM are not decisive when it comes to taking action in terms of that field. Many actions in the superior-subordinate relationship may have an intuitive character and may not be classified by the parties as a management tool.

### **Actions supporting diversity management**

Different strategies of equalizing the position of women and men on the labor market have been adopted in different countries. Actions supporting DM undertaken in Poland to date, have mainly focused on counteracting discrimination at the workplace. These are actions undertaken both on the central as well as regional levels. It seems that the main role here is played by the state. Its impact on developing DM may be expressed in various manners, from educational and informative actions, to restrictions aimed at business entities not following laws regarding the discussed subject. The role of government organisations is not limited to posting information on DM or eliminating discrimination towards a given gender. These institutions provide training courses and advice regarding the discussed field. It has to be emphasised that such courses may relate to companies as well as employees hired in the sector of government administration. These instruments may help entrepreneurs in implementing the concept or selected elements of DM. Furthermore, thanks to training, consulting, and information points, entrepreneurs can obtain the necessary information on the current DM problems, which occur when starting or running a business.

When performing an analysis of actions supporting DM, special attention needs to be paid to legal regulations in Poland. The Polish law includes the principle of equality among citizens, regardless of their gender, in the Constitution and Labour Code. The provisions of Article 32 of the Constitution indicate that everyone is equal in terms of the law. No one can be discriminated in the public, social, or economic life, for any reason. Whereas, Article 33 of the Constitution states that women and men have especially equal rights as to education, employment and promotion, equal remuneration for the work of an equal value, social security, assuming positions, serving functions, as well as achieving public dignities and decorations [17]. In line with the Labour Code (Article 113), any discrimination in employment, whether direct or indirect, in particular with regard to gender, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, trade union membership, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, as well as due to employment for a specified period or indefinite period or full or part-time work — is unacceptable [30]. The above-mentioned regulations indicate that the employer should counteract any discrimination in the workplace. What is

important is that an employer may be subject to sanctions in the case of violating the principle of equality. It is worth adding that a person, against whom an employer has violated the principle of equal treatment in employment, has the right to a compensation of the minimum remuneration for work, determined in separate provisions. It seems that the Polish law should include more regulations concerning specifically promotion of DM. The following changes could be listed with regard to the above: the tax law, public procurement law, labour law, law on supervising business, regulations on establishing and terminating a company, among others.

The subject of diversity is also very important in the European Union, with Poland being its member. The European Commission puts special emphasis on promoting good practices and supports initiatives related to DM. The following activities are worth mentioning here: “Support for voluntary initiatives promoting diversity management at the workplace across the EU project” [12]. The Diversity Charter has been created within the above project and it constitutes a written obligation of a company for implementing efficient solutions contributing to development of an equal treatment and managing diversity in the workplace, as well as to promote it among business and social partners. In Poland, the Diversity Charter transcends the Labour Law obliging one to introduce DM at a company. It relates, for instance, to the necessity of ensuring anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing monitoring, appointing a person or team coordinating DM within the company, introducing regular anti-discrimination education for all employees of company, as well as reporting the undertaken actions and their results. It may be stated that being a signatory of the Diversity Charter is a sign of prestige. Companies, which have signed the Diversity Charter, form an elite group and they may constitute a model to follow for other business entities wishing to implement diversity-related programmes [24]. The Charter’s impact on the image and reputation is also significant. Such companies are viewed as socially responsible.

### **Conclusion**

The authors have presented a short overview of gender diversity in Polish and foreign companies as well as selected actions that support it. Some of the most important barriers in managing diversity in Poland have also been discussed.

The authors have encountered several research problems. In some cases there was no possibility to use the latest data because it was not published by statistical organizations. What is more, gender diversity research usually covers large companies, while there are no data on gender diversity in smaller enterprises. For this reason, there is a need for further research on micro and small firms in reference to gender issue.

The empirical analysis has confirmed the main hypothesis of the article. This article is an attempt to compare gender diversity in Polish and foreign enterprises. Studies, conducted in Poland and other countries, confirm discrepancies between DM, which are heavily impacted by the social conditions of a given country.

Mainly larger corporations focus on gender diversity. It seems that they are the first to notice the benefits of gender diversity. A special disproportion between Polish and foreign enterprises in gender diversity can be seen in the participation of women in senior management positions. Women still remain a decisive minority in manage-

ment boards and supervisory boards of companies, despite the continuous efforts to increase gender diversity in the company's major bodies.

In the authors' opinion, the most important barriers in DM in Poland are stereotypes and prejudices against the role of the women in the society. Moreover, the serious difficulties in implementation of DM arise from insufficient knowledge about DM tools, the lack of engagement from the employees, and the lack of a person responsible for the Diversity Charter.

For this reason, the authors of the paper postulate that Polish companies should utilise competences of both genders more often, while benefitting from diversity and providing opportunities of creating a more efficient culture of operation. This view fits into the trend that the differences in the styles of management of men and women become blurred and this trend is already visible in Western Europe, yet not in Poland, where an efficient manager is associated with a man, rather than a woman. In order to improve the situation, follow-up actions have to be undertaken aiming at promoting diversity and eliminating any signs of discrimination within companies.

Business environment is still far from stable. In those turbulent times even enterprises and industries that were stable cannot be sure what tomorrow brings. That is why managers should be prepared to face different scenarios and make their enterprises agile and flexible by utilizing management styles of both genders.

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## ГЕНДЕРНОЕ РАЗНООБРАЗИЕ НА ПОЛЬСКИХ ПРЕДПРИЯТИЯХ

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### Аннотация

В эпоху социально неоднородной среды управление разнообразием (diversity management) должно иметь первостепенное значение в любой компании из-за потенциала людских ресурсов. Следовательно, надлежащее управление разнообразием может привести к успеху компании на рынке. В Польше общество относительно однородно с точки зрения культуры, расы и религии. Возраст и пол первыми и чаще всего являются причиной дискриминации на польских предприятиях. Вот почему эти факторы входят в основную область управления разнообразием в Польше. Авторы этой статьи решили сосредоточиться на проблеме гендерного разнообразия на предприятиях.

Данная тема особенно значима, поскольку на рабочем месте разнообразие представляет собой одну из самых важных глобальных тенденций в области трудоустройства. Анализ отдельных аспектов управления разнообразием в контексте гендерного равенства в Польше может способствовать лучшему пониманию проблемы.

В первой части этой статьи авторы рассматривают управление разнообразием с теоретической точки зрения на основе имеющихся статей и отчетов. Следующая глава

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посвящена проблеме гендерного разнообразия на основе исследований, проведенных в Польше и за рубежом. В последней части статьи основное внимание уделяется ограничениям управления разнообразием и мероприятиям, направленным на поощрение разнообразия на польских предприятиях.

Основная цель этой статьи — проанализировать уровень гендерного разнообразия в польских и иностранных компаниях, а также рассмотреть существующие инструменты поддержки и препятствия в управлении разнообразием в Польше. Для этого в данном исследовании были рассмотрены существующие научные источники, включающие различные коммерческие отчеты и документы. В качестве основного источника данных для анализа была использована база данных Web of Science Core.

#### Ключевые слова

Гендерное разнообразие, трудоустройство, польские предприятия, экономика труда.

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