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# Cultural intelligence as an important attribute of global managers

Dynamic and most often unexpected changes in the world economy, constant development of technology, unstable political situation in many regions, and growing migration of people resulting in increased cultural diversity at workplaces are among the challenges that contemporary enterprises have to face. All these circumstances influence companies seeking opportunities to achieve competitive advantages, both internationally and domestically. Turbulent environment requires managers who are equipped with both traditional managerial hard skills, and soft skills, including cultural intelligence. In the literature, cultural intelligence as an important attribute of global managers has been primarily considered and analysed regarding managers delegated to work abroad. However, increasing cultural diversity of the population of certain countries results in the growing importance of culturally diverse staff working also in companies operating in a domestic environment. It means that managers have to face many complex problems related to effectively leading culturally diversified teams. The main purpose of the paper is to highlight the importance of cultural intelligence as an attribute of global managers working abroad. Effective managers can manage an intercultural workforce and gain competitive advantage from cultural diversity regardless of the country they work in.

Keywords: international assignment, global managers, self-initiated expatriation, cultural intelligence JEL classification: F230, F22, M14, Z00

## Inteligencja kulturowa jako ważny atrybut globalnych menedżerów

Dynamiczne i najczęściej niespodziewane zmiany w gospodarce światowej, stały rozwój technologiczny, niestabilna sytuacja polityczna w wielu regionach i nasilająca się migracja ludności w skali międzynarodowej wywierają wpływ na wzrost zróżnicowania kulturowego w miejscu pracy, które stanowi poważne wyzwanie dla współczesnych przedsiębiorstw. Wspomniane zmiany mobilizują przedsiębiorstwa do poszukiwania możliwości uzyskania przewagi konkurencyjnej tak w skali krajowej, jak i międzynarodowej. Turbulentne otoczenie sprawia, że poszukiwani są menedżerowie odznaczający się zarówno twardymi, jak i miękkimi kompetencjami, wśród których coraz ważniejszą rolę zaczyna odgrywać inteligencja kulturowa. W literaturze przedmiotu inteligencja kulturowa jako ważny atrybut globalnych menedżerów jest badana i analizowana głównie w odniesieniu do tych menedżerów, którzy delegowani są do pracy w innych krajach. Okazuje się jednak, że wobec rosnącego zróżnicowania kulturowego populacji wielu krajów jest ona przydatna także menedżerom operującym na rynkach krajowych, którzy mają za zadanie efektywnie kierować wielokulturowymi zespołami. Główny cel artykułu to naświetlenie istoty i znaczenia inteligencji kulturowej jako ważnego atrybutu globalnych menedżerów pracujących

za granicą. Menedżerowie odznaczający się inteligencją kulturową mogą skutecznie kierować zróżnicowanym personelem bez względu na kraj, w którym pracują.

Słowa kluczowe: praca za granicą, globalni menedżerowie, ekspatriacja z własnej inicjatywy, inteligencja kulturowa

Klasyfikacja JEL: F230, F22, M14, Z00

#### Introduction

The Population Division of the United Nations reports that the number of international migrants has been growing rapidly over the last fifteen years for various reasons, such as wars, political conflicts, terrorism, inequality, poverty and lack of decent jobs on the one hand, and faster, cheaper ways of transportation on the other. The process has intensified since 2000, when the total number of international migrants worldwide reached the level of 173 million, and in 2015 increased by another 70 million, amounting to 244 million people in total [United Nations, 2016]<sup>1</sup>.

Globalization, growing importance of Foreign Direct Investment [UNCTAD, 2015] and transnational corporations<sup>2</sup>, dynamic changes in the world economy as a whole and amongst individual economies [Rodrik, 2011], the revolution in technologies, increasing competition on a global scale, mergers and acquisitions, and diversification of businesses, causing stress and instability of employment, result in a growing mobility of employees as well as an increasing demand for global managers. These managers are expected to work in an intercultural environment [Thomas, Inkson, 2009] and solve technical, political, social, and cultural problems [Ivanova, Torkkeli, 2013]. There are different categories of international migrants, reflecting different reasons of their mobility. They usually look for better opportunities, jobs, and living conditions, believing that the 'grass is greener' beyond their country.

The IT revolution influencing every aspect of life also has been affecting forms of managing international business activity [*The Challenges...*, 2010]. New communication and management technologies [Czinkota et al., 2009] and relatively inexpensive flights have shortened distances between countries, and have impact on the duration of international assignments. Contemporary managers working in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The 2015 Report shows that the majority of international migrants lived in Europe, Asia, and Northern America (76, 75, and 54 million, respectively). Africa hosted 21 million migrants, whereas Latin America and the Caribbean – 9 million, and Oceania – 8 million. Europe and Asia absorb approximately two-thirds of the total amount of international migrants.

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, using database of 37 million enterprises worldwide, analysed 43,060 transnational corporations and found out that global corporate control belongs to 147 enterprises that 'own interlocking stakes of one another and together control 40% of the wealth in the network. A total of 737 control 80% of it all' [Upbin, 2011].

international companies all over the world are not required to spend as much time in other countries as previously, because they can conduct their businesses and control many processes from the place where they live [Dowling, Festing, Engle, 2013]. Traditional long-term contracts lasting from one to five years are systematically replaced by short-term assignments [McKenna, Ducharme, Budworth, 2009] lasting up to three months, with extended contracts of up to one year or various other forms of international mobility. These changes bring certain advantages and disadvantages for both companies and managers, as it is highlighted in the next section.

It is necessary to point out the existence of a group of managers who are not delegated abroad by their companies but independently search for jobs in other countries, and as self-initiated expatriates work all over the world [Biemann, Andersen, 2010; Altman, Baruch, 2012; Al Ariss, Crowley-Henry, 2013; Doherty, 2013; Doherty, Richardson, Thorn, 2013a; 2013b]. Cultural intelligence can be considered as one of their vital attributes [Rose et al., 2010; Livermore, Van Dyne, Ang, 2012]. Another group of managers exposed to high risk of making mistakes caused by lack of cultural intelligence are those who work in their own country but in a multicultural work environment [Stewart, 2007]. Cultural intelligence allows them to manage more effectively and avoid many misunderstandings resulting from ignorance. It is necessary to emphasize that although this issue is worth more consideration, the volume of the paper is limited and thus it is dedicated only to managers who work abroad.

The reasons for undertaking the scientific problem related to cultural intelligence include: the growing number of companies involved in worldwide operations and dealing with cultural diversity, academic interest, lack of Polish academic publications devoted to this subject, as well as the identification of the resulting need to deeper investigate this topic. The aim of the paper is to stimulate managerial cross-cultural thinking and encourage further research in this field through highlighting the problem of cultural intelligence as an important trait of international managers working abroad and dealing with a culturally diversified environment. Effective managers are cosmopolitan types who can manage an intercultural workforce and gain competitive advantage from cultural diversity regardless of the country they work in [Ng, Tan, Ang, 2011]. The first step undertaken in this research was the collection and selection of relevant secondary sources and then a review and analysis of their content. A critical analysis of the literature and statistical data facilitated achieving the purpose of the paper. To present the results of this process, the descriptive technique was utilized.

There are three issues related to cultural intelligence as an attribute of global managers, highlighted in the particular parts of the paper. The first is devoted to the different categories of international assignments and managers' need for de-

veloping cultural intelligence to perform effectively in an intercultural environment, the second is dedicated to the traits of global managers and the last part presents the concept of cultural intelligence and its components as essential managerial competences. The summary and recommendations close the considerations set out in the paper. Studies of statistics and international migration analysis published by the Population Division of the United Nations, Finaccord ExpatriateBASE, World Investment Report 2015 and 2016 Global Mobility Trends Survey Report were the basis for completing the first part of the paper, whereas an analysis and critical review of the relevant literature were undertaken to clarify the categories of contemporary managers as well as the concept of cultural intelligence and opportunities of its practical utilization in managerial jobs.

### 1. Characteristics of international assignments

Internationalization, manifested in the growing intensification of business operations worldwide [UNCTAD, 2015], causes a vast expansion of transnational corporations, development of international business activities such as foreign trade, joint ventures, franchising, strategic alliances, mergers, acquisitions and international projects, and leads to an increasing demand for highly educated professionals representing different disciplines who are expected to work worldwide. 'International assignee' is a general term used to define this category of employees, whereas an 'expatriate' usually means a person who leaves his or her country for a particular purpose and usually fixed period from one to three or more years and then comes back home. With regard to Anne-Wil Harzing's and Sebastian Reiche's [2009] definition of the term 'international assignee', it can be described as 'any person that is relocated internationally'.

Rapid changes occurring in the global market raise demand for both talented and flexible employees who are mobile and can undertake assignments in any part of the world. In many cases employees involved in international business operations, supported by modern communication devices and access to the Internet, are able to complete their tasks anywhere. Dual careers, changes in life styles, and ease in communication and transportation have generated new forms of international assignments, often called non-traditional or non-standard, contrary to traditional or standard types lasting for more than one year.

Traditional international assignments, as mentioned by Peter J. Dowling, Marion Festing and Allen D. Engle [2013], are classified as long-term contracts and last from one to five years. Regarding the country of origin, expatriates on international assignments can be divided into two categories: Parent Country Nationals (PCNs) and Third Country Nationals (TCNs). PCNs originate from the country

where the headquarters of the company is located and TCNs come from countries other than the country where a subsidiary operates. Local employees working in subsidiaries are classified as Host Country Nationals (HCNs). When they are delegated to the country where the headquarters is located to work as long- or short-term assignees, they are named inpatriates. They are expected to share subsidiaries' 'best practices' with headquarters' employees and learn about corporations' cultures, strategies and values.

When considering non-traditional assignments, it is necessary to specify their various forms, increasingly gaining in popularity since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- short-term assignments lasting up to three months,
- extended assignments lasting up to one year,
- contractual assignments,
- international travellers: frequent visitors, commuters, rotational and virtual assignments.

There are different reasons behind taking on short-term assignments [Miller, Murray, 2011]. In some cases, it is necessary to control and/or supervise particular stages of international projects and to maintain direct contact with project teams. It is especially important when representatives of fluid-time cultures are involved and compliance with deadlines is critical to the success of the project. A dynamic business environment, in particular a political one, can cause unexpected problems difficult to solve for local managers or even managers working as long-term assignees - which is why sometimes the support and expertise of professionals delegated for short-term assignments may prove to be vital for a subsidiary. Every now and then a job position in a foreign subsidiary is not filled because of a failure of the former manager and lack of time to find a replacement and then, short-time assignees are desirable. If necessary, short-term assignments are converted into extended contracts lasting up to one year. Contractual assignments are used primarily in international project teams when professionals with specific knowledge and unique skills are required. Usually the duration of their stay abroad is limited from six months to one year.

International travellers are metaphorically named 'global nomads', 'soldiers of fortune', 'project workers', 'international cadre', 'commuters', and 'virtual assignees' by some corporations [CIPD, 2007] and these cost-effective forms of international assignments will be systematically developing and growing, as reported in 2015 Global Mobility Trends Survey Report. Despite continued changes in the world economy, the constant pressure on lowering costs, including costs of international assignments, has not diminished, as reported by 74% of the respondents from 143 multinational corporations examined in the survey. Although they operate in an uneven and unclear global environment, 43% declared they expect an increase

in their international assignment population. In 2015, building international management experience for the first time took the second place in the ranking of reasons for sending employees on international assignments, just after filling managerial skills gap (whereas previously it was ranked behind filling technical skills gap). It is worth citing the following sentence from the Report: 'Developing leadership talent with a global mindset is critical for today's companies and leveraging international assignments as a developmental tool is a growing trend' [Brookfield].

The reasons for taking on non-standard forms of international assignments include:

- shortage of experienced managers or other professionals willing to go abroad for long-term contracts,
- family's unwillingness to change existing life style (dual career issues, education of children, etc.),
- cost reduction of international assignments,
- attracting more talented employees to gain international experience.

Long-term international assignment are substituted or/and complemented by other, non-standard forms of assignments. According to the findings of Marja Tahvanainen, Denice Welch, and Verner Worm [2005], substitution is predominantly used to lower costs and increase cost-effectiveness, whereas complementation corresponds with developing leadership and managerial skills and building a global mindset.

The group of international travellers is comprised of frequent flyers, managers or specialists visiting many subsidiaries or international project teams to solve problems, consult, monitor, advise, etc. A commuting assignee travels abroad to or from a subsidiary every week or every other week, if his or her presence is required in both places. As the family stays at home, there are no relocation problems, spouses do not have to break their careers, children do not have to change schools, etc. Although there are some advantages to such assignments, there are also disadvantages resulting from the stress caused by frequent and intensive business journeys.

Rotational assignments involve short stays abroad usually followed by breaks in the parent country. These types of arrangements are recommended for hardship locations such as oil rigs or mines. Virtual assignments can be convenient for managers who – using different means of electronic communication such as phone calls, video conferences, or e-mails – are able to work from their own countries. Virtual communication itself can cause communication problems resulting from cultural differences, dispersion of responsibility and lack of direct ongoing support. If necessary, these types of assignments can be combined with short visits abroad to assure managerial control and consultation.

Regardless of the duration of their contracts, it is worth noting that international assignees have to complete different tasks and play varied roles in subsidiaries. Some of them, listed by Ann-Wil Harzing [2001], are as follows: supervisors or controllers, described as 'bears', value bearers or 'bumble-bees', who are supposed to transfer corporate culture and, in particular, its value system (it is the most challenging task and one which not always can be successfully completed because of cultural differences), and 'spiders', who are expected to build a global network by establishing and developing interpersonal relations and direct contacts with managerial staff in subsidiaries. In many societies, building long-lasting relationships is the key to business success. It is difficult to overestimate the value of employees who are gifted with both interpersonal skills and cultural intelligence and can use them to build and develop social capital, which is one of the basic attributes of global managers. The last category, called 'best practice transmitters', collect them in subsidiaries and/or in headquarters and disseminate worldwide, thus building social capital, as pointed out by Kristiina Maekelae [2007]. In today's knowledge-based economy, best practice transfer can be an essential instrument for achieving competitive advantage. However, completing this task requires experienced, outstanding professionals who not only have the ability to share knowledge and are highly motivated, but also demonstrate emotional and cultural intelligence helping them to implement best practices.

Not all of the above-described types of international assignees occupy managerial positions. Some of them are specialists, consultants, project team members, young talents sent abroad to gain international experience, improve language and communication skills, establish interpersonal relationships, and develop cultural intelligence that will be playing an important role in their managerial career.

# 2. Essential and required competencies of global managers

Requirements for global managers are much higher and more complex than for those who operate in a domestic environment [Dowling, Festing, Engle, 2013; Phatak, 1974]. A cadre of global managers should demonstrate both hard competencies such as experience and essential knowledge related to general management and particular areas of business activity as well as soft skills such as ease in adaptability to a new business and cultural environment, and fast responsiveness to changes and emerging problems. Interpersonal, communication and negotiation competencies are vital to establishing contacts with members of the external environment of the foreign subsidiary as well as with subordinates, who can originate from different countries and cultures, even if they are citizens of the same country. Similar competencies are also expected from local managers who have to

manage intercultural teams and deal with culturally diversified clients, as is often the case in the global world.

There are many researches dedicated to the attributes of global managers or global leaders, as both terms are used alternatively, whose authors try to establish a profile of the most outstanding international leader that would be universally accepted. One of the most ambitious international research project focusing on this topic was the project GLOBE, which involved over 160 academics from 62 countries whose research teams surveyed over 17,000 middle managers [House et al., 1999; House, 2004]. The results of the survey showed that a leader, to be universally perceived as effective in majority of countries, should demonstrate integrity, charisma [Jacquart, Antonakis, 2015], and ability to build effective teams. Universal impediments to leadership effectiveness are usually attributes such as being non-cooperative, ruthless, egocentric, irritable, antisocial, non-explicit, dictatorial, and being a loner [Simpson, 2008].

A group of researchers conducting a survey among managers working in American, European and Asian enterprises identified a set of attributes characterizing outstanding global leaders, which they called a 'Global Explorer Model' [Mendenhall et al., 2013]. In short, it comprises the following traits:

- inquisitiveness and passion for learning,
- interest in diversity,
- acceptance of ambiguity perceived as a stimulating and natural element of a global business,
- ability to comply with both local and global environment and conditions,
- integrity of beliefs and behaviours,
- ability to establish relationships with people demonstrating different knowledge, skills, experience and cultural background and maintaining own value system,
- sense of business.

Apart from the above-listed attributes, there are also other traits and skills enhancing the effectiveness of managers operating in a multicultural environment. First of all, researchers pay attention to a global mindset and awareness of benefits which can be drawn from cultural diversity. Developing awareness of technological changes is also helpful in the era of a permanent introduction of technological innovations. Last but not least is the ability to share leadership and build networks, partnership, and alliances, as pointed out by Marshall Goldsmith, Cathy Greenberg, Alastair Roberston and Maya Hu-Chan [2003].

# 3. Cultural intelligence and its importance in managing international business

In order to fulfil the purpose of the paper, it is worth devoting more attention to cultural intelligence and its significance for managing organizations in a globalizing world. This attribute seems to be vital for managers' effectiveness in a multicultural environment, whether they operate in their own country or abroad. Cultural intelligence is an important attribute of everybody involved in international business, but it is a priceless trait of managerial staff in particular.

The term 'cultural intelligence' is relatively new, as it appeared at the beginning of the 21st century as the result of deepening globalization and increasing international migration. In 2002, P. Christopher Earley published an article dedicated to cultural intelligence in which he defined it as a 'person's capacity to adapt to new cultural settings based on multiple facets including cognitive, motivational and behavioral features'; later, together with Soon Ang, he edited a book on the subject [Earley, Ang, 2003]. The researchers found out that a better understanding of the essence of cultural intelligence results in a more effective intercultural management, in particular when it comes to filling managerial positions abroad and planning training and development. The concept and definitions were developed in subsequent researches conducted, among others, by David Thomas and Kerr Inkson [2004], Earley and Elaine Mosakowski [2004], Earley and Randall S. Peterson [2004] and Earley, Peterson and Lisa Moynihan [2006], who proved that the 'mean level of team member CQ predicts intragroup trust, cohesion, and performance for the multinational team'. They evidenced that CQ should not be treated as a static individual's capability but as a dynamic attribute which can be developed through gaining experience working in intercultural teams. As the result of subsequent research conducted by Ang, Linn Van Dyne, and Christine Koh [2006], Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, K. Yee Ng, Klaus J. Templer, Cheryl Tay, and N. Anand Chandrasekar [2007], and Ang and Van Dyne [2008], the fourth dimension – metacognitive – was incorporated into the model of cultural intelligence.

The emergence of the concept of cultural intelligence is perceived as a consequence of living in an increasingly globalizing world, where an individual has to have the ability to understand multicultural environment, formulate correct and adequate methodology and conclusions, and adapt his or her behaviour accordingly in a manner expected and accepted in a given cultural environment. It should be stressed that cultural intelligence, together with general, social, practical, and emotional intelligence, as analysed by Dorota Simpson [2015], facilitate individuals to function effectively in a new cultural situation characterised by

cultural diversity. In international contacts, as Simpson [2014] stated, it can be profitable to possess at least emotional and cultural intelligence, to distinguish behaviours that depend on personality from those that depend on cultural origin.

Further development of research conducted by Van Dyne, Ang and Koh [2009; 2012] related to cultural intelligence resulted in the proposal of a more detailed segmentation of every dimension:

- metacognitive: understood as a capability of an individual to gain and assess his or her intercultural knowledge in relation to own cultural identity as well as the cultural identity of others during interaction. It comprises the three following sub-dimensions:
  - a) planning: the phase of preparation, consideration of objectives, and anticipation of possible actions undertaken by partners from other countries,
  - awareness: being aware of one's own and others' cultural conditions, barriers, and traditions, and able to anticipate how they can influence behaviour during interaction,
  - c) checking: a kind of redefinition of our expectations with regard to the actual situation occurring during interactions with representatives of other cultures;
- 2. cognitive: referring to the individual's general knowledge about cultures and the differences between them, and the structure of this knowledge. It contains two sub-dimensions:
  - a) culture-general knowledge: general knowledge about different cultures and their systems of values,
  - context-specific knowledge: knowledge about the impact of culture on different managerial roles and activities such as motivation, assessment, leadership style, etc.;
- 3. motivational: intrinsic motivation of an individual to make an effort to function effectively in a new cultural environment. The following sub-dimensions can be distinguished:
  - a) intrinsic interest: personal satisfaction from interactions with people originating from different cultures,
  - b) extrinsic interest: appreciation of the status resulting from living and working in other countries,
  - self-efficacy to adjust: self-confidence and personal conviction about one's own ability to live and work in different cultures;
- 4. behavioural: capability to produce an adequate verbal and non-verbal reaction during intercultural relations. It comprises the following sub-dimensions:
  - a) verbal behaviour: ability to modify voice, intonation, pause, accent and stress, and to use silence when and where necessary,

- b) non-verbal behaviour: ability to adjust to non-verbal communication and behaviours accepted in other countries, such as gestures, physical distance between interlocutors, facial expressions, touch or lack of touch, etc.,
- c) speech acts: ability to adapt to the ways and styles of verbal expressions such as negation, refusal, interrupting, agreeing, etc.

The concise overview of the components and sub-components of cultural intelligence allows us to conclude that although not inherited, it can be consciously enhanced. Managers aware of its importance in a globalizing world should make an effort to build and develop this attribute through both theoretical studies and practical experience.

#### Conclusions

The globalizing world becomes a place of an enormous number of intercultural interactions. As an important facilitator, cultural intelligence can make these relations more friendly and fruitful. Since the beginning of the 21st century, more and more businesses, including virtual ones, have been conducted on an international scale. All these activities have impacted the intensification of multicultural contacts, in which cultural intelligence seems to play a significant role. As these relations have no ancestral background, they should be gradually developed and improved, in particular in the case of all categories of migrating managers as well as local people managing multicultural teams.

The justification for highlighting the important role of cultural intelligence is given by the prominent role of courses and research in business schools and MBA courses globally. It has to be appreciated that this emphasis was and is directly related to the need of not only the business community, but the international community of NGOs and governing institutions including the EU and UN as well.

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