Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace: Employee Perception and Implications for Internal Brand Management

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Abstract

The study explores the issues connected with diversity and inclusion in the workplace and their application in internal branding. The authors draw attention to the depth of the problematics and identify the gaps in research results concerning the meaning of diversity management as a method of creating corporate image of the organization, both externally and internally.

The purpose of the research is to investigate employees' perceptions on diversity in the workplace. It will develop insight into and knowledge of the current state of diversity in the workplace in Poland. Secondly, the results of the research are meant to help to accelerate the process of adapting and changing current management practices to meet the demands of a diversifying workforce. Besides, the authors investigate how diversity management can become an effective tool for internal branding as a crucial success factor.

In the statistical study, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to assess differences between women and men. In the case of an independent variable related to the position held in the organization, the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA analysis was used for comparison. In order to assess the relationship between nominal features, the Fisher's exact test – the chi-squared test was applied with the Yates's continuity correction for a 2x2 contingency table. For these tables, the contingency coefficient C of correlation was calculated. In the case of the scaled variables, to evaluate the relationship between them and the answers to the questions asked, Spearman's rank correlation coefficients were calculated.

Keywords: diversity and inclusion, diversity management, internal brand management, employer branding.

1. Introduction

In today's ever-changing world, in which the competition for talent never abates, diversity and inclusion have become important elements of strategic plans for many organizations. A cultural revolution and changes in demographics influencing the current workplace force businesses to use inclusion as a strategy to succeed. Workplace dynamics must move beyond representation metrics to engage a more diverse population. Employers now face the additional challenge of providing inclusive and welcoming environments to an increasingly diverse pool of talent.

Inclusion means creating a safe, collaborative environment that supports mutual understanding and different perspectives. It is important for businesses in order to promote innovation and have an impact on the bottom line. Inclusion not only means hiring a diverse, talented workforce but also engaging those workers so they become active contributors to the company (Vêlez, 2012).

Today's companies must focus on leveraging communications to transform employees into brand ambassadors. Internal brand management brings a favorable psychological climate into the organization, which helps in creating committed employees and increasing the congruency of employees' and organizational values, one of which is diversity.

2. Review of Literature

Diversity management is a North American concept instigated by the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Bell, 2012; Ellickson, 2001). The development of this phenomenon was accelerated by scholars who have successfully framed diversity in a business context (Cox, 1993; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thomas et al., 2002). The concept has been migrating to other regions of the world (Jonsen, Özbilgin, 2014) – to become one of the most important management functions in today's diversified world.

Through the decades, diversity management has undergone several philosophical shifts. In the late 1960s through the early 1970s, affirmative action was the focus of diversity activities in an effort to ensure legal compliance of racial and gender discrimination laws. Around the mid-1980s, multiculturalism was advanced by the educational system as a means of inclusively acknowledging and celebrating a variety of cultural heritages and experiences (Hudson-Ward, 2014).

Although anthropologists have studied cultural diversity for almost 150 years, the subject of diversity has only been addressed in management literature for the last 30 years. During that time, diversity as a topic for publications has reached a substantial level. Over the last 10 years the number of academic articles increased by over 110 percent as compared to the previous decade and since the mid-1980s the increase was almost 500 percent in the popular press. The management of diversity has univocally been defined as a strategic issue, crucial to economic and competitive success. Increased globalization, changes in workforces, and an increasing representation of minorities of all kinds have fueled the consideration that the diversity debate has moved beyond issues of legal and moral obligations to become an inevitable reality, both within and outside of today's organizations (Jonsen, Maznevski, Schneider, 2011).

However, growing tension between the promise and the reality of diversity in the workplace has led some scholars to question the relevance of existing research on diversity. They warn about serious implications for the credibility of the field, both in terms of future adoption by practitioners and for building theory (Jayne, Dipboye, 2004; Joshi, Roh, 2008; Mannix, Neale, 2005; Wise, Tschirhart, 2000). The claim has been raised that research has not been market-oriented enough and that the overall mandate for diversity in organizations may come under threat. Apparently, the findings of diversity studies do not address their overall relevance to management and human resources practices (Kossek et al., 2006).

Furthermore, as Roberson (2006) has noted, there has been an exclusion of inclusion in academic literature. Inclusion is a way of actively valuing differences and using them constructively in all aspects of organizational life – from business issues to organizational climate. Diversity departments in organizations, which are often called D&I (Diversity & Inclusion), have worked with inclusion for many years and a wealth of descriptive books have included the matter (Ivancevich, Gilbert, 2000). Yet the area has only recently caught scholastic attention through renewed focus on diversity climate (Avery, McKay, 2010).

In 1990, R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr. published "From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity" in "Harvard Business Review", an article considered a seminal work in diversity management, which was a call to action for companies to consider moving beyond demographic data collection as a means of gauging success or failure of diversity efforts. His work appeared to gain traction at the beginning of the 21st century, as the concept of diversity and inclusion emerged as the accepted strategic approach to diversity management. The idea of presenting diversity and inclusion as a combined phrase highlights the symbiotic connection between the two. In

essence, where there is diversity, there should also be inclusion (Hudson-Ward, 2014). Inclusion of employees in the workplace and adopting diversity as one of the basic values creating organization's corporate culture has become the essence of branding of the organization – both externally and internally.

Over the years, workplace branding has grown in its significance to managers, since it is viewed as leading to positive organizational results. Organizations have found that effective branding generates competitive advantage, helps employees internalize organizational values, and assists in attraction and employee retention (Conference Board 2001). However, workplace branding has generated more attention in the practitioner community than academia, where research is embryonic. A contributing factor for the sparse academic research being conducted in this area is the fact that the theoretical foundation of workplace branding has not yet been fully developed. Some authors (Backhaus, Tikoo 2004; Miles, Mangold 2005; Sartain, Schumann 2006; Barrow, Mosley 2006) provide general conceptual frameworks and some practical steps in creating a workplace brand (Love, Singh, 2011). Most of the research on employer brand is limited to conceptual papers which either identify and define the concept (Ambler, Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004; Ewing et al., 2002) or borrow the models on consumer behavior to explain brand equity (Andreassen, Lanseng, 2010).

There is an evident lack of research regarding the perception of employees on issues connected with diversity management in the workplace and how successful diversity and inclusion contributes to engaging employees, creating corporate culture and company's image. This article aims to fill this research gap by diagnosing diversity management perception in the current workplace and formulating recommendations on how to use diversity and inclusion in the process of internal brand management.

3. Conceptual Framework
3.1 The concept of branding

It was not until very late in the 20th century that the term "**brand**" would mostly be associated with consumer goods and services. Nowadays, the term is used far more widely and it is common for it to be used to describe virtually anything carrying a distinct identity, and reputation associated with that identity (Barrow, Mosely, 2006). According to the American Marketing Association, a brand can be defined as "a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often, it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme". Brand recognition is created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary.

Brand equity is a phrase used in the marketing industry to try to describe the value of having a well-known brand name, based on the idea that the owner of a well-known brand name can generate more money from products with that brand name than from products with a less well-known name. Brand equity is said to be the single most powerful asset of an organization. Several internal processes of a company synchronize to create an external manifestation in the form of a brand. The stronger the synergy between the external and internal processes, the higher the chance of the brand getting stronger (Khan, 2009).

The term "**branding**" can be used to differentiate products, services, places, people, and also organizations. Hence the term "**employment branding**" allows to distinguish one company from another in the perception of its current and potential employees. Employment branding creates brand loyalty related to the working environment (working conditions, policies, procedures) and helps to create a better image of the given organization in the minds of its employees, which in turn helps in talent attraction and retention.
We can distinguish different types of employment branding (Mandhanya, Shah, 2010):
- **Employer branding**: giving an identity (Backaus, Tikoo, 2004), image and distinctiveness to the organization as a desirable employer (Ambler, Barrow, 1996; Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004) and message to the talent pool that the organization is 'a good place to work' (Ewing et al., 2002; Knox, Freeman, 2006) in order to attract its prospective employees and to motivate, engage and retain its current employees (Srivastava, Bhatnagar, 2010).
- **Recruitment branding**: advertising vacant positions in a company and explaining the application process.
- **External branding**: taking the "inside out" approach by creating powerful brand internally through employee experience and turning the employees into brand advocates.
- **Internal branding**: taking the "outside in" approach by focusing on creating company visibility in the target talent markets by showing why it is a great place to work.

While external branding is necessary to spread the message about the company in the market place to gain the best talent, employment branding activities will only be beneficial if external branding is legitimized by internal branding. Without internal branding based on employees' positive experience, external branding soon loses its shine and investment in it turns out to be useless (Mandhanya, Shah, 2010).

3.2 Workplace branding

Workplace branding, a relatively new academic concept with its beginnings traceable to the mid- and late-1990s (Rosethorn 2010), uses an approach which is similar to that used in marketing and positioning of an organization's products and services to customers. In marketing terms, the word "brand" is linked to what an individual believes about a specific product or service of a company. A brand is essentially a promise of commitment and satisfying performance by an organization (Campbell 2002). It is a creation of an impression or image through a process of changing and reinforcing what people say or believe. Applying the same branding principles to employees can help to create a workplace brand.

Workplace branding has been defined as "a targeted, long-term strategy to manage awareness and perceptions of employees, potential employees, and related stakeholders with regards to a particular organization" (Backhaus, Tikoo, 2004: 2). Essentially, workplace branding allows the organization to distinguish itself from its competitors and develop a recognizable identity, through practices that are perceived as desirable to employees and the public.

Successful brands are those that consistently deliver on their promises (Campbell 2002) and are supported and reinforced by the senior management of the organization. Workplace branding helps to communicate what it is like to work for that particular organization and what this organization stands for. It delivers a unique value proposition to potential and existing employees (Caplan 2004).

Brands provide a great deal of value to consumers and perform the following functions for marketers: (1) identification of the source of the product, (2) assignment of responsibility to product maker, (3) risk reducer, (4) search cost reducer, (5) promise, bond, or pact with maker of product, (6) symbolic device, and (7) signal of quality (Keller 2003). While external branding simplifies a consumer's decision process through advertising and creating a strong brand promise, corporations have recognized the significant value of promoting the brand message internally as well (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, Gordon, 2009).

3.3 Internal brand management

Internal branding is the concerted, inter-departmental and multi-directional internal communications effort carried out in order to create and maintain an internal brand of an organization. It attempts to achieve consistency with the external brand and encourage brand commitment and the propensity for brand championship among employees. Thus, internal branding is the reflection of the values and the realization of the promise of the brand both internally and externally.

Internal brand management is focused on its current employees and communication in order to understand the corporate brand values. It is of vital importance because it carries the brand promise and incorporates it as part of the organizational culture. This alignment and understanding across the company is highly important to ensure a consistent delivery of the brand promise as well as possibly provide the organization with a sustainable competitive advantage. A key element of internal branding is an employee's transformation of brand values, including customers' expectations about the company, into reality during the delivery of the brand promise (Foster, Punjaisri, Cheng, 2010: 402).

From an external market perspective, branding involves the creation of mental structures that help the target audience to organize their knowledge with respect to that particular product/organization. In doing so, the target audience is able to clarify their decision making with respect to that product/organization and, in turn, this process provides value to an organization through improved customer buying habits. Branding, however, is not only an opportunity to shape customers' perceptions with respect to the organization; it is also an opportunity to shape employee perceptions as well. In fact, according to Jacobs (2003), a brand represents the relationship an organization has with its employees just as much as it represents the relationship that it has with its customers. Figure 1 presents how the model of internal branding should work in practice- tying all the external and internal

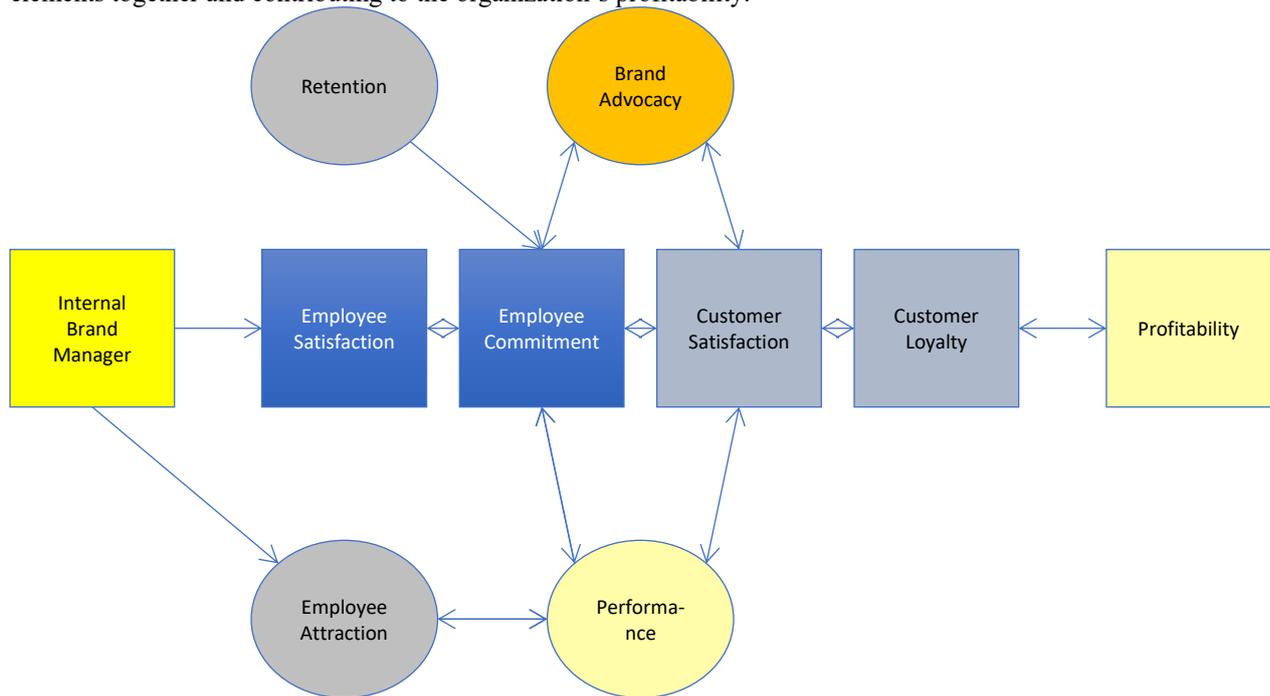elements together and contributing to the organization's profitability.

Figure 1: **Internal branding model.**
Source: Khan, 2009: 23.

It is the actual experience with the brand that dominates customer brand perceptions, of which employees play a major role. It is the employees who must understand what the brand means, and how it provides value to consumers, in order for its tangible and intangible components to be developed and delivered accordingly. It is for this primary reason that internal brand management is seen as a significant strategic organizational initiative. There is an inherent power in having an informed workforce that is both able and committed to delivering the brand promise. Without such brand knowledge, employees are unable to transform the brand vision into the brand reality.

Therefore, one can conclude that a central component to managing a customer's experience with a brand and their subsequent perceptions is to effectively manage employees' experiences within their own organization. Through the internalization of the brand, employees are better equipped to fulfil the explicit and implicit promises inherent in the brand. Without such internalization, the ability for employees to deliver the appropriate customer experience is unlikely. In situations such as this, any external brand-building program is likely to be unsuccessful (King, Grace, 2008).

Internal branding is considered as a means to create powerful corporate brands. It assists the organization in aligning its internal process and corporate culture with those of the brand (de Chernatony, Segal-Horn, 2003; Vallaster, 2004). The key role of internal branding is to ensure that employees transform espoused brand messages into brand reality for customers and other stakeholders. Successful internal branding engenders employees' commitment to, identification with and loyalty to the brand (Meyer et al., 2002; Papasolomou, Vrontis, 2006).

When employees internalize the brand values, they will consistently deliver on the brand promise across all contact points between the company and its stakeholders. To implement successful internal brand building, internal marketing has been suggested as a key instrument (Vallaster, de Chernatony, 2003). Although internal marketing is regarded as an appropriate approach for communicating the brand internally, communication is not the sole method to ensure the success of the internal branding campaign. It has to be supported by strategic, human resource and finance management, as well as has to be rooted in company values (Khan, 2009).

3.4 Values-based diversity

The corporate branding concept places an emphasis on employees' attitudes and behaviours. This has given rise to internal branding and employer branding, which argue for a closer alignment between the employees' values and those of the corporate brand. The centrepiece of brand from which everything else stems is the set of values with which it is associated.

Without exception, all of the companies that participated in the research carried out by Canadian Marketing Association (2008) emphasized the paramount importance of the role that values played in their internal brand. Among the most important values in the researched companies the following are prevailing: client passion, creativity, accountability, enthusiasm, excellence, caring, team work, service, quality, innovation, integrity, spirit, insight, respect, commitment, responsibility, and **diversity**. It is immediately apparent that the subject of brand values is not as straightforward as might initially be thought. In particular some of these values can only be comfortably applied to internal branding; 'team work', or 'diversity' while others have a greater application to the external brand promise, i.e., 'service' or 'responsibility' (Goom, MacLaverty, McQuillan, Oddie 2008).

Workplace diversity management has primarily focused on increasing the number of underrepresented populations among our ranks. Yet, an emerging paradigm shift that elevates values as a critical diversity factor is currently taking place in the global market. Many of today's workers are seeking more than visual representations of diversity as proof that an employer offers an inclusive work environment. Potential employees desire meritocratic workplaces where the totality of an individual's diverse contributions and lifestyle choices matters as much as demographic differences.

The rise of **values-based diversity** can be regarded as the next evolutionary step in workplace diversity management and the implications of this new approach are significant for companies operating in today's diversified world. "It's an appreciation of diversity that's not just based on visible characteristics and demographics. It is also about diversity in thought, diversity in approach, and diversity in ideas." Values-based diversity is defined as a management philosophy in which the values that individuals bring into the workplace (such as differences in communication styles, work ethics, and motivational factors) are elevated as diversity issues (Hudson-Ward, 2014).

A special report issued by "The Economist" in January 2014 examines the rise of values-based diversity by surveying 228 human resources managers. Outcomes indicated that the impact of values on an organization is measurable and affects workplace dynamics. This demonstrates the importance of viewing values-based diversity as an equal and complementary metric to acquired diversity (cultural competence and fluency) and inherent diversity (race, gender, and sexual orientation) in overall workplace diversity management.

Many corporations have successfully incorporated values as a diversity metric. "DiversityInc" magazine, which compiles an annual list of the top 50 companies for diversity, evaluated 893 companies in 2013 based on a list of criteria, including talent pipeline, equitable talent management, and CEO/leadership commitment. Of the companies that ranked in the top five, four (Sodexo, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young, and MasterCard Worldwide) have publicly accessible information about their diversity management initiatives (Hudson-Ward, 2014).

Diversity management can be treated as the establishment of a comprehensive organizational and managerial process which supports a corporate culture in which open expression of diverse perspectives and approaches is respected and leveraged for the benefit of the business, the employee and community.

3.5 Workforce diversity management

Workforce diversity may be defined as the existence of difference in the composition of employees of an organization or any department or unit of the organization upon demographic, psychological or organizational structure domains. Managing diversity refers to comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works well for all employees, including dominant culture employees (Thomas, 1991). The goal of managing diversity, according to Cox (1993), is managing the ability of all employees to contribute to

organizational goals and to achieve their full potential unhindered by differences between individuals in a group (Sia, Bhardwaj, 2009).

In the past 20 years, diversity and inclusion have grown as a corporate imperative. According to SHRM statistics, 55% of companies are big promoters of diversity, while 42% of diversity programs are advocated by the CEO, top leadership, and HR heads. While approaches in various parts of the globe differ – diversity and inclusion programs in North America tend to be more centralized while programs in Asia and Europe are more relaxed – one commonality around the world has been a heavy focus on hiring and promoting women.

The focus on women is understandable as they constitute 50% of the global population and are easier by comparison to integrate into an organization due to fewer overall cultural differences with men who are heavily represented at the highest levels in the corporate workplace. As a result, a majority of business leaders are concerned about large gaps in mirroring the general population, particularly with regard to three systematically under-represented groups: workers over the age of 50, individuals with disabilities, and religious and ethnic minorities. In the coming years, it will be important for companies to overcome the hurdles that prevent these groups from being incorporated into the highest levels of an organization (Talent Intelligence, 2014).

3.6 Diversity Versus Inclusion

Diversity can be defined as the collective mixture of differences and similarities that includes for example, individual and organizational characteristics, values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences, and behaviors. **Inclusion** is understood as the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization's success.

The words "diversity" and "inclusion" are often used in the same sentence as if they are inextricably linked, but, in fact, diversity is the mix and inclusion is the effort that it takes to make the mix work. Creating an inclusive environment is complex. Having a diverse workforce does not guarantee that you understand how to make that mix work or how to unlock its full potential (Turnbull, 2014).

Inclusion, as a concept, goes beyond diversity management, which remains the dominant paradigm in the field of public administration (Choi, Rainey, 2010; Kellough, Naff, 2004). Roberson (2006) empirically shows that diversity and inclusion are two different but overlapping concepts. In many ways, diversity management is the first step (or a precursor) toward creating inclusive environments.

Furthermore, diversity management focuses on improving recruitment and training for mainly women and minorities in the workplace, whereas inclusion focuses on the removal of barriers to enable high performance from all employees (Miller, 1998; Mor-Barak, Cherin, 1998; Roberson, 2006). Therefore, we can interpret diversity and inclusion as separate but related constructs, as it results from empirical studies: "definitions of diversity focused primarily on heterogeneity and the demographic composition of groups or organizations, whereas definitions of inclusion focused on employee involvement and the integration of diversity into organizational systems and processes" (Roberson, 2006: 227–228; Sabharwal, 2014: 201).

Inclusion is important for businesses in order to promote innovation and have an impact on the bottom line. Organizations must find ways to incorporate the insights of people who reflect the growing diversity of consumers. Inclusion not only means hiring a diverse, talented workforce but also engaging those workers so they become active contributors to the brand equity.

Inclusion is believed to provide a "bridge between interpersonal differences and a person's ability to contribute effectively to the organization" (Mor Barak, Cherin, 1998). For this reason, practitioners often view policies and practices that promote inclusion as having the potential to integrate diverse people into work teams and organizations, thereby helping teams to work more effectively, and promoting positive individual and organizational outcomes (Roberson, 2006; Matz-Costa, Carapinha, Pitt-Catsouphes, 2012: 52-53).

Diversity management is a multifaceted concept (Pitts, 2006: 235) and, as such, includes three components: recruitment programs, programs aimed to increase cultural awareness, and pragmatic management policies (Sabharwal, 2014). In order to examine what its realization looks like in organizations, the authors of this study carried out research in the workplace in Poland.

4. Research Methodology

Researches from all over the world, including Poland, show that creating an open workplace is a key factor of growth and success in XXI century. Poland is the habitat of diversification caused by a re-opening to the world, by the growth of population mobility and internationalization of the economy. Though in Poland the concept of diversity management is quite fresh, many multinational organizations have already started the journey and are willing to move forward. The international environment is also constantly changing and this complex picture means that multinational companies cannot simply apply a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

An environment in which diversity is embraced often shows a better organization, better results, and individuals are more capable of coping with change (Kumar, 2012). A better working environment allows employees to fully express their potential, not only by releasing their knowledge and know-how, but also by allowing them to be more educated on such themes. There is plenty of literature confirming these theses. But how does the reality look like in the multicultural corporate workplace in Poland?

To examine this, a survey was carried out on the sample of 115 people living and working in Poland. The research method used was diagnostic survey and the tool – questionnaire consisting of 38 questions. The respondents were queried about their level of knowledge on the topic, how often they are instructed on it, and how crucial diversity management is in their perception. In addition to that, the study was carried to understand the main barriers in real life which threaten cooperation among colleagues of different background of whatever sort. As per the background of Poland itself (so endogenous cause) and as per the development of the modern and contemporary business (exogenous cause), diversity management will be increasingly important for Poland and the companies based there. The logic departs from the continuously incrementing number of foreign and expats which live and work in Poland due to their life choices, but increasingly also due to their skills and abilities which are rented and paid for on the Polish market.

The study has been created to map several aspects of the employees working in environments where foreigners, expats and general workforce express an arising level of diversity. The primary research objectives are the following:

- to identify the most prevalent perceptions on diversity within organizations in Poland;
- to evaluate the status of Polish companies with regards to diversity management.

The secondary research objectives are:

- to indicate the importance of effective diversity management and its application in the process of internal branding;
- to help improve the retention strategy in order to reduce costs associated with labour turnover;
- to serve as basis for talent management and diversity management policy within companies.

In particular, the following research questions were posed:

- what level of knowledge do employees have on the subject?
- what role does diversity management play in creating good company image and internal branding?
- are employees aware of strategies being engaged by their companies to face the phenomenon?
- how do people perceive that inclusiveness (or the set of behaviours which assimilate rather than discriminate diversity)?
- what are the major obstacles for effective diversity management and how to increase awareness of diversity on the workplace?
  The following hypotheses have been formulated for the purpose of the research:
- **H1:** In the workplace there is significant awareness of diversity and its importance for the success of the organization.
- **H2:** Women attribute more significance to diversity and its influence on the organization.
- **H3:** Polish people are less open to diversity issues than people representing other nationalities.
- **H4:** Women and representatives of nationalities other than Polish see bigger potential in diversity and its influence on different aspects of the organization.

- **H5:** The higher the position held in the organization, the bigger significance perceived in the influence of increasing diversity on the functioning of the organization.
- **H6:** Women and employees of foreign nationalities rate particular obstacles for accepting diversity in the workplace as more significant than men and men and Poles.
- **H7:** Female and Polish workers, as well as employees holding higher position better evaluate particular strategies for improving inclusiveness in the organization.

5. Results and Interpretation

In the statistical study, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to assess differences between women and men. This test was applied because the answers to the questions asked are on the Likert's order scale of 1-5. In the case of an independent variable related to the position held in the organization, because of more than two groups to be compared, the Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA analysis was used for comparison. In order to assess the relationship between nominal features, the Fisher's exact test – the-chi squared test was applied with the Yates's continuity correction for a 2x2 contingency tables. For these tables, the contingency coefficient C of correlation was calculated. In the case of the scaled variables, to evaluate the relationship between them and the answers to the questions asked, Spearman's rank correlation (Spearman's rho) coefficients were calculated. All statistical tests have been calculated at the level of statistical significance of alpha=0.05. This means that if $p<0.05$, then there is a significant difference or a significant relationship.

The profiles of the respondents are provided below in Table 1.

Table 1: **The demographics of the respondents.**

Variable	Levels	Percentage
Gender	Male	56,52%
	Female	43,48%
Age Group	19-25	0,00%
	26-35	28,70%
	36-45	57,39%
	45 plus	13,91%
Education	High school	9,57%
	Bachelor	11,30%
	Master	52,17%
	Postgraduate	20,00%
	PhD	6,09%
Experience	Up to 1 year	0,00%
	2-4 years	13,91%
	5-10 years	46,96%
	Over 10 years	39,13%
Job Position	Administrative worker	2,61%
	Specialist	31,30%
	Line Manager	20,00%
	Middle manager	20,87%
	Top manager	12,17%
	Other	13,04%

The significant majority of the respondents (89%) declared that they are aware of diversity in their workplace.
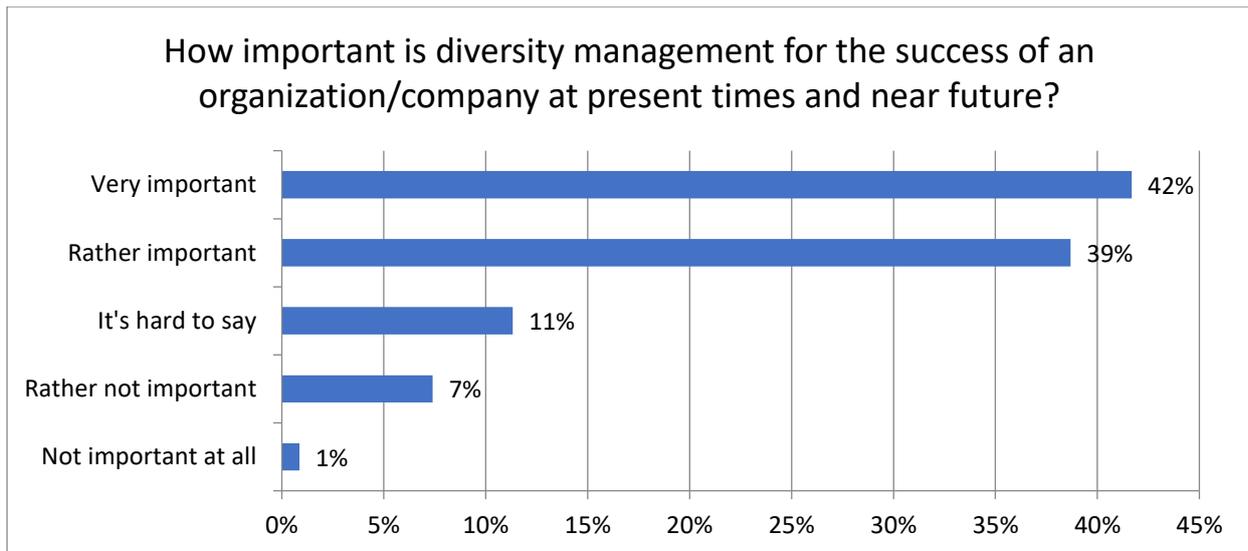
Figure 2:   **The importance of diversity for the success of an organization.**

In most of the cases diversity management is perceived to be very important (42%) or rather important (39%) for the success of an organization at present and in the future. A total of 81% of the respondents believe that diversity management is a significant element of corporate governance (Figure 2). The cross-sectional study shows how various groups of respondents differ.   Statistically significantly (Z=2.275; p=0.023) women in this variable have higher results (M=4.31) than men (M=3.88). Women look more bravely at managing diversity and see more potential in it than men. This is also confirmed by further studies and results from the cognitive experience of the particular groups.

Statistically significantly (Z=2.831; p=0.005) persons of Polish nationality in this variable have higher results (M=4.59) than people of other nationalities (M=4.04). This means that among the respondents (a significant group of people with higher education) there is a big opening to diversity in the workplace among Poles, higher than in other nationalities. The changes occurring in the labor market, openness to other nationalities and readiness for differences in the group have been confirmed in this research.

People having middle manager position have the highest scores (M=4.48) and the lowest scores are achieved by persons in specialist position (M=3.51). What's more, the higher the education of the surveyed person, the higher the scores are obtained on a scale of 1-5 (rho=0.341; p<0.01). The greater the professional experience of the examined person, the higher the scores are obtained on a scale of 1-5 (rho=0.439; p<0.01). People with higher education see a great potential in opening up to a diverse work environment which translates into business success.
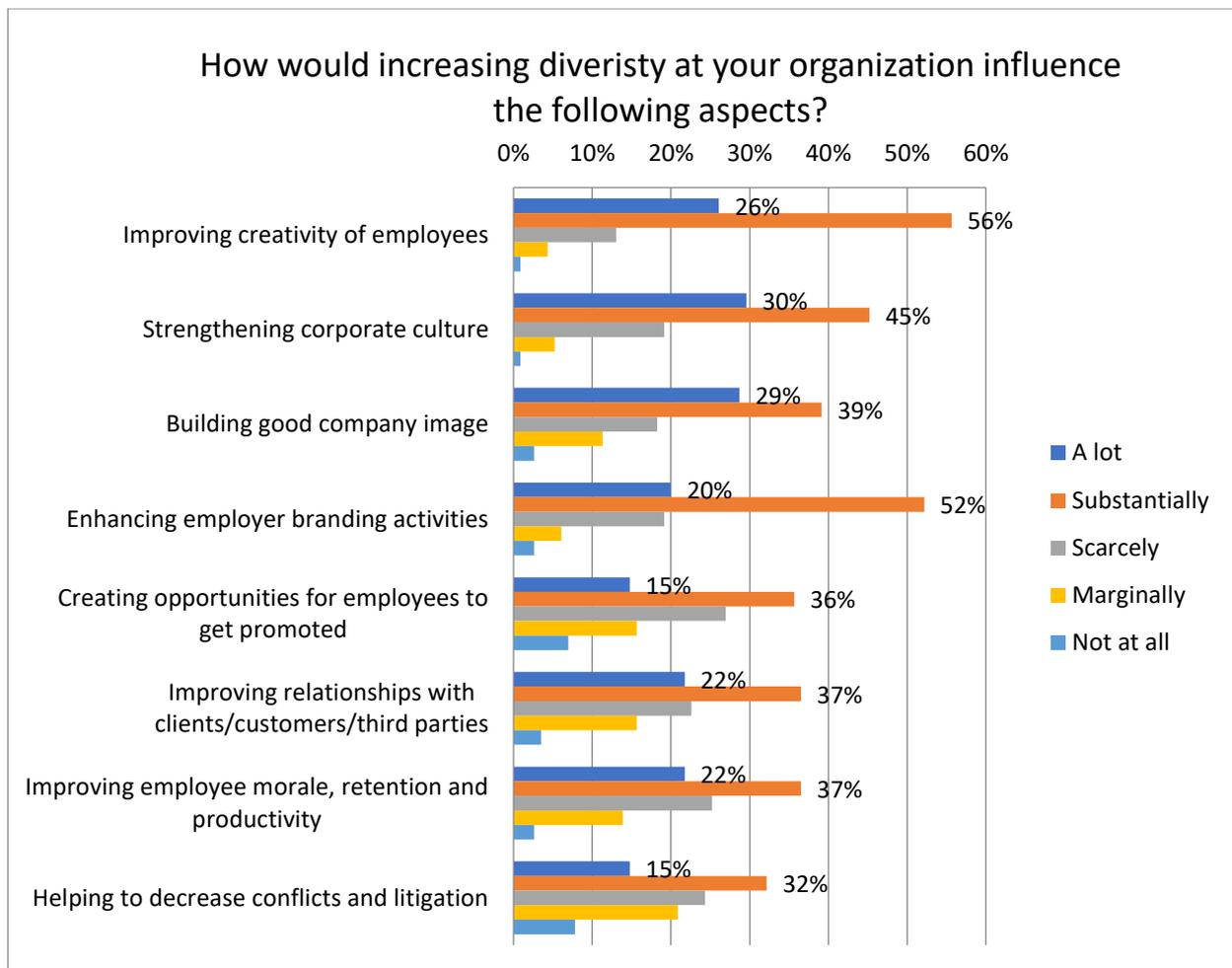
Figure 3: **The evaluation of the possible influence of increasing diversity on the given organizational aspects.**

The surveyed were asked to rate on a scale from 1 (=not at all) to 5 (=a lot) how increasing diversity at their organization would improve the indicated aspects (Figure 3). Significant statistical differences in the measured variables were identified on the basis of gender, nationality and position held.

Statistically significantly (Z=-1.971; p=0.049) women in the variable 'Building good company image' have higher results (M=3.42) than men (M=3.02). Similarly, statistically significantly (Z=-2.788; p=0.005) women in the variable "Improving relationships with clients/customers/third parties" have higher results (M=3.42) than men (M=2.82).

Statistically significantly (Z=-3,753; p=0) people of Polish nationality in the variable "Improving creativity of employees" have higher results (M=3.88) than those of other nationalities (M=2.84). Statistically significantly (Z=-2,38; p=0,017) people of Polish nationality in the variable "Strengthening corporate culture' have higher results (M=3.76) than those of other nationalities (M=3.07).

In the case of the variable "Improving creativity of employees", persons having specialist positions have the highest results (M=3.51) and the lowest results are achieved by persons occupying the position of line manager (M=2.25). For the variable "Strengthening corporate culture", persons in the positions of specialist and top manager have the highest scores (M=3.32) and the lowest scores are achieved by persons in the positions of line manager (M=2.33). As far as "Building good company image" is concerned, top managers (M=3.57) have the highest scores and specialists (M=2.86) have the lowest scores. In the case of "Enhancing employer branding activities", middle managers have the highest scores (M=3.22) and the lowest scores are achieved by persons in

the position of line manager (M=2.71). With the variable "Improving relationships with clients/customers/third parties", middle manager positions have the highest scores (M=3.74), and the lowest scores are achieved by line manager positions (M=2.79). Finally, for the variable "Helping to decrease conflicts and litigation", the highest scores are achieved by middle managers (M=3.61) and the lowest by line managers (M=2.54).
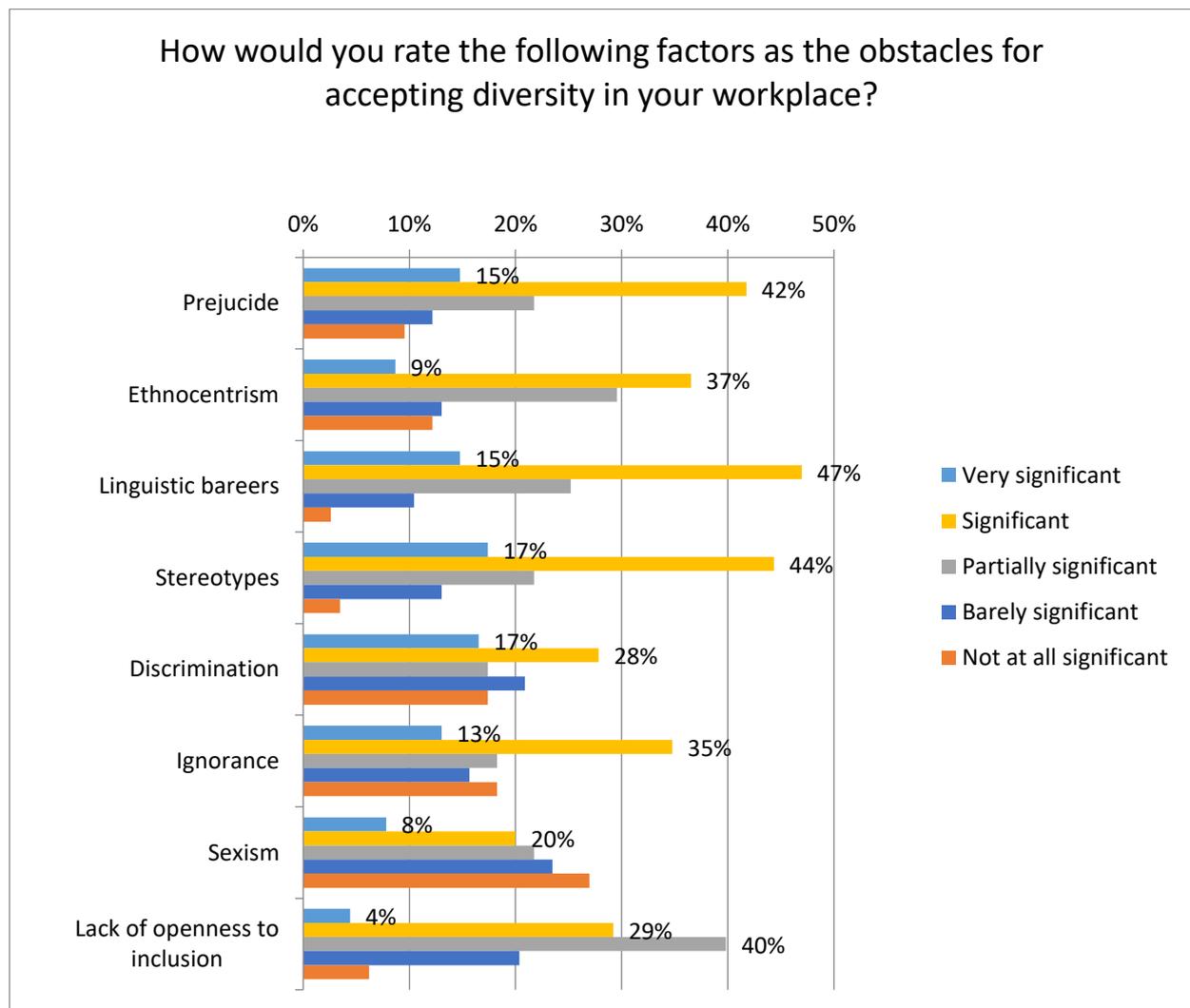
How would you rate the following factors as the obstacles for accepting diversity in your workplace?

Figure 4: **The evaluation of the significance of obstacles for accepting diversity in the workplace.**

What are the obstacles for accepting diversity in the workplace? The respondents were asked to rate the indicated factors on a scale from 1 (=not at all significant) to 5 (=very significant), which has been illustrated on Figure 4. Statistically significant differences in the measured variables have been identified based on gender, nationality, job title, degree of education and length of professional experience.

Statistically significantly (Z=2.148; p=0.032) women with the "Prejudice" variable have higher results (M=3.18) than men (M=2.78). In the "Linguistic barriers" variable, women also have higher results (M=3.29) than men (M=2.84) in statistically significant terms (Z=2.396; p=0.017).

Similarly, statistically significantly (Z=3.662; p=0) women in the variable "Stereotypes" have higher results (M=3.51) than men (M=2.78). Statistically significantly (Z=-3.012; p=0.003) women in the variable "Ignorance" have higher results (M=3.18) than men (M=2.46). Statistically significantly (Z=2.166; p=0.03) women in the "Sexism" variable have higher results (M=2.86) than men (M=2.34).

Statistically significantly (Z=-3.864; p=0) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Linguistic barriers" have higher results (M=4.12) than people of other nationalities (M=2.92). Statistically significantly (Z=-3,448; p=0,001) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Stereotypes" have higher results (M=4.06) than those of other nationalities (M=3.04). Statistically significantly (Z=4.04; p=0) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Ignorance" have higher results (M=4.06) than people of other nationalities (M=2.66). Statistically significantly (Z=2.128; p=0.033) persons of Polish nationality in the "Lack of openness to inclusion" variable have higher results (M=3.2) than people of other nationalities (M=2.7).

In fact, statistically speaking, in the case of the "Sexism" variable persons in positions of line managers have the highest results (M=3.29), while those in positions of middle managers and specialists have the lowest results (M=2.26). Statistically, the more years of education a researched person has, the higher scores are achieved on a scale of 1-5 in case of the "Discrimination" variable (rho=0.331; p<0.01).

The more years of experience the researched person has, the higher the scores on a scale of 1-5 in case of the variable "Discrimination" (rho=0.399; p<0.01). The more years of experience a person has, the higher the scores on a scale of 1-5 in case of the variable "Ignorance" (rho=0.304; p=0.001).

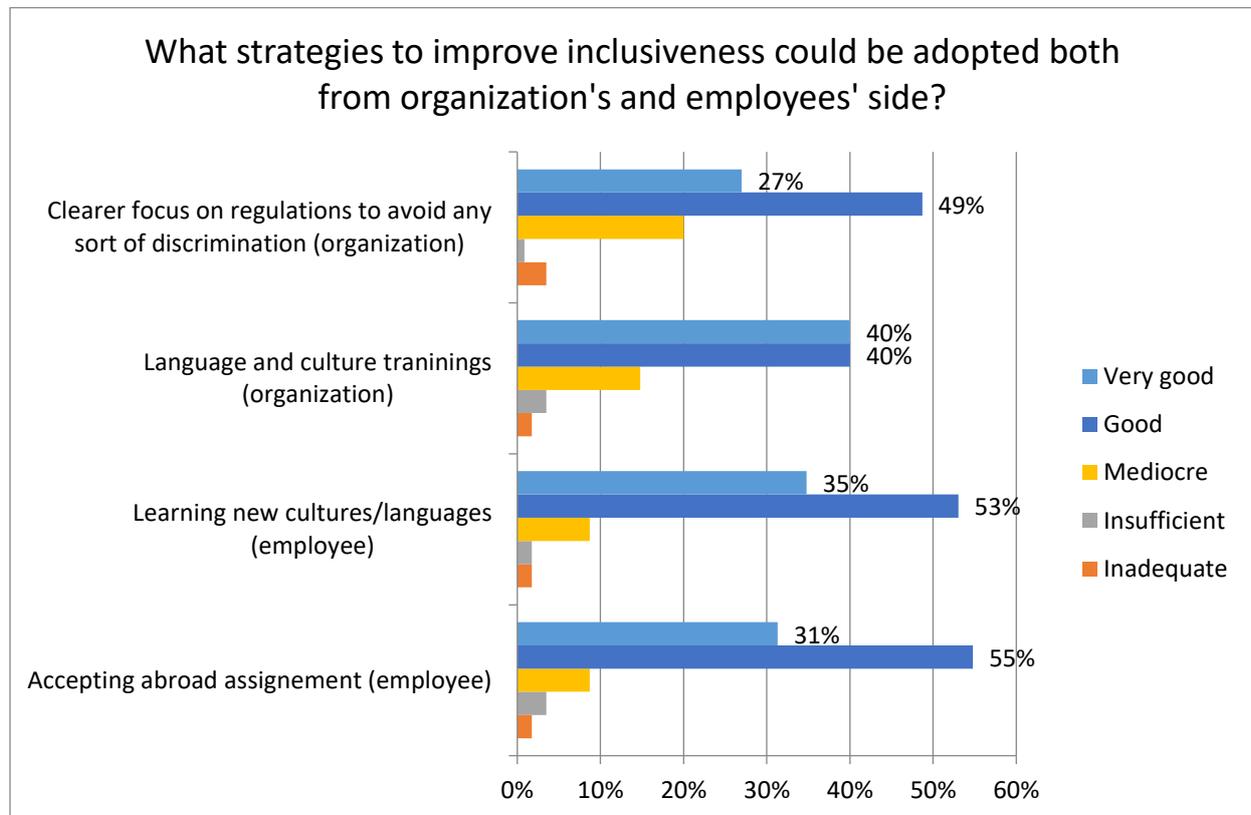**Figure 5:**   **The evaluation of adequacy of strategies which could be adopted to improve inclusiveness both from organization's and employee's side.**

The survey participants were also asked to rate the strategies which could be adopted to improve inclusiveness both from organization's and employee's side (Figure 5) – on a scale from 1 (=inadequate) to 5 (=very good). Significant statistical differences in the measured variables were identified on the basis of gender, nationality and held position.

Statistically significantly (Z = 2.56; p=0.01) women in the variable "Accepting abroad assignment (by employee)" have higher results (M=4.25) than men (M=3.92). Statistically significantly (Z=-2.871; p=0.004) women in the variable "Learning new cultures/languages (by employee)" have higher results (M=4.32) than men (M=3.98).

Statistically significantly (Z=-3.057; p=0.002) women in the variable "Language and culture trainings (by organization)" have higher results (M=4.32) than men (M=3.88).

Statistically significantly (Z=-3.84; p=0) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Accepting abroad assignment (by employee)" have higher results (M=4.71) than people of other nationalities (M=4). Similarly, statistically significantly (Z=-3.064; p=0.002) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Learning new cultures/languages (by employee)" have higher results (M=4.65) than people of other nationalities (M=4.09). Furthermore, significantly statistically (Z=-2.515; p=0.012) persons of Polish nationality in the variable "Language and culture trainings (by organization)" have higher results (M=4.53) than people of other nationalities (M=4.06). Also statistically significantly (Z=-3.89; p=0) people of Polish nationality in the variable "Clearer focus on regulations to avoid any sort of discrimination (by organization)" have higher results (M=4.65) than people of other nationalities (M=3.83).

For the variable "Learning new cultures/languages (employee)", middle manager positions have the highest scores (M=4.43) and the lowest scores are achieved by persons in specialist positions (M=3.89). In the case of "Language and culture trainings (by organization)", middle manager positions have the highest scores (M=4.39) and the lowest scores are achieved by persons in specialist positions (M=3.71).

The researchers wanted to examine how many respondents participated in diversity courses within the last 2 years. As we can see from the Figure 6, only 1 in 4 respondents declared having attended such courses. Over half of the surveyed did not participate in courses on diversity, as their organizations did not provide them! Significant statistical differences in the measured variables were identified on the basis of gender, nationality and position held.
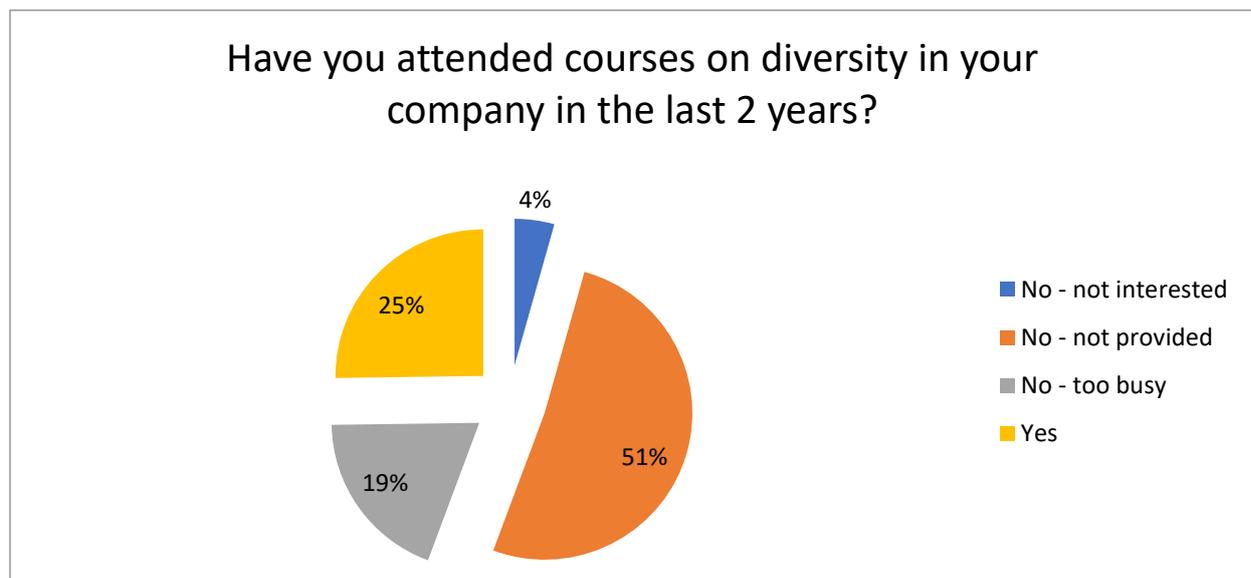

Figure 6: **The attendance to courses on diversity in the last 2 years.**

In this case, statistically significantly (Z=4.31; p=0), women have higher results (M=3.95) than men (M=3.26) Statistically significantly (Z=-3,701; p=0) people of Polish nationality have higher results (M=4.41) than people of other nationalities (M=3.52). The line and middle manager positions have the highest scores (M=3.83). The lowest results are achieved by persons in specialist positions (M=3,31). Statistically, the more years of experience a person has, the higher the results (rho=0.371; p=0.001).

The analysis of clusters shows that on the basis of empirical data it is possible to distinguish three significantly different groups of people who constitute three profiles in the variables. In some of the variables they will have higher scores and in others they will have lower results, as shown in the Figure 7 below.
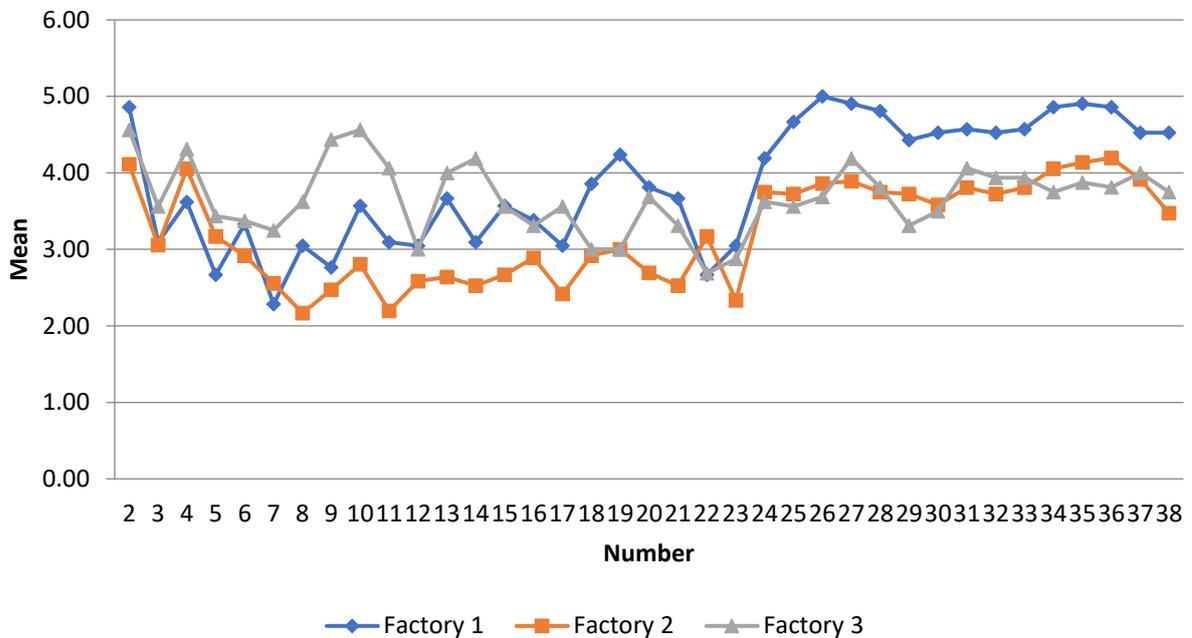

Figure 7: **K-Means Cluster Analysis**

The Number corresponds to the order number of questions in the questionnaire. It was noted that questions from16 to 38 are the strongest differentiating factor between the persons surveyed in terms of gender, work experience. Cluster analysis shows that there are three groups of people who differ from each other in the directions of answers to the questions asked. Especially the point of deflection is again from question 16 - where there is the greatest differentiation.

The overall interpretation of the results verifies positively 5 out of 7 posed hypotheses. It turns out that in the workplace there is significant awareness of diversity and its importance for the success of the organization. Women attribute more significance to diversity and its influence on the organization. Women and representatives of nationalities other than Polish see bigger potential in diversity and its influence on different aspects of the organization. The higher the position held in the organization, the bigger significance perceived in the influence of increasing diversity on the functioning of the organization. And finally, female and Polish workers, as well as employees holding higher position better evaluate particular strategies for improving inclusiveness in the organization.

Two of the formulated hypotheses partially accepted (H6) or rejected (H3). As it emerges, workers representing other nationalities are less open to diversity issues than Polish employees. Although it turned out to be true that female employees rate particular obstacles for accepting diversity in the workplace as more significant than men, it is Polish nationality of workers that stands for higher rating of particular obstacles for accepting diversity in the workplace as more significant – in comparison to foreign nationalities.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The surveyed persons are mostly aware of the fact that there exists diversity in their workplace (89%). Most of the respondents, despite the obstacles they are aware of, see great benefits for organizations because of their consciousness of diversity management. The majority of the employees believe that increasing diversity would improve creativity of employees (82%), strengthen corporate culture (75%), build good company image (68%) and enhance employer branding activities (72%).

According to the examined, the most important obstacles to the acceptance of diversity in the workplace are stereotypes (44%) and language barriers (47%). The respondents believe that prejudices and stereotypes should be reduced in order to improve the functioning of the organizations. A significant number of respondents (27%) do not, however, consider diversity in the sexual field to be an obstacle to the acceptance of diversity in the workplace.

From the point of view of employees, acceptance of foreign assignments is a good strategy for improving diversity management, and 53% of respondents think that learning new cultures / languages by employees is a good idea to accept diversity. From the perspective of the organization, 49% of the respondents think that the best strategy for implementing diversity is the introduction of appropriate anti-discrimination legislation. A common point of view for both sides of perspective (organization's and employee's) is the need of the cultural and linguistic training (40%).

It seems that the Polish market is open to diversity and adopting a conscious openness to diversity management in companies. It is particularly meaningful when Polish companies are opening up to employees from different parts of the world. Of particular importance now is the conscious introduction of appropriate regulations in anti-discrimination to companies and the introduction of joint workshops to improve communication and knowledge of foreign cultures we may encounter at work.

The main take away from this study is therefore this snapshot, where the road for the future in Poland is suggested:

- focus on education on diversity by the companies,
- attention to the diverse and more open policy to inclusiveness,
- more precise evaluation of the workforce and its inclusiveness needs,
- incorporation of diversity to corporate strategy as one of the basic values of the company,
- planning and realization of effective communication on internal brand focused on turning diverse employees into brand ambassadors.

How to promote diversity and inclusion? In her book "Inclusion: The New Competitive Business Advantage", Engelmeier (2012) proposes such solutions as: sharing strategies with workers; asking for employees' input instead of relying on managers or top executives; evaluating the idea, not the person offering it; acting on what the manager/owner determines is the best course of action; providing feedback to employees about why a suggestion was or wasn't considered; and thanking participants for their contributions.

The process of internal brand management should start with conducting brand research with customers and employees to clarify what differentiates the given brand and the specific ways people connect with the brand on an emotional level. Next, research findings should be used to focus and articulate the brand promise. A powerful brand promise communicates in just a few words what the company does and why it matters. That formulates the emotional hook for the brand - both inside and outside the organization. Then engaging brand education program should be developed to clearly communicate the brand's position, personality, promise and benefits. In the process of building the brand internally, the brand and its promise should be linked to job descriptions, training programs, employee evaluations, meetings and events. It is crucial to market to employees like customers through building an engagement plan using a comprehensive set of different tools on multiple communications platforms. Taking the time to integrate the brand internally and engage employees offers benefits for all stakeholders, including customers, potential customers, employees and shareholders (Manternach, 2016).

This study leaves space for further inquiry in the future. It will be important to see the evolution of the topic

in the upcoming years, and to see how Poland and it workforce will adapt to those; in particular how deeply companies will be willing to invest in diversity management and its understanding – this will probably be a key to success in the future.

The conclusion seems to be obvious: one of the key elements of the employment value proposition (EVP) of any organization should be the opportunity for employees to bring their unique talent, skills, knowledge, and passion to the work environment that should enable them to be who they are and utilize this uniqueness for the good of the organization they work for and identify with.

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