

Bożena Dancewicz
Business Coach

Gender and ethnic origin: Opportunities and barriers in international professional career

Introduction

The leading goal of this paper is to attempt to answer the question whether gender and ethnic origin¹ have an influence on the international professional career of an individual. Since 1989 Poland has been affected by the changes taking place worldwide in the wake of rampant globalisation. The country's accession to the European Union has opened new labour markets, an opportunity that Polish people are eagerly taking advantage of. At the same time, Poland has become home to international corporations, which have transformed its economy to a considerable extent. These processes involve the active participation of women. Their social position, professional opportunities, as well as related expectations and challenges have undergone a substantial change.

Poles, similarly to other nations, have a number of features shaped by specific historical and social processes (national culture). The complexity of cultural environment may influence one's professional career. Accordingly, this paper analyses which culture-dependent factors may constitute an opportunity and which may be a barrier in international professional career, taking into consideration gender. Numerous cultural models have been developed so far. This paper draws on the model elaborated by G. Hofstede on the basis of surveys conducted among 116 thousand IBM employees from 40 countries that have confirmed the influence of ethnic culture on practices and attitudes in professional work [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2011]. Although flawed to a certain extent in terms of methodology and interpretation of the survey results [Boski 2010], Hofstede's model is a point of reference for cultural studies, hence it is used also in the present analysis.

The first part contains an overview of literature on gender and ethnic origin and discusses the most significant concepts related to culture and its dimensions according to G. Hofstede, as well as with culturally-conditioned social roles. The second part presents the results of the author's research on the influence of gender and ethnic origin on international professional career, taking into account the research method applied. The final part indicates possible practical implications and potential directions for further research.

Gender and ethnic origin: theoretical underpinnings

Culture

Culture is a complex phenomenon, explored by representatives of numerous disciplines of science, such as cultural anthropology, archaeology, psychology, sociology and ethnography. Their achievements are used by other sciences, such as management science or economics. Knowledge of national culture helps to explain various social, political, and economic phenomena, as the behaviour of both individuals and social groups is conditioned by a cultural paradigm. Its significance to interpersonal relations is illustrated by the following statement: "A fish only discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish. It sustains us. We live and breathe through it. What one may regard as essential, a certain level of material wealth for example, may not be so vital to other cultures" [Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner, 1999].

The term "culture" has been defined in many ways. One of the most interest definitions is provid-

ed by G. Hofstede: “the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others” [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2011]. Such a definition of culture stands in opposition to a view, the echoes of which still resonate with certain scholars, suggesting that culture is an enigmatic phenomenon that is difficult to define and measure. The precursor of this approach was J. Herder, an 18th-century philosopher, who held that “nothing is more indeterminate than the term ‘culture’” [Herder, 2000]. It is also important to note that culture is a complex construct composed of various elements that form it at different times [Kroeber, 2002]. As such, it is a subject of study from different perspectives concerning its possible evolution in the wake of increasing globalisation. In the most general terms, scholars divide into those who predict the decline of national cultures in favour of one global culture modelled on the American one, and those who believe that national cultures will be cherished and developed, although not free from external influences.

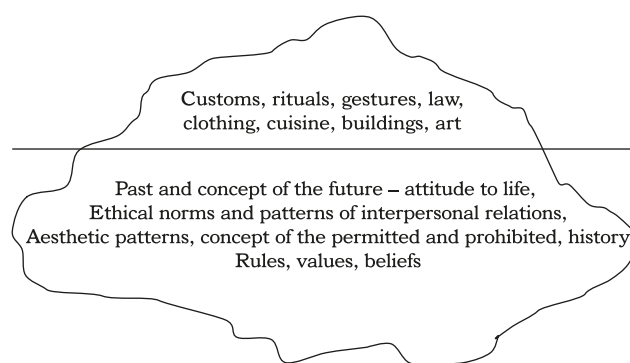
The proponents of convergence theory invoke globalisation processes, which trigger cultural homogenisation. Movement of people on an unprecedented scale, use of the Internet as a source of interpersonal communication, unlimited global access to information in real time, and model of corporate management result in cultural patterns transcending the ethnic boundaries. As a result, the global world may evolve through:

- the development of a uniform global culture dominated by Western cultural patterns;
- the gradual elimination of local cultural patterns over a span of as many as several generations;
- cultural deformation consisting in filtering, adapting and, consequently, adopting certain Western patterns by local cultures;
- cultural amalgamation, whereby Western culture adopts certain local cultural patterns, which, in turn, adopt selected aspects of Western patterns, interpreting them in their own way [Sztompka, 2005].

An opposite point of view is presented by the proponents of divergence theory. They believe that ethnic cultures will return and will be defended in response to culture universalisation. Cultural interaction is not a new phenomenon. The development of new technologies only influences its speed and scale. In this sense, one may agree with the predictions of McLuhan [1968], who was the first to use the term “global village” as early as in the early 1960s. What he meant by this is that by 2000 we would all wear

the same clothes and have similar preferences modelled on Western culture. This belief is confirmed at the level of the external layer of culture, which is the most visible, as well as relatively easy to notice and accept. It is much more difficult to reach to deeper layers that are composed of beliefs, norms and values resulting from the fundamental assumptions of a given culture. The layers they form are so deeply rooted and firm that they are often accepted and implemented by the representatives of a culture in an intuitive and unconscious manner. When not known, they give rise to serious conflicts and, undoubtedly, constitute a barrier to understanding mutual intentions and behaviour. The model of culture as an iceberg (see figure 1) illustrates easily noticeable layers and those whose presence is difficult to identify without deeper knowledge².

Figure 1. Model of culture as an iceberg



Source: own work based on: D. Katan, *Translating Cultures*, St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester 1999, p. 29.

Such deeply hidden layers of ethnic culture may determine the success or failure of any intercultural activity, including international professional career. They may also be an important inhibitor of global cultural homogenisation.

There is no doubt that “no culture has ever existed in isolation, but rather every culture has shaped its meanings in reference to other cultures” [Szymkowska-Bartyzel, 2006:11], but “as opposed to ethnic and national cultures, which are specific, limited in time and distinct, as well as refer to emotions, values, memories, sense of historical identity and destiny common to the whole group, a global and cosmopolitan culture is not capable of referring to any historical identity [...] is devoid of memories [...], does not respond to any life needs, as well as does not create any identity” [Burszta 1998:183].

It seems thus justified to state that cultural convergence and divergence constitute simultaneous phenomena. It is also difficult to assess clearly which of the two will dominate and for how long.

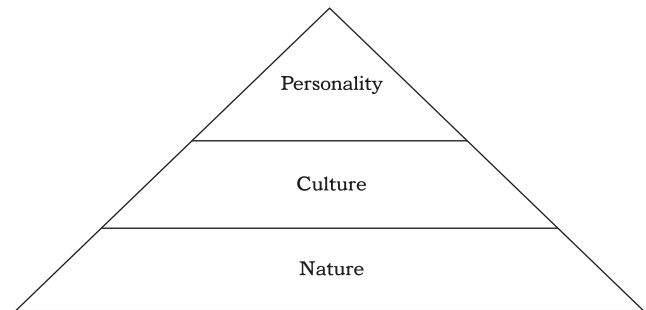
Cultural dimensions according to Hofstede

Cultural dimensions are examined not only by cultural anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists, but also by intercultural management experts. Apart from its cognitive value, their work has also a practical dimension. By deciphering the essence of diversity, they search for solutions that could improve effectiveness in international business.

G. Hofstede is one of the most business-oriented scholars. His model of analysis of cultural differences was developed on the basis of surveys conducted in the 1960s and 1970s among IBM employees from several dozen countries, with a view to verifying the correlation between national culture and organisational culture. As already mentioned, culture, according to Hofstede, is the collective programming of the mind. He distinguishes three levels of this programming of the human mind: individual, collective and universal (see figure 2).

G. Hofstede understands the term “nature” as characteristics common to all people, such as basic physiological and psychological needs; by “personality” he means all that is unique to a given individual and has source in individual experience. Culture is the collective level, characteristic of a given group and acquired in the process of socialisation. Hofstede believes that this level is the most important one when it comes to distinguishing the members of one

Figure 2. The levels of the programming of the human mind according to Hofstede



Source: [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2011:18].

group from the members of other groups, as it determines patterns of behaviour, norms and values.

Based on the results of surveys conducted continuously for several dozen years, G. Hofstede distinguishes five basic cultural dimensions presented in Table 1.

Membership in a cultural circle is not one-dimensional, as every member of a community belongs to many cultural circles, such as:

- national culture,
- culture related to membership in religious, ethnic, language or regional groups,
- gender culture,
- generational culture,
- social class culture (related to one’s education and job),
- organisational culture (called corporate), related to one’s role and job position in the workplace [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2011:23-24; Dancewicz 2015a].

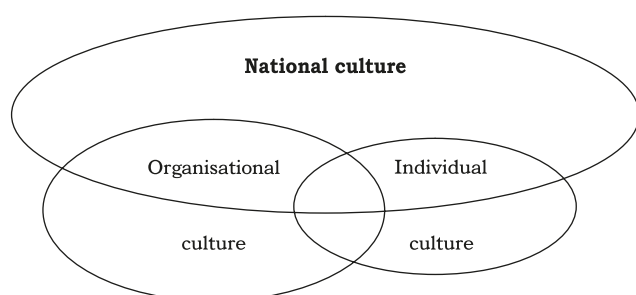
Table 1. Cultural dimensions according to Hofstede

Cultural dimension	Description
Power distance (<i>Power Distance Index – PDI</i>)	Determines the extent to which a society accepts that power is distributed unequally, and expects obedience towards authorities, supervisors and parents
Collectivism and individualism (<i>Individualism – IDV</i>)	Determines the position of an individual depending on his or her group membership or personal characteristics. Defines focus on group benefits or personal benefits
Femininity, masculinity (<i>Masculinity – MAS</i>)	Determines differences in social roles depending on gender. Defines success attributes
Uncertainty avoidance (<i>Uncertainty Avoidance Index – UAI</i>)	Attitude to the new, unknown and uncertain. Determines the extent of tolerance for uncertainty and tendency to take risk
Long-term orientation (<i>Long Term Orientation – LTO</i>)	Referred to also as Confucian dynamism, defines long-term (focus on the future) or short-term (focus on the present and the past) attitude to life

Source: [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2011].

The characteristics of a representative of a given national culture who becomes a member of an international organisation influence this organisation to a certain extent. By the same token, an organisation influences its members. As a result, values, norms and behaviour constantly interact with one another [Linton 1975]. This correlation is illustrated by figure 3.

Figure 3. The correlation between national culture, organisational culture and individual culture



Source: [Sułkowski 2002:111].

Culturally-conditioned social roles

Cultural norms define the social roles of women and men. Research on the division of social tasks depending on gender makes it possible to differentiate the following patterns:

- Gender is the main criterion on the basis of which women and men are assigned social roles and tasks;
- A specific set of tasks is consistently assigned to one gender only; women are usually responsible for home and children, whereas men perform tasks requiring physical effort and obtain funds to provide for their family;
- Assignment of roles to gender vary considerably across cultures: what is regarded feminine behaviour in one society may be characteristic of men in another one [Goodman 2000:168].

Depending on the approach taken, it is assumed that the division of social roles results from functions that ensure the smooth functioning of society³ or involves the struggle of the dominating group to keep power⁴. Irrespective of the reasons, every culture has a pattern of assigning specific social roles to gender. In the model presented by G. Hofstede, it is reflected in the dimension referred to as femininity/masculinity (Masculinity – MAS). According to G. Hofstede, the masculinity index for a given so-

ciety is based on differences resulting from the degree of consent to the performance of various social roles. Societies characterised by a high masculinity index tend to appreciate values traditionally considered masculine, such as power, control, achievement, competitiveness, and their material attributes indicating one's social position. Societies with a high femininity index, in contrast, appreciate such values as social solidarity, harmony in interpersonal relations, or care for the weak. A high masculinity index is usually directly proportional to the degree of discrimination of women. The masculinity index in Poland is relatively high: 64/100⁵.

Poland, similarly to other countries of the world, undergoes dynamic economic and social changes, covering also the role of women in society. Numerous studies, however, show that professional opportunities and the course of career growth differ depending on gender [Ornacka, Mańka 2011]. Secondary sources distinguish, inter alia, the following factors that hinder women from achieving upward mobility:

- “sticky floor” – a pattern whereby women hold positions that do not offer any promotion possibilities and perform badly-remunerated jobs with a low social status⁶;
- “glass ceilings” – known also as horizontal segregation, a phenomenon whereby “women’s professional activity concentrates in several areas of employment (e.g. education, services and health-care), which usually involves the overrepresentation of women in selected, usually less well-paid, sections and jobs. In contrast, men’s professional activity is spread evenly across much more areas” [Gawrycka, Wasilczuk, Zwiech, 2008:29];
- gendered organization, that is expecting full responsibility irrespective of gender, ignoring the fact of motherhood, and rewarding responsibility, mobility, etc. [Williams, Muller, Kilanski 2012];
- old boys’ networks – a professional success depends directly or indirectly on the acceptance and membership of informal professional and social networks as a condition for exchanging important information, building reputation and establishing relevant relations [Zuckermann, Cole, Bruer 1991].

While the total global population of women is slightly smaller than that of men⁷, in Europe it is larger: the European average is 51%, while in Poland women constitute 52% of the population⁸. It seems thus important to study the influence of gender and cultural conditions on the international career of individuals.

Results of own research

Research methodology and questions

With the research goal being to gain fuller knowledge of cultural factors that have an influence on one's international career⁹, including gender, exploratory data analysis has been chosen as the research methodology. Owing to the steady increase in transnational movement of people and capital, factors that facilitate and hinder one's professional career attract much interest from a large number of scholars¹⁰. This is also the case with issues regarding the social and professional position of women¹¹. It is, however, relatively rare that the subject of women's international career is discussed with respect to intercultural differences. Consequently, the main goal of the research presented in this article has been to identify factors that may constitute an opportunity or a barrier in women's and men's international professional career, taking into consideration a cultural perspective.

The survey conducted has, to a certain extent, the character of exploratory data analysis, as it makes it possible to indicate what triggers (the cause) specific results (the effect). Given the adopted research method (nonprobability sampling), its results do not allow for far-reaching generalisations. A semi-structured in-depth interview has been used as a tool for collecting data. 10 individual interviews in total have been conducted. Table 2 shows research problems and questions.

The respondents vary in their gender, country of origin, and a number of cultures that they had encountered in professional life. Out of 10 survey participants, 7 are women and 3 are men. One of the important criteria based on which the respondents

have been selected is an intercultural professional experience. As many as 6 out of 10 respondents declare that they have worked in more than two cultural environments other than their own. It means that they not only have operated in an international environment, but also have lived in several countries. The respondents come from different countries. All of them have higher education and have worked on relatively senior positions.

Culturally-conditioned social roles: the influence of gender on one's international career

The survey participants do not believe that gender has any influence on their international career. During the interview, however, they would add: *but it depends ... It depends on your position*, says a Polish woman working in Great Britain. Other respondents confirm this view, indicating that gender may be an asset in lower and less-paid positions. *In Great Britain, women are often employed in catering, as babysitters or assistants in corporations. These are poorly paid jobs without any promotion prospects. It is believed that women will take them and will be good workers because they have no other choice. They have to provide for themselves and sometimes also for their children. They will apply themselves.* This opinion is shared by a majority of respondents, who mention also the country of origin as a factor that may additionally increase the probability of being employed in less prestigious jobs: *If you are a Pole, you will always find a job that is not attractive for natives, but making a career is quite a different thing.*

No affirmative answer has been obtained to the question whether women's careers are blocked or hindered. The respondents have provided descrip-

Table 2. Research problems and questions

Main research problem Influence of gender and ethnic origin on one's international career	
Specific research problem I Influence of gender on one's international career	Specific research II Influence of gender on one's international career
Research question: Does gender influence one's international professional career. If so, in what way? Is there a relation between one's gender-conditioned social position and ethnic culture? If so, what is it? Does ethnic origin influence one's international professional career? If so, in what way? Are there similarities or differences in professional relations between the country of origin and the working environment? If so, what are they? How can they influence one's professional career?	

tive answers with specific examples. *If you have proper education and experience, you may be promoted. Gender has no significance up to a certain level. It may be even an asset in corporations that promote diversity*, claims a Polish woman employed in a large corporation. *The higher the position, the more crowded it is. Men usually remain entrenched there*, she adds. *It depends on the industry. In my workplace (university, editor's note), I haven't spotted any difference in the treatment of women and men*, another woman says. The importance of the criterion of the industry is confirmed by a respondent from Italy working in construction: *it makes no difference to me whether I employ a man or a woman. There are, though, few women-engineers, in particular with proper experience, so I have no choice.*

Another issue emphasised in the answers concerns women's aspirations and assessment of their own capabilities. *I don't make choices based on gender. Usually, only men submit applications and I have no choice*, states a senior manager from Canada. When asked about the reasons, he cannot provide any clear answer. Other respondents, however, indicate several important factors such as education, experience in certain areas, lesser focus on professional career, often due to the pursuit of the husband's/partner's career, concentration on domestic duties, high level of self-criticism and lack of self-confidence. *We cannot both dedicate ourselves to career. Since we focus on my husband, I have to limit my ambitions. I wouldn't be able to expend so much time and energy on work. I look for other solutions for myself*, says a German woman pursuing a career in non-governmental organisations. *If I chose full-time work, the fact that I'm a woman probably wouldn't matter*, she adds. This point of view is shared by a Polish senior manager in a corporation: *my experience tells me that women are much less willing to perform some jobs because they refuse to work flexitime and overtime, withstand the pressure of responsibility and sometimes be mobile*. Two other respondents (a Canadian and a Polish woman) agree: *it's a matter of individual traits rather than gender*. The Canadian woman adds: *I've never thought about this. I've been valued for my competencies, or at least it seems so to me*. The Polish woman presents a similar opinion: *I've never felt discriminated as a woman, but I've never really thought about that. If a job seemed interesting to me, I would apply for it and I would receive it (laughter). My corporation doesn't allow for any form of discrimination. But it is a Scandinavian*

company (laughter). Even so, some ten years ago, all top positions were accidentally held by Swedes, all men of course (laughter), another woman says. All the women respondents and two out of three men respondents agree with the statement that *in any case, a woman must be at least a bit better than a man*. A Polish woman with rich international experience in business is convinced that *gender is significant because we are raised in a way that later determines our approach to career*, and adds: *compared to women from other countries, we, Polish women, are less active on a professional field. Although we are entrepreneurial, we have a tendency to lock ourselves in the comfort zone. I notice a lack of business courage and a sense of self-value. Me? I must be different (...) also for the reason that I'm myself. Women often follow a male model in business because they think it's easier to do so*. Later she specifies what she has in mind, explaining that *gender is no barrier to pursuing a career as long as we do not make it such ourselves*.

It may be thus assumed that gender does not play a key role in an international professional career. One may search for potential barriers in individual or culturally-conditioned approaches to the role of women in society. The survey results indicate a deviation from the cultural script in cultures with a high masculinity index, such as Poland (64), Great Britain (66) or Italy (70), and, by the same token, confirm compliance with the cultural script in cultures with a low masculinity index (Norway 8, Sweden a 5)¹².

Influence of ethnic origin on international professional career

All the respondents agree that they have never experienced discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin. Nevertheless, seven out of ten respondents have witnessed preference for people from one's own cultural circle: *An Italian will always choose another Italian if he has a choice*, two respondents state categorically (an Italian man and a Polish woman), *not only in Italy, but everywhere*. The situation differs slightly in Great Britain: *it is an old gentlemen's club rather than ethnic discrimination. If you go to the right schools and have a proper social position, you're treated as you own folk, no matter whether you're Hindu, Polish or English*. It is interesting to compare this situation with Poland, where *being Polish doesn't give you an advantage among your Polish colleagues. We rather don't support one another at work*. Favouritism on grounds of one's

ethnic or social background is accepted by Poles. It results from the fact that Polish society is characterised by a high power distance index (68). It may be a factor hindering one's professional career because Polish people *aren't independent or good at decision making. They expect detailed instructions and don't want to take responsibility*, a Canadian tells about Poles. It has particular importance in contacts with cultures with a low power distance index, such as Canada (39), Great Britain (35), or Sweden (31), which appreciate and value partnership, initiative, decision-making skills and readiness to take responsibility. On the other hand, the respondents, all of whom have experience in international business, declare a high level of adaptation to the applicable organisational culture, a fact that indicates the shift of the cultural ethnic paradigm towards the professional paradigm [Dancewicz 2015b].

Certain correlations may be seen between the power distance index and the individuality index. Most countries with a low power distance index have a high individuality index, while strong dependence on group membership results in strong dependence on authority and acceptance of this state of affairs¹³. The survey participants belong to cultures differing in their degree of individualism. The index is 60 for Poland, 67 for Germany, 76 for Italy, and 80 for Canada. It implies possible antagonisms in approach to responsibility, self-reliance, relationality, as well as the degree of ethical relativism.

In case of interaction between a culture with a relatively low individualism index, such as Polish culture, and a culture with a high individualism index, such as British culture, cognitive dissonance may arise and result in a lack of mutual understanding and limitations in professional career. *The British are self-focused. They care about themselves and their own lives. Polish people are more prone to observe and evaluate other people, as well as compare them with themselves*, says a Polish woman working in London. *They don't find it difficult to speak well of themselves. We (Polish people, editor's note) believe that it is not the done thing*.

We're ashamed to speak if we're not sure that we have something really brilliant to say. They do not care. We're excessively modest and have problems with accepting praises, being in the forefront or speaking about our own achievements. We're disappointed when others don't appreciate our strengths or don't notice our true value (laughter). It hinders promotion prospects. It frustrates us when someone who is much worse than us gets a job that we

should get. But they simply don't know that we're better. We don't speak about that and they don't have time to notice that.

Another respondent pays attention to interpersonal relations: *They are so superficial and selfish. British people are so kind that it's hard to decipher their true intentions. Maybe this is why it's so difficult to make real friends with them. What irritates me is going out together after work. You cannot refuse to go out with strangers whom you do not necessarily like. And those empty conversations. You have an impression that they notice you only when they have their own business to do. Even if you build a stronger relationship with someone, you cannot rely on that person because rules are always rules.*

The last sentence refers to the problem of ethical relativism. The respondents emphasise the significance of rules in British culture. Polish people treat rules in a more arbitrary way and, just in case, strive to find possibilities of circumventing them, provided that no one learns this. The tendency is confirmed by other respondents with respect to, inter alia, Japanese culture.

The respondents' answers concerning Polish and British people confirm cultural differences resulting from the level of uncertainty avoidance. Polish culture is characterised by a very high uncertainty avoidance index (93) in contrast to Great Britain, which has a very low index of 35. The interviews suggest that, although Polish people are prone to take the risk, the predictability of social relations and the future runs high on their list of priorities and influences their sense of security. It may be reflected in effectiveness in the business environment, which, if based on the Euro-Atlantic model (e.g. British), promotes the perception of uncertainty as an opportunity. A low level of uncertainty avoidance means also that any regulations that are not followed should be changed. The respondents agree that, when encountering regulations that do not respond to reality, Polish people usually search for a way to circumvent them, a course of action that is sometimes regarded as dishonesty. On the other hand, as one of the women respondents remarks: *they (Polish people, editor's note) take challenges, but only as part of procedures. It fits well with an organisation's culture*. Other survey participants confirm this opinion. They also agree that a sense of uncertainty is a source of nervous tension for Poles. It may lead to aggression and reduced tolerance towards otherness. Such behaviour is interpreted negatively in business environment.

Poland is a short-term oriented country (the index at the level of 38). The respondents' answers confirm readiness to fulfil social commitments, including professional ones, irrespective of the costs involved. Consequently, Polish people are capable of working hard and diligently, thanks to which they are regarded as really industrious, as all the respondents emphasise. Since they are oriented on fast gratification, however, they do not tolerate long overtime hours that do not produce any specific effects. As a result, it may seem that Polish people are not committed, as confirmed by the respondents, in particular those from more long-term oriented cultures (Germany, Italy and Great Britain), whose members are much more willing to make sacrifices and renounce their private life.

Conclusions

The survey has not demonstrated any relevant influence of gender on one's international professional career. A barrier may be the relatively small number of women with proper education and experience in certain jobs. Women's weaker commitment to the pursuit of promotion may result from their orientation on home and their partner's career. The survey shows that the individual or culturally-conditioned perception of a woman's role in society may prove a decisive factor. It may be related to a culture-specific approach to the social division of gender roles. Polish society, similarly to German, Italian and British one, is characterised by a high masculinity index. Consequently, as all the respondents agree, women from these cultures engaging in professional competition feel a strong need to prove their value despite a lack of any organisational pressure.

The survey results do not indicate clearly whether ethnic origin has an influence on one's international professional career. What they suggest, however, is that moving out of one's own cultural script is virtually impossible and may influence a career in specific circumstances, especially in emergencies. It implies the relativism and complexity of the subject. Relativism related to the impact of ethnic culture on career development appears in the respondents' answers in the context of organisational culture. It indicates a high level of adaptation to the organisation's culture, sometimes in opposition to national culture. A strong emphasis is placed on the age limit with respect to Polish people. According to the survey participants, young Poles differ in attitude from their parents, a fact that influences the value of cultural dimensions. Although observed also in other

cultures, the phenomenon is deemed especially significant in the case of Poland. It is related to the diffusion of values and a business model derived from Anglo-Saxon culture, hence a specific organisational culture. Characteristics specific to a given ethnic culture come to surface usually in situations of lower stability, e.g. during a crisis or conflict. Then they may influence one's professional career.

The form of the survey, namely an open interview, has triggered a natural shift to the form of storytelling. As a result, the respondents' answers go beyond the scope of this paper. At the same time, they provide a vast insight into their personal experiences and opinions, allowing for a deeper understanding of opportunities and risks regarding the international professional career of an individual in a cultural context. All the survey participants have rich business experience in an intercultural environment. The survey has revealed, however, that their experience has come at the cost of numerous and expensive efforts. Many of them have learnt during the survey what cultural dimensions are and how knowledge of them may influence professional effectiveness and understanding of one's own attitudes and behaviours. They have often been frustrated at their own ignorance and have asked for more information. It follows that the level of knowledge about intercultural differences in business environment is relatively low. The respondents' answers clearly indicate the actual and potential impact of such ignorance on personal and corporate business effectiveness. It seems thus justified to recommend providing members of international organisations with intercultural knowledge through training sessions or workshops. Improving the level of intercultural competence may contribute to limiting errors and mistakes that may have a measurable influence on business effectiveness. It applies in particular to the managerial staff, including HR employees. Work with people in a tumultuous global environment requires a special approach. As indicated by the research, professional interactions are influenced not only by personal factors, but also by those cultural, including ethnic and organisational ones.

Ending

The continued presence of transnational corporations in the global economic reality and the scale of international movements are elements that influence business relations. At the same time, women

are becoming ever more active in professional life; they assume positions that have been so far reserved for men. It seems thus important to study determinants that may have an impact on individual careers in the present circumstances. Apart from having an individual dimension, such study may influence the effectiveness of organisations.

The surveys conducted for the purposes of this analysis have made it possible to answer the question about the possible impact of gender and ethnic origin on an international professional career. They have also revealed the significant role that the level of international competence plays in such a career.

Due to the limitations related to the adopted research methodology, it has not been possible to find answers to all the questions. The aforementioned limitations result from the relatively small population sample size, which makes it impossible to draw generalized conclusions. The expensive and time-consuming nature of research has constituted a barrier to conducting more surveys. The material obtained during the surveys indicates the wide scope of the subject in question and calls for further research.

Apart from its cognitive value, research in this scope may have practical implications for business. It may also contribute to reducing stress of people who start work in an international environment, as well as influence their professional career.

¹ Academic literature differentiates between ethnic culture and national culture [Kłoskowska 1996:24, Paleczny 2008:81]. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that a national culture is a composite of ethnic cultures that form it.

² See the onion diagram [Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2011:20] and layered structure of national culture [Trompenaars, Hampden-Turner 2002:37].

³ The functionalist theory of society, known also as the social balance theory [Parsons, 2009].

⁴ The conflict theory [Collins, 1979].

⁵ <https://geert-hofstede.com/poland.html>.

⁶ See the guide of the Ministry of Regional Development entitled *Zasada równości szans kobiet i mężczyzn w projektach Programu Operacyjnego Kapitał Ludzki*, Warsaw 2010, p. 83.

⁷ <https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/idb/worldpop.php>.

⁸ [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/sytuacja_demograficzna_polski_na_tle_europy%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/sytuacja_demograficzna_polski_na_tle_europy%20(1).pdf).

⁹ Here understood as work in a country other than one's country of origin, with no differentiation for the way of its performance (expatriate, immigrant, self-initiated expatriates).

¹⁰ In Poland, these issues are studied, inter alia, by M. Rozkowińska and S. Przytuła.

¹¹ Topics discussed both in academia, e.g. [Lisowska 2010], and in business environments, e.g. Deloitte [Kobieta i władza w biznesie, Warsaw 2012] or Hays [Kobiety na rynku pracy, Warsaw 2017].

¹² All values regarding cultural indicators based on: <https://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

¹³ Analysis based on the national dimensions of culture, as in footnote 12.

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