

Agnieszka Knap-Stefaniuk

ORCID: 0000-0002-9201-9889

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland

Joan Sorribes

ORCID: 0000-0003-1074-0734

Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona – Universitat de Girona, Spain

Intercultural Management as an Important Aspect of Modern Managers' Work: Educational Challenges

Zarządzanie międzykulturowe jako ważny aspekt pracy współczesnych menedżerów.
Wyzwania edukacyjne

ABSTRACT

The issue of intercultural management has become particularly pertinent because of globalization and the internationalization of economic activity undertaken by contemporary companies. Intercultural management and its challenges are extensively analysed in numerous Polish and foreign publications. The significant role played by intercultural management primarily stems from the tremendous impact it exerts on the efficient functioning of multicultural teams, the relationships between the people in these teams, and their communication and motivation. Moreover, at present it is a crucial aspect of the everyday work of managers operating in culturally diverse work environments.

KEYWORDS

intercultural management, managers' values, intercultural work environment, culturally diverse teams, educational challenges

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

zarządzanie międzykulturowe, wartości menedżerów, międzykulturowe środowisko pracy, zespoły zróżnicowane kulturowo, wyzwania edukacyjne

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The article is of a theoretical nature. The first part describes the role and importance of manager values in the context of cultural diversity in their work environments, followed by the presentation of the concept and meaning of intercultural management. Next, the impact managers exert on the management of culturally diverse teams in modern organizations is analysed. The final part describes selected challenges connected to educating and training modern managers to work in intercultural work environments.

The aim of the article is to demonstrate the role and importance of intercultural management as a vital aspect of modern managers' work and to identify educational challenges related to this area.

ABSTRAKT

Problematyka zarządzania międzykulturowego jest szczególnie aktualna w warunkach globalizacji i internacjonalizacji działalności gospodarczej współczesnych przedsiębiorstw. Zarządzanie międzykulturowe i związane z nim wyzwania są szeroko opisywane w licznych publikacjach polskich i zagranicznych. Rola i znaczenie zarządzania międzykulturowego wynikają przede wszystkim z tego, że ma ono duży wpływ na sprawne funkcjonowanie wielokulturowych zespołów, relacje między ludźmi w tych zespołach, komunikację i motywację do pracy, a przede wszystkim jest dziś szczególnie istotnym aspektem codziennej pracy menedżerów, którzy pracują i realizują zadania w zróżnicowanym kulturowo środowisku pracy.

Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczny. W pierwszej części przedstawiono rolę i znaczenie menedżerów w zarządzaniu w kontekście różnorodności kulturowej w środowisku pracy. Następnie omówiono pojęcie i znaczenie zarządzania międzykulturowego. W dalszej kolejności przedstawiono wpływ menedżerów na zarządzanie zespołami zróżnicowanymi kulturowo we współczesnych organizacjach. W ostatnim punkcie artykułu zasygnalizowano wyzwania edukacyjne, przed jakimi stoi kształcenie współczesnych menedżerów w zakresie zarządzania ludźmi w międzykulturowym środowisku pracy.

Celem artykułu jest wykazanie roli i znaczenia zarządzania międzykulturowego jako ważnego aspektu w pracy współczesnych menedżerów oraz identyfikacja wyzwań edukacyjnych związanych z tym obszarem.

Introduction

The article addresses important and topical issues related to the management of multicultural teams in contemporary organizations. The multicultural composition of teams in organizations is nowadays an increasingly common phenomenon. However, sometimes managers lack adequate preparation to work within intercultural management because many companies tend to promote employees to managerial positions in recognition of their technical skills rather than their knowledge and experience in managing culturally diverse teams. Companies sometimes neglect the complexity of intercultural management and do not provide their managers with adequate training in this area, which often leads to a failure in the functioning of multicultural teams and unsuccessful performance of their tasks and projects.

The coexistence and interactions between different cultures within the same organization are a widespread phenomenon in contemporary management. That is why—given the vital role played by managers in intercultural management—it is particularly relevant that modern managers are well-educated, properly trained, and adequately prepared to effectively communicate and collaborate with members of multicultural teams and customers from different cultures.

Competencies of modern managers and their knowledge and experience in the area of intercultural management are fundamental in building effective multicultural teams. The openness of their attitudes and flexibility of their behaviours to a large extent determine the relationships between employees from different cultures, the atmosphere at work, cooperation within teams and with customers, the ability to share knowledge and experiences, the quality of jointly implemented projects, and the achievement of company objectives.

Building positive interactions between different cultures leads to more efficient functioning of teams and the whole company and meeting the needs of international customers. Intercultural management poses a number of challenges for contemporary enterprises, including those in the area of educating managers and preparing them to effectively manage multicultural teams. Thus, it seems indispensable to provide managers with workshops and trainings thanks to which they will broaden their knowledge and develop skills

necessary in managing multicultural teams, especially in the area of cultural differences, intercultural communication, conflict management, and—last but not least—cultural intelligence.

The role and importance of managers' values in management in the context of cultural diversity in the work environment

Numerous authors have analysed differences in values in management (e.g., Child 1981; Ralston et al. 1993). At the end of the last century, a debate was held as to whether emerging economies around the world that had adopted the Western free market system also adopted the values of the West (Bond, King 1985). The argument that the exposure to Western ways of doing business resulted in the adoption of Western values suggested that the demands and opportunities of a technologically advancing society shaped the value systems that corresponded to industrialisation rather than to indigenous cultures (Pascale, Maguire 1980). However, it seems that culture is a force powerful enough to ensure that business values endorsed by companies in different countries remain distinct despite the impact of Western-style industrialisation (Lincoln, Olson, Hanada 1978).

The results of the studies undertaken in this area reveal that the beliefs and values that made up the system of the 20th-century management in organisations are no longer adequate in the 21st century (Dolan, García 2001).

Today, the work system as a whole is contrary to what is known as the “scientific organisation of work,” in which everything is pre-determined and workers have little to contribute other than their purely physical capacities. Employees of contemporary companies play a significant role in their workplaces, and their success primarily depends on managers, whose ability to transmit values affects teams' cohesion and their members' behaviours in the face of difficulties. To this end, managers seek the participation of team members, define the framework within which teams develop, submit important decisions to the consideration of the group, and should know how to unite the group, communicate effectively and deal with problems successfully (Porret 2007).

This system of working is in line with the systemic view of an organisation and with the distinction between organic and mechanical organisations (Aguirre 2004). Burns and Stalker (1967) argue that organic organisations are desirable in changing and uncertain environments, especially because “organic” systems easily adapt to unstable conditions in which tasks cannot be divided and distributed among specialists in a clearly defined hierarchy. Individuals have to fulfil their tasks capitalising on their knowledge of the overall objectives of the company. Workers lose most of their formal definition in terms of methods, rights and obligations, all of which have to undergo a continuous process of redefinition through interactions with tasks performed by other workers.

Successful preparation of managers, which includes developing in them a deep sense of humanity and strong values, is a great challenge for contemporary organisations. Such preparation is usually based on a philosophy of management, which is defined as a structured approach that assists managers in leading others. A typical management philosophy can vary depending on the person and the management style, and it will also vary by department, by specific team goals, and company initiatives.

The management philosophy linked to values led to the formulation of management by values, which is a philosophy that, in addition to promoting a dynamic cultural revitalisation within the organisation, allows the process of change to be understood as an opportunity for personal and professional development in an increasingly changing, competitive and demanding environment.

Nowadays, the need to foster particular values in employees and managers as well as to consolidate the organisational culture to achieve objectives is commonly acknowledged; it is in this context that management by values has taken on relevance, especially in culturally diverse environments.

Management by values is a management philosophy which assumes that management based on the human factor is an essential element in the development of an organisation. It is based on seeking the maximum involvement of employees and focusing their attention on organisational values as a way of meeting the challenges posed by the need to adapt to the demands of a turbulent environment.

The evolution of management which finally led to Management by Values began in the 1920s when it was called Management by Instruction and was implemented in a simple and predictable environment, in which managers directly ordered the work to be carried out by workers with little training and directly supervised their work. In the 1960s it was replaced by Management by Objectives: in a more complex environment and with personnel with higher and diversified levels of qualification, managers developed and implemented a system of objectives in a cascade throughout the hierarchical structure of the organisation, taking it as a basis for remuneration. Management by Values appeared in the 2000s: in today's complex and dynamically changing environments, managers must seek creativity in solving complex problems by increasingly highly skilled professionals.

This new management system is based on the idea that companies which compete on the same markets and technological sectors do so on increasingly equal technical terms and that the competitive differences between them will necessarily stem from the way they are managed.

Hence, if a company implements a management system based on its own values and distinctive capabilities, it will be able to produce products and services in a way that differs from its competitors and, as a result, will be more likely to succeed. In order to achieve success, the company's Human Resources System should become the main tool for the company's competitiveness, taking on the complexity and dynamism of the environment and leading the personnel to the highest level of productivity.

Thus, it might be necessary to introduce proper ways of transmitting desirable values throughout the organisation. The main objective of the Human Resources System is to attract the right people to these values and encourage them to reach their highest levels of creativity and productivity by finding full meaning in their work. The basic idea is to develop such work philosophy which will guarantee the integration of all workers of an organisation. This requires coherence between the human resources management system and the strategic plans, both of which must be developed with a dynamically changing global environment in mind.

When business "values" are discussed, both at the popular and even academic level, they are usually restricted to ethical or moral values,

such as integrity, sincerity, honesty, fairness, dignity and respect. Of course, these ethical values are essential for the survival and evolution of the human species, and correspond to the social and environmental dimensions of the current sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility discourse. However, in a broader perspective, a value is treated as something worthy of esteem that exceeds the ethical dimension and includes for example creativity, joy or even efficiency, so necessary in today's organisations.

An important aspect of work of managers operating in an intercultural environment is their ability to identify values, especially in case of employees from different cultures (Matić 2008). Values endorsed by culturally diverse employees can significantly affect the functioning of an organization in many ways, including conflict management, ability of the organization to implement changes, adapt to a dynamic market environment, communicate in teams and engage in the achievement of company goals.

Although the deliberate absence of an explicit values strategy can also be considered a legitimate strategy, its explicit, participatory, consensual and coherent formulation has different functions, all of them absolutely critical for the health of any business organisation. When the strategy and its values are shared, they generate cohesion and productive efficiency and build corporate identity. It is important to define the way in which the organisation reveals its philosophy and strategy through communication, behaviour and symbolism. This strategy allows a company to ensure integrity and cohesion despite the dispersion of authority, even in virtual companies. In addition, the values strategy provides a stable framework to guide decision-making in a rapidly changing work environment. Finally, it creates common language and integrates different subcultures, especially when the company branches are located in different countries and employ highly diverse workforce in terms of working styles, education and customs.

For authors such as (Alarcón 2012), values do not only serve as a measurement of an effective manager in the 21st century but also incorporate an integral diagnosis of the whole person and their ethical and emotional stability.

Managing by values is a social process which results from interactions, and management systems provide opportunities to enhance

those social interactions that motivate employees to act, which is particularly important in an environment of cultural differences.

Therefore, managers play a particularly important role in the implementation of management systems, in terms of integrating the practices of an organization with the values that are derived from employees' experiences. In culturally diverse work environments, values preferred by managers are especially important because they affect employees from different cultures: their attitudes, behaviours, cooperation in a team, and realization of goals. Managers' vital task is to integrate employees around common values, which means convincing people to apply these values in their everyday work in organizational practices (Knap-Stefaniuk, Burkiewicz 2021a).

"The internationalisation of the work environment is increasingly influencing management processes that take place in modern organisations. It should be emphasized that intercultural interactions are inseparably linked with intercultural management. Such interactions should be understood as mutual influences exerted by a person from one cultural background on another person or persons from a different culture" (Knap-Stefaniuk, Sorribes 2021: 150–151). Intercultural interactions are particularly important in the work of managers in the area of values shared and promoted in the team.

"Becoming a successful manager actually means developing a capacity to understand the nature of results and achievements and their linkages within corresponding systems of values" (Petkovski 2012: 92).

The essence of intercultural management: Concept and meaning

It is not a surprise that various issues related to culture or traditions drive the behaviour of a group of people belonging to a given nation or culture. This becomes evident when different people from different cultural backgrounds from one of 194 countries in the world are placed in work or business relationships, hence should be taken into account in the strategic planning of a global company or a company that aspires to be global.

Intercultural management results from progressive globalization processes and takes place when an organisation faces cultural differences inside or outside (Łukasik 2011). Greblikaite and Daugeliene

(2010) argue that intercultural management is management that takes into account and bridges cultural differences between employees of an organization and is primarily aimed at improving communication within the company and in its relations with the international environment.

According to Georgescu, Bulacu and Istrate (2019), intercultural management can be described as a combination of knowledge, insights and skills which are necessary for adequately dealing with national and regional cultures and differences between cultures at several management levels within and between organisations. It is not a separate area but an integral part of general and international management.

Nowadays, intercultural management is primarily aimed at creating and maintaining a work environment that values both similarities and differences of individual employees so that all of them can fulfil their potential by engaging in the achievement of corporate goals and strategies. Intercultural management assumes that employees from different cultural backgrounds can bring their ideas, insights, and experiences to the organization, which will translate into a more productive teamwork and higher quality products and services (Knap-Stefaniuk 2021a).

Intercultural management can therefore be defined as a set of principles and tools which offer individuals and companies intercultural solutions leading to a greater efficiency in the international integration process, negotiations, sales, work activities and commercial relations with people or companies from different countries and cultures.

Intercultural competence is reflected in the ability to recognise, respect, value and productively use—in oneself and others—cultural conditions and determinants in perceiving, judging, feeling and acting with the aim of creating mutual adaptation, tolerance of incompatibilities and a development towards synergistic forms of cooperation, living together and effective orientation patterns with respect to interpreting and shaping the world (Martin, Nakayama 2010). In the case of managers working in an environment of cultural differences, their intercultural competences have a significant impact on the management of multicultural teams and their success or failure.

Intercultural management promotes good relations between employees, fosters an appropriate approach to customers and suppliers from other countries, helps in negotiations between employees from different cultures, facilitates understanding of different cultural values, and presents solutions to problems generated by different practices and ways of working or trading. In this regard, adaptation, agility and cultural flexibility are not only competencies vital for managers working for global companies but also become indispensable qualities in the business world and in working relationships. By acquiring the right intercultural competencies, the company, its employees and managers will be better prepared to face the challenges that globalisation brings.

Intercultural management is the art of knowing how to work with people from other cultures. Nowadays, when global companies operate in foreign markets and in different cultural context, in order to be successful, they must first understand a new cultural context and then adapt its operations to it.

According to Elashmawi and Harris (1993), the new global market will be not only international but highly intercultural. Understandably, international management in the future will also—or even particularly—make the intercultural management an absolute necessity.

The impact of managers on management of culturally diverse teams in contemporary organizations

The development of international activities undertaken by contemporary companies has a significant impact on the growing demands for management of culturally diverse workforce (Herciu 2014). Hence, modern managers—especially those who work in culturally diverse environments—play a crucial role in successful managing of their teams and achieving company goals.

Managers who work in international environments and manage culturally diverse teams should be persons with, first, relevant and up-to-date knowledge, skills and predispositions that enable them to act flexibly in a multicultural environment and, second, with relevant

experience that enables them to effectively manage their teams and achieve set goals.

Intercultural management is the art of knowing how to work, negotiate, communicate and manage people from other countries. Sometimes little details in intercultural team management turn out to be vitally important, especially in view of the fact that the psychological and human costs of failures born by both employees and companies are very high. Companies send their executives to other countries on the basis of their technical and professional skills, but very often they do not assess their adaptability to new situations or their tolerance of differences.

According to Caputo et al. (2019), working environments have become increasingly culturally diverse and employees at all levels of organisational structures are often required to engage in cross-cultural negotiations. Thus, managers and negotiators should develop the ability to recognize cultural differences and adapt their negotiation styles to the cultural factors they face. The results of their study indicate that cultural factors (e.g., power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and masculinity) have both a direct and indirect impact on negotiation styles, the latter being mediated thanks to cultural intelligence. The study also highlights the importance of cultural values and cultural intelligence on negotiation styles and contributes to the research and practice of negotiations.

The need for a specific intercultural discipline in the management field comes from the fact that speaking a foreign language is not enough for successful communication between people belonging to different cultures. The communicative process is much more complex than the simple understanding of what the interlocutor says. This is because communication is not linear, which means that the transmission of a message is never neutral; the spoken message transmits not only words and notions but also norms and values, and some of these norms and values may not be fully shared by interlocutors.

Consequently, managers have to be aware not only of the different language used by their business partners but also of their different attitudes, time perception, behaviours, traditions and other culturally-loaded factors. At this point, intercultural management provides an opportunity to become aware of them and tools to successfully address them. Inappropriate behaviour while doing business

or misunderstandings of business partners' activities can lead to serious problems and even to a termination of partnership (Georgescu, Bulacu, Istratie 2019).

It is advisable to prepare companies, managers and employees before they have to deal with such situations, for example by explaining the main characteristics of various cultures, teaching them how to successfully promote team-building of intercultural teams, how to communicate effectively, how to encourage respect within the team, how to ensure collaboration and facilitate mutual learning, and how to identify team members' unique skills and strong points in order to use them for the benefit of the company.

In order to succeed in intercultural management, managers need to be open and able to adapt to new situations and employees from different countries. They need to be curious and willing to gain knowledge about how different cultures communicate and interact with each other. Intercultural management is also about overcoming cultural prejudices. Managers must understand and accept multiculturalism and possess knowledge and experience in managing culturally diverse teams (Knap-Stefaniuk 2021a).

Managers who effectively manage culturally diverse teams can expect positive outcomes from their work, which include employees' different ways of thinking and their diverse experiences as well as their abilities to analyse problems from different perspectives (Coote-Martin 2014).

Cultural differences can lead to a range of relationship problems among employees and between employees and managers. Therefore, managers should be aware of and understand cultural differences and to create such working conditions for their subordinates in which they can really contribute to the effective functioning of teams and the whole organization (Zi Leng, Yazdanifard 2014).

Managing people in an intercultural work environment: Challenges in educating modern managers

Contemporary organizations must be more flexible than before, must respond to increasingly unpredictable changes in their environment and attract employees from different countries and cultures

in order to develop a multifaceted approach to their activity and increase the level of adaptation, based on the competencies of their employees (Mockaitis, Zander, De Cieri 2018). Today's business environment is dynamically changing and, due to these changes, the qualitative requirements for managers' competences are also changing (Ullrich, Pokorný, Ambrozová 2017). Leading culturally diverse teams is a major challenge for many modern managers, who should possess both hard and soft competencies (Knap-Stefaniuk 2021b).

Today, the effectiveness of managers depends primarily on their skills. Thus, it is especially important to recruit and train managers whose skills make them effective in managing people and positively affect the development of the whole organization (Mehri, Ramezan 2016). Managers play a key role in contemporary organizations, and their competencies determine success of both managers themselves and the teams they lead. This is especially important in a multicultural environment, which is sensitive and prone to a lack of flexibility or tolerance from superiors and colleagues (Namiq 2018). Hence, managing people in a culturally diverse environment requires continuous, systematic development of managers' competencies necessary to effectively lead multicultural teams.

It should be emphasized that, on the one hand, the diversity of employees and the cultures they come from can be an opportunity for the development of employees, teams, and organizations, but, on the other hand, it can also give rise to resentment, conflicts, and difficult situations. Therefore, paying attention to intercultural competencies of managers should be an important element of the strategy of any contemporary organization (Knap-Stefaniuk, Burkiewicz 2021b). It is necessary to educate managers not only in the area of cultural differences—which is an absolute minimum—but also in the area of intercultural communication and intercultural conflict resolution.

Increasingly often teams are made up of people of different nationalities, languages and sensitivities. In many multicultural teams English is the language of business communication, however, not all team members are equally fluent at it, which can cause a number of problems. For example, it can lead to changes in power relations within the team or negatively affect knowledge sharing, which is crucial in innovation teams. Additionally, it can also lead to distress, emotional problems and ultimately also a trust issue, which obviously

translates into less effective cooperation. Managers should make sure that everyone has enough time to speak because people who need more time to formulate their ideas in English may fear being sidelined. And of course, poor English is also a big problem in knowledge transfer, e.g. when certain employees are not listened to just because it takes them longer to voice their ideas. Understandably, it prevents effective development of synergies in multicultural teams, and should be avoided.

Communication skills is not the only area within which managers should improve their competences. Another important area is patience, because we cannot expect a multilingual and multinational company to work as well as a domestic company. Of course, a great advantage of an international company is its greater creativity based on many different points of view, which facilitates reaching better solutions by developing synergies and extending knowledge. But it requires time.

It is also worth emphasizing that managers' cultural intelligence (Cultural Quotient—CQ) plays a crucial role in managing culturally diverse teams. It affects their openness in building positive intercultural relations in teams, their ability to understand and accept employees' attitudes and behaviours, way of communication, work style and values preferred in their cultures (Knap-Stefaniuk 2021b).

In a corporate environment where cultural diversity is increasingly present, cultural intelligence is becoming more and more relevant as part of organisational learning, as it greatly contributes to the adaptation of employees from different cultures to the way of working of the company. At the same time, it is closely linked to employees' and managers' emotional intelligence and intercultural skills, thus it also fosters the creation of personal and professional bonds.

Managers' cultural intelligence is defined as their ability to function effectively in different cultures and to adapt quickly in conditions of cultural diversity as well as their understanding of the essence of challenges and problems arising from managing culturally diverse teams (Knap-Stefaniuk 2021b). It is necessary to educate managers in the area of cultural intelligence because it is indispensable when working with employees from different cultures. For example, it sensitizes them to cultural differences, protects against prejudice and stereotypical treatment of team members, leads to greater openness

and flexibility in forming intercultural relations, and increases their ability to build multicultural, effective cooperation within and outside the team.

Moreover, managers who work in contemporary organizations and manage intercultural teams require relevant interpersonal characteristics, such as extraversion, creativity, leadership, adaptive skills, awareness and sensitivity, especially cultural sensitivity (Tewari, Sharma 2011). These features should be included in educational curricula covering competencies required by managers.

Without proper understanding of the role of cultural diversity in managing contemporary organizations, strategic plans may simply remain intentions, nothing more (Kivenzor 2018: 1). Therefore, one of the key challenges in the work of modern managers is to understand the essence and importance of intercultural management, so relevant education and training of managers in this area is a must. Managers who are well-prepared to manage multicultural teams are able to positively affect their teams' creativity, innovativeness, and teamwork.

As organizations increasingly often function in the changing and dynamic conditions of the global market, employees become valuable resource, and the high demand for competent human resources will continue to grow (Wardhani 2018), especially for managers who can effectively manage multicultural teams and are well-prepared to function in an environment of cultural differences.

Conclusions

In the contemporary world, globalization and the unprecedented growth of international companies which employ multicultural staff require recruiting managers who are able to act effectively, make rational decisions, successfully communicate with culturally diverse teams, coordinate their work and task performance, and quickly resolve conflict situations arising from cultural differences.

In the authors' opinion, it seems crucial to rethink current educational models, teaching methods and managers' competence development before organisations embark on the path of internationalisation.

Managers who work with intercultural teams should acquire and develop interdisciplinary knowledge on interculturality, understand

international and global contexts of the functioning of contemporary organizations, and be willing to learn about the cultures of their employees in order to effectively capitalise on the potential offered by multicultural teams.

Thus, educating and training managers who are responsible for managing culturally diverse employees is nowadays the foundation for shaping flexible, open and tolerant attitudes and such an environment in which multiculturalism is a normal aspect of managers' work.

To sum up, in order to raise relevant competences of their managers and improve efficiency of employees and multicultural teams, employers and HR departments should plan and effectively implement trainings aimed at developing managers' knowledge and skills. These trainings should focus on intercultural management, management of multicultural teams, especially in the context of motivating and engaging employees, conflict management in multicultural work environments, intercultural communication and cultural intelligence.

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ADDRESSES FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Agnieszka Knap-Stefaniuk
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland
Institute of Political and Administrative Sciences
e-mail: agnieszka.knap.stefaniuk@ignatianum.edu.pl

Joan Sorribes
Escola Universitària Formatic Barcelona – Universitat de Girona, Spain
Facultad de ciencias económicas y empresariales – UdG
Departamento de ciencias jurídicas y empresariales – EUFB
e-mail: joan.sorribes@udg.edu