Agnieszka Knap-Stefaniuk
Ignatianum University in Cracow

ORCID: 0000-0002-9201-9889
e-mail: agnieszka.knap.stefaniuk@ignatianum.edu.pl

CHALLENGES IN CONTEMPORARY MANAGEMENT OF MULTICULTURAL TEAMS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS OF INTERVIEWS WITH EUROPEAN MANAGERS

WYZWANIA WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM ZARZĄDZANIU WIELOKULTUROWYMI ZESPOŁAMI: ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA WYNIKÓW WYWIADÓW Z EUROPEJSKIMI MENEDŻERAMI

Abstract: The increasing number of multinational companies has added complexity to tasks performed by multicultural teams. While multiculturalism is common in many companies operating globally, it can impact goal achievement both positively and negatively. However, the effective management of multicultural teams offers several benefits, such as access to employees' unique knowledge and diverse experiences, improved communication with foreign contractors, and the possibility to introduce innovative solutions. This article aims to identify the challenges in managing multicultural teams based on in-depth interviews conducted in 2024 with managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece. These challenges are compared to those reported by managers from other European countries in the interviews conducted in 2023. The theoretical section discusses the importance of multicultural teams in contemporary management. The empirical section presents the results of the 2024 interviews and compares them to the 2023 findings. According to managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, the main challenges in managing multicultural teams include the substantive preparation of managers, their level of cultural intelligence, effective communication within multicultural teams, and the continuous development of the knowledge and skills necessary for working in culturally diverse environments.
Keywords: multiculturalism, multicultural teams, cultural differences, managers, employees

Streszczenie: Rosnąca liczba międzynarodowych przedsiębiorstw oznacza większą złożoność zadań, które są realizowane przez wielokulturowe zespoły. Choć dziś wielokulturowość jest powszechnym zjawiskiem w wielu firmach działających na globalnym rynku, może ona wpływać zarówno pozytywnie, jak i negatywnie na realizację ich celów. Jednak skuteczne zarządzanie wielokulturowymi zespołami przynosi szereg korzyści, takich jak dostęp do unikalnej wiedzy pracowników i ich zróżnicowanych doświadczeń, sprawna komunikacja z zagranicznymi kontrahentami czy możliwość wprowadzania nowych, oryginalnych rozwiązań. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie wyzwań w zarządzaniu wielokulturowymi zespołami w oparciu o indywidualne wywiady pogłębione z menedżerami z Niemiec, Austrii, Belgii, Holandii i Grecji, które zostały przeprowadzone w roku 2024 i porównanie ich do wyzwań wymienionych przez menedżerów z innych krajów europejskich w wywiadach z roku 2023. W części teoretycznej artykułu przedstawiono znaczenie wielokulturowych zespołów we współczesnym zarządzaniu. W części badawczej zaprezentowano wyniki wywiadów przeprowadzonych z menedżerami w roku 2024 i porównano je z wynikami wywiadów z menedżerami z innych krajów europejskich z roku 2023. Zdaniem menedżerów z Niemiec, Austrii, Belgii, Holandii i Grecji współczesne wyzwania w zarządzaniu wielokulturowymi zespołami to: przygotowanie merytoryczne menedżerów do zarządzania wielokulturowymi zespołami, poziom inteligencji kulturowej menedżerów, komunikacja w wielokulturowych zespołach i ciągły rozwój wiedzy i umiejętności niezbędnych do pracy w środowisku różnic kulturowych.
Słowa kluczowe: wielokulturowość, wielokulturowe zespoły, różnice kulturowe, menedżerowie, pracownicy

Introduction

Multiculturalism has long been a challenge in human resource management, as the co-existence of diverse cultures in a workplace significantly impacts team dynamics, employee cooperation, communication, conflict resolution, and dealing with difficult situations. While multicultural teams often lead to greater creativity and innovation, increased flexibility in decision-making, as well as higher efficiency and effectiveness in the global market, they also pose challenges such as communication problems, language barriers, lack of trust, and misunderstandings or conflicts arising from cultural differences.

Hence, modern managers must navigate numerous challenges related to working in a multicultural environment, integrating culturally diverse employees, and managing multicultural teams effectively. The successful creation and functioning of such teams largely depend on managers' knowledge and experience, willingness to learn about different cultures, and their ability to identify both differences and similarities in work styles, task and goal accomplishment, and problem-solving approaches among employees from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The article aims to identify the challenges to managing multicultural teams within contemporary organizations based on the opinions and experiences of managers from five European countries – Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Greece – who were interviewed in 2024 and to compare them to the results from 2023 interviews with managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland, as discussed in the article "Opinions of European Managers on the Challenges of Team Management in Multicultural Work Environments" (Knap-Stefaniuk, 2023). All the respondents, i.e., the managers interviewed in 2024 and in 2023, have extensive experience managing multicultural teams. To achieve the article's aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the most significant challenges in managing multicultural teams (in a multicultural work environment) according to European managers (executives from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece)?
2. Do the challenges in managing multicultural teams identified as the most important by the managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece in the interviews conducted in 2024 differ from the challenges identified as the most significant by the managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland in the 2023 interviews?

Literature review – multicultural teams and their importance for contemporary organizations

The area of management of multicultural teams is highly relevant today. With the increasing number of global companies employing people from different cultures, managers face numerous challenges in integrating and ensuring the smooth operation of culturally diverse groups, achieving set targets, and responding quickly to environmental changes.

Based on the criterion of cultural diversity, teams can be categorised as culturally homogeneous or multicultural. Multicultural teams can further be divided into three types: token teams, where only one member comes from a different culture, bicultural teams, consisting of members from two different cultures, and multicultural teams, composed of representatives from at least three different cultures (Adler, Gundersen, 2007).

Researchers have long been interested in multicultural teams. In numerous studies, they have analysed their strengths, weaknesses, the challenges of managing them, and the benefits these teams bring to companies, including enhanced creativity, innovation, competitiveness, organizational commitment, faster problem-solving, and more effective decision-making (Ali et al., 2019; Backmann et al., 2020; Ely, Thomas, 2001; Han, Beyerlein, 2016; Jang, 2017; Jones et al., 2020; Neukam, 2017; Stahl et al., 2010a; Schoonhoven et al., 2005; Stahl, Maznevski, 2021; Yasmeen et al., 2020).

Following the widespread internationalization of business, large global companies have emerged and their workforces have grown increasingly multicultural. The ability to understand and navigate different cultures have become key to international management and business success (Cox, 2001; Allen et al., 2004).

In today's increasingly heterogeneous work environments, there is a growing need for companies to incorporate cultural diversity into their workforce (Gonçalves et al., 2020). Consequently, multicultural teams are frequently used as a key collaboration method to boost productivity (Choi et al., 2018; Ratasuk, Charoensukmongkol, 2020) and achieve organizational goals (Hoever et al., 2012).

Cultural diversity in teams fosters the development and implementation of new solutions, leveraging the creativity and innovation of employees. In multicultural teams, different cultures intersect, providing a broader range of alternatives and ways to analyse problems (Adler, Gundersen, 2007). The diverse knowledge and experience of team members promote non-standard thinking, increase flexibility, and improve decision-making accuracy.

Multicultural teams contribute not only diverse knowledge and experiences to a company but also invaluable skills. For many employees, cross-cultural interactions offer them opportunities to learn about other cultures, different work styles, and new values; as well as to gain new experiences.

Multicultural teams are notably adept at adapting quickly. In an environment of constant change or emerging challenges, diverse perspectives can accelerate the adaptation process, which is crucial in today's fast-paced world. Understanding and appreciating cultural differences enable companies to better identify and meet the needs and expectations of global customers, and, consequently, offer products and services tailored to their unique preferences.

Additionally, companies that promote cultural diversity attract talented employees from around the world, benefiting from their unique competencies, knowledge of various markets, and international experience. A multicultural working environment is also increasingly appealing to professionals seeking to develop their skills and experience within a broader global context. "With global tensions around immigration, refugees, prejudice, and pandemics at new heights, research on multicultural teams has never been more important. At the same time, the potential benefits from multicultural teams, such as innovation, improved decision-making, and engagement in distributed working relationships, have never been more needed" (Stahl, Maznevski, 2020, p. 18-19).

It is widely acknowledged that culturally diverse teams, or multicultural teams, are a key source of organizational success and performance (Ho et al., 2017). Building effective multicultural teams requires fulfilling several important conditions, such as the careful selection of team members (who should be highly competent, knowledgeable, and experienced), effective recognition and understanding of cultural differences (team members must be aware of cultural differences from the very beginning and treat them with understanding), establishing and following a common vision of work (a team should agree on shared values and goals), treating all team members equally, and providing regular feedback to all employees. It is vital that members of multicultural teams should feel respected, appreciated, and understood (Słaboń, 2019, p. 46).

The increasing complexity of cultural diversity in contemporary organizations has necessitated a new approach to managing multicultural teams. Employees from different cultures seek such management styles that include them in the process of sharing knowledge and experiences and offer opportunities to develop their competencies in international work environments. Therefore, managers play a crucial role in developing and implementing new solutions necessary for the successful management of multicultural teams.

A key element of integration in a multicultural work environment is respect and openness to differences, along with active efforts undertaken by managers to understand and enrich their teams through cultural diversity.

Research methodology

The study described in the article, i.e., the interviews with the managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, was conducted in 2024 using the snowball sampling method. This nonprobability sampling technique is often employed in studies involving social groups that are challenging for researchers to access. In the case of this study, the difficulty lay in finding managers of various nationalities who met specific criteria.

In its most basic form, snowball sampling consists in asking each interviewee to recommend other people who could be asked to participate in the study. This process gradually builds up the sample (Sęk, 2015, p. 60). The main advantage of this method is that it facilitates finding individuals who meet certain requirements when their complete list is unavailable or when it is challenging for a researcher to access them (Szreder, 2004). In the study described in this article, at the end of each interview, respondents (i.e., managers from five European countries) were asked to recommend another person who also met the selection criteria and could be interviewed.

The interviews were based on an individual in-depth interview technique. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth interviewing is a qualitative method that involves intensive one-on-one interviews with a small group of respondents to explore their personal viewpoints, feelings, and perspectives on specific solutions, programmes, or situations (Minsky, 2017, p. 37). As noted by Michael Quinn Patton (2002), the main advantage of qualitative interviews is that they allow researchers to explore the unobservable and to gain access to respondents' perspective, who – thanks to open-ended questions – construct data in their own words (Gajda, 2019, p. 133).

For this study, the author used the same interview protocol she had developed for interviews conducted in 2023 with managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland.

The in-depth interview scenario offers respondents greater flexibility, serving as both a guide for the interviewer and a framework within which respondents can express their views freely. This approach avoids pre-categorised answers and scales, enabling respondents to answer using their own words. The interviewer can adapt the order and pace of asking questions based on a respondent's engagement and communication style and has the option to ask follow-up questions when needed (Miński, 2017, p. 39). This flexibility provides the researcher with some latitude in conducting the study (Nicińska, 2000, p. 41).

The interviews with the managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece (conducted in 2024) lasted between 40 and 45 minutes and were held online via Zoom. All participants were informed about the aim of the study, the interview process, and data confidentiality. With respondents' consent, the interviews were recorded, and the author also took notes during the sessions. These interviews were conducted in English.

The interviews conducted in 2023 with managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. They were not recorded, but the author took notes. Interviews with Polish managers were conducted in Polish, while those with managers from other countries were conducted in English.

The empirical data collected in both the 2023 and 2024 interviews were subjected to qualitative analysis and, where applicable, quantitative analysis.

Managing multicultural teams – research findings

The interviews described in this article were conducted between January and April 2024. A total of 25 individual in-depth interviews were held with managers from five European countries: Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, with five interviews from each country. This was the first time the author conducted interviews with managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

At the time, the author also attempted to arrange interviews with managers from Croatia to include them in the study. Unfortunately, due to time and organizational constraints, these interviews could not be completed.

The author references interviews conducted in 2023 with managers from six other European countries: the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland. This involved five individual in-depth interviews with managers from each of these countries, totalling 30 interviews. The results of these 2023 interviews are compared with those of the 2024 interviews with managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece.

All interviews conducted in 2023 and 2024 involved managers from different European countries who work in multinational companies, have a minimum of three years of experience in a managerial position, and manage multicultural teams with employees from at least three different cultures or countries.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the managers who participated in the interviews conducted between May and August 2023. Table 2 presents the characteristics of the managers who participated in the interviews conducted between January and April 2024.

Table 1. Characteristics of managers who participated in the 2023 study

Criterion	Czech Republic	Portugal	France	Spain	Italy	Poland
Age	36-51	38-44	38-50	35-46	37-45	34-53
Female	1	1	2	2	1	2
Male	4	4	3	3	4	3
Number of years in a managerial position	4-13	5-10	4-11	4-11	5-11	4-15
Number of nationalities (cultures) in a team managed by the manager	3	5	4	4	4	3

Source: own study based on the interviews with the European managers (in:) A. Knap-Stefaniuk, (2023), Opinions of European managers on the challenges of team management in multicultural work environments, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie 134(61), p. 9.

Table 2. Characteristics of managers who participated in the 2024 study

Criterion	Germany	Austria	Belgium	Netherlands	Greece
Age	42-50	40-44	39-47	39-45	38-47
Female	2	2	1	1	1
Male	3	3	4	4	4
Number of years in a managerial position	4-11	6-9	5-10	5-9	4-10
Number of nationalities (cultures) in a team managed by the manager	4	4	4	4	3

Source: own study based on the interviews with the European managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and Greece (2023-2024).

The aim of the interviews conducted in 2023 and 2024 with managers from 11 European countries was to obtain information regarding their knowledge and experiences in the area of multiculturalism in the workplace and the management of multicultural teams. Specifically, the interviews sought to identify the challenges that managers face in contemporary multicultural team management.

Managers' responses to the questions regarding the challenges of managing multicultural teams from the 2024 interviews are presented in Table 3. For comparison, Table 4 presents the responses to questions regarding challenges in managing multicultural teams obtained from managers during the interviews conducted in 2023.

Table 3. Challenges in managing multicultural teams in the 2024 study

Challenges	Germany	Austria	Belgium	Netherlands	Greece
Managers' factual knowledge on and preparation to manage teams in multicultural environments	5	5	5	5	5
Managers' level of cultural intelligence	5	5	5	5	5
Communication	5	5	5	5	5
Recruitment and selection	4	4	4	4	4
Remuneration	4	4	4	4	3
Employee motivation	4	4	4	4	4
Training and development	4	4	4	4	3
Performance appraisal (individual and team)	4	4	4	4	3
Conflict resolution	4	4	5	5	3
Competence management	4	4	4	4	4
Talent management	4	4	4	4	3
Change management	4	4	4	4	4
Time management	4	4	4	4	4
Stress management	4	4	4	4	4
Continuous development of knowledge and skills necessary to work in an environment of cultural differences	5	5	5	5	5

Source: own study based on the interviews with the European managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, and Greece (2023-2024).

Table 4. Challenges in managing multicultural teams in the 2023 study

Challenges	Czech Republic	Portugal	France	Spain	Italy	Poland
Managers' factual knowledge on and preparation to manage teams in multicultural environments	5	5	5	5	5	5
Managers' level of cultural intelligence	5	5	5	5	5	5
Communication	5	5	5	5	5	5
Recruitment and selection	4	3	4	4	3	3
Remuneration	4	4	4	4	4	4
Employee motivation	5	5	5	5	5	5
Training and development	4	4	4	4	4	4
Performance appraisal (individual and team)	4	4	4	4	4	4
Conflict resolution	4	5	5	5	4	4
Competence management	4	4	4	4	4	4
Talent management	4	4	4	4	4	4
Change management	4	4	5	5	4	5

Source: own study based on the interviews with the European managers (in:) A. Knap-Stefaniuk, (2023), Opinions of European managers on the challenges of team management in multicultural work environments, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie 134(61), p. 9.

Based on the 2024 interviews with managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, the author concludes that these managers understand the concept of multiculturalism and possess knowledge (which, in their opinion, is insufficient) of and experience in managing multicultural teams. Similarly, the 2023 interviews with managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland confirmed that managers from these countries also have significant knowledge and experience regarding multiculturalism and managing multicultural teams.

The challenges identified by the managers in the 2024 interviews (from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece) align with those identified in the 2023 interviews (from Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland). These challenges include: the substantive preparation of managers to manage multicultural teams, managers' level of cultural intelligence, communication, recruitment and selection, remuneration, employee motivation, development and training, performance appraisals, conflict resolution, competence management, talent management, and change management. Additionally, in the 2024 interviews, managers also mentioned time management, stress management, and the continuous development of the knowledge and skills needed to work in an environment of cultural differences (see Tables 3 and 4).

The information obtained from the managers during the interviews carried out in 2024, made it possible to answer the research questions:

1. *What are the most significant challenges in managing multicultural teams (in a multicultural work environment) according to European managers (executives from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece)?*

In the opinion of the managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, the most significant challenges in managing multicultural teams are: the substantive preparation of managers to manage teams in a multicultural environment (5 responses from managers from each country), managers' level of cultural intelligence (5 responses from managers from each country), communication (5 responses from managers from each country), and the continuous development of knowledge and skills necessary to work in an environment of cultural differences (5 responses from managers from each country).

In the interviews, the managers emphasised that while they possess some knowledge and experience in managing multicultural teams, they consider the same insufficient. They observed that their substantive preparation for managing culturally diverse employees often results from their own efforts to seek out necessary information. Managers highlighted that their companies do not regularly provide updated training or coaching, making the ongoing development of knowledge and skills a critical challenge.

2. *Do the challenges in managing multicultural teams identified as the most important by the managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece in interviews conducted in 2024 differ from the challenges identified as the most significant by the managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland in the 2023 interviews?*

The challenges in managing multicultural teams identified by managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece in 2024 do not substantially differ from those identified by managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland in 2023.

In the interviews conducted in 2023, the respondents also mentioned the following as the most significant challenges: the substantive preparation of managers to manage teams in a multicultural environment, managers' level of cultural intelligence, communication, and motivating employees (5 responses from managers from each country). In 2024, managers additionally listed the continuous development of the skills necessary to work in culturally diverse environments (5 responses from managers from each country).

Comparing the results of the 2024 interviews with those from 2023, it is evident that the challenges remain consistent. Both sets of interviews underscore the need for organizational support for managers, including substantive preparation, knowledge, skills, and continuous development – elements essential for the efficient and effective management of multicultural teams.

The cultural diversity of the workforce holds great potential for building open and creative teams whose members respect the perspectives, knowledge, and experiences of their colleagues. However, it also poses risks of conflicts and difficult situations due to differing values and attitudes. In the author's opinion, the literature review and the results of the interviews she has conducted provide a deeper understanding of the challenges identified by the respondents, offering valuable insights into the factors that impact the efficient and effective management of multicultural teams.

Discussion

Many researchers worldwide, spanning various disciplines and perspectives, have been analysing and studying multicultural issues for years (e.g., Arciszewska, 2023; Johansson, 2022; Knap-Stefaniuk, Karna, 2019; Kwiatkowska, 2019; Mahfud et al., 2018; Modood, 2021; Rozkwitalska, 2013; Śliz, Szczepański, 2020; Villotti et al., 2019; Zane, 2023). Studies in this area address cultural differences and the functioning of multicultural teams as well as the challenges associated with managing them (e.g., Backmann et al., 2020; Bouncken et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2012; Glinkowska, 2016; Guzmán-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Karna, Knap-Stefaniuk, 2019; Kopertyńska, 2018; Kowalczyk, 2015; Stahl et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2019).

For instance, in the study conducted by Kopertyńska (2018, p. 21), managers indicated that managing a multicultural team requires an extensive understanding of different cultures. Kopertyńska's interviews revealed that while cultural differences are not insurmountable barriers, they do necessitate significant effort on the part of managers and their appropriate development. Similarly, in the studies conducted by the author of this article, managers from 11 European countries identified the substantive preparation of managers to manage teams under multicultural conditions as a significant challenge. This aligns with the broader consensus in the literature that effective multicultural team management hinges on managers' cultural competence and continuous development.

Challenges related to communication in multicultural teams, identified by managers in the interviews conducted by the author in 2023 and 2024, have also been found in studies by other researchers (e.g., Kopertyńska, 2018; Szpilko, Szydło, Samuel, 2022; Sogancilar, Ors, 2018). For example, in Velten and Lashley's (2018) study, nearly all interviewees reported that communication problems and conflicts arise particularly when cultural differences between team members are too huge, especially regarding employees' character, values, attitudes, and mentality (Velten, Lashley, 2018, p. 109).

Researchers have also examined managers' understanding of culture and cultural diversity. Studies in this area have revealed that HR professionals often fail to implement processes that equip managers with tools allowing them to handle multiculturalism effectively. Additionally, managers often lack opportunities to develop the skills and experience necessary to integrate corporate policies and procedures with cultural diversity (Baporikar, 2020).

Areiqat, Hamdan, Zamil, and Aldabbagh (2020) concluded that managers need the kind of managerial knowledge that will allow them to operate effectively in culturally diverse environments, as multiculturalism remains a critical issue for contemporary organizations. In their opinion, managers should be well-prepared and motivated to educate themselves and their employees about cultural differences and appropriate responses in various situations (Areiqat et al., 2020). Similarly, Celikdemir and Katrinli (2020) investigated effective management practices concerning cultural diversity in the workplace and concluded that both employees and managers should enhance their skills in managing cultural diversity (Celikdemir, Katrinli, 2020).

Extensive research has delved into cross-cultural competences and cultural intelligence (CQ) (Bird et al., 2010; Szkudlarek et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2015), as well as the knowledge, skills, and abilities essential for effective interactions with people from diverse cultures. In the interviews conducted by the author, the respondents (European managers) also identified the managers' level of cultural intelligence and the need to develop this competence as significant challenges in managing multicultural teams.

Common challenges highlighted in numerous studies include a lack of knowledge about multiculturalism (cultural diversity), communication problems, low levels of skills necessary for effective work in a culturally diverse environment (such as cultural intelligence), and the absence or insufficiency of formal policies for managing cultural diversity within organizations.

Limitations and research perspectives

The study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The qualitative study, consisting of individual in-depth interviews, was conducted on a small sample size and does not provide any basis for broad generalisations. This method is time-consuming and requires careful participant selection. The use of snowball sampling technique restricted the potential to reach a wider range of interviewees. Moreover, in this type of study, managing a large volume of verbal data poses a significant challenge for researchers, necessitating an effective strategy for information selection to avoid data overload.

In the author's opinion, future studies should continue to explore the challenges embedded in managing multicultural teams in other European countries. Also, because understanding and addressing multiculturalism, along with identifying cultural differences and similarities, is crucial in multinational companies, future studies could focus on analysing and evaluating these areas from the perspectives of both managers and employees.

Future empirical studies should also consider the role of demographic variables such as age, gender, and socio-economic status in supporting multiculturalism and cultural integration. Additionally, examining how these factors affect the attitudes of managers and employees in the workplace could provide valuable insights.

Conclusions and practical implications

The functioning and cooperation of multicultural teams is a complex phenomenon, which is influenced by numerous factors that modern managers must understand. The expansion of multinational companies has led to an increase in the formation of multicultural teams, composed of members from diverse cultures and nationalities. These cultural differences significantly impact team performance and results, particularly in areas such as communication, working styles, employees' needs and expectations, motivation and commitment, problem-solving approaches, and decision-making processes.

Cultural differences within a team entail both opportunities and threats. Therefore, managers of multicultural teams need to be fully aware of cultural differences in order to better understand and motivate their team members, facilitate effective collaboration, achieve organizational goals, and skilfully address culturally sensitive situations when disagreements arise.

A lack of awareness of the importance and relevance of multiculturalism among managers can result in conflicts, decreased employee motivation, and diminished team morale. While numerous recommendations have been developed by researchers, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing multicultural teams effectively. Success in this area often depends on a specific manager and their team.

When a manager values multiculturalism and fosters an environment where employees respect and understand diverse cultural backgrounds, the team is more likely to appreciate varying perspectives, experiences, and communication styles. This collective appreciation helps overcome challenges and promotes collaboration.

In today's world, managers are expected to possess competencies that allow them to adapt swiftly in culturally diverse work environments. They need to be flexible in employing different management styles and effective in communication within a multicultural setting. Additionally, they should be eager to gain knowledge and experiences that enhance their ability to operate efficiently in the global marketplace. Multicultural teams bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches, which can lead to

innovative ideas and solutions. The benefits of embracing multiculturalism and workforce diversity are substantial and positively impact employees, teams, and organizations as a whole.

The interviews conducted by the author in 2024, along with those from 2023, have provided key insights into the challenges linked to managing multicultural teams. According to the 2024 interviews with managers from Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece, the primary challenges include: the substantive preparation required for managing multicultural teams, the level of cultural intelligence among managers, and effective communication within these teams. The same challenges were listed by managers from the Czech Republic, Portugal, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland in the 2023 interviews.

The findings highlight the need for companies to enhance their efforts in planning and providing targeted programmes, training, and coaching for managers. These initiatives should focus on providing substantive support in managing culturally diverse teams, developing cultural intelligence, and improving intercultural communication. HR professionals must understand the specifics of these programmes and tailor them to address managers' knowledge, experience, needs, and expectations.

Managing a culturally diverse workforce is a significant challenge for any manager. Without adequate knowledge, experience, and, crucially, organizational support, setting and achieving common goals within multicultural teams can be difficult. Building a positive atmosphere of mutual understanding and cooperation as well as fostering respect and tolerance in a diverse work environment requires intentional effort.

Multicultural teams are inherently prone to unique challenges and potential conflicts. Therefore, their managers need to be well-prepared to handle these complexities. Essential qualities such as openness, approachability, consideration, tolerance, and flexibility are crucial for preventing conflicts and creating a work environment where multiculturalism becomes a source of employee satisfaction, new knowledge, enriching experiences, and effective performance. By embracing these attributes, managers can turn cultural diversity into a powerful asset for achieving company goals and supporting personal development.

References

Adler, N.J., Gundersen A. (2007). International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior. Thomson South-Western: Mason.

Ali, I., Ali, M., Leal-Rodríguez, A. L., and Albort-Morant, G. (2019). The role of knowledge spillovers and cultural intelligence in enhancing expatriate employees' individual and team creativity. Journal of Business Research 101, p. 561-573. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.11.012.

Allen, R., Dawson, G., Wheatley, K. and White, C.S. (2004). Diversity practices: Learning responses for modern organizations, Development and Learning in Organizations 18(6), p. 13-15. https://doi.org/10.1108/14777280410564185.

Areiqat, A., Hamdan, Y., Zamil, A., and Aldabbagh, I. (2020). True Workplace Diversity: A Key Ingredient for Business Success, Regardless of the Industry or Company Size, Journal of Talent Development and Excellence 12, p. 2304-2314.

Arciszewska, H. (2023). Wielokulturowość jako zjawisko kulturowe, społeczne, polityczne [Multiculturalism as a cultural, social and political phenomenon]. Problemy Opiekuńczo-Wychowawcze 616, p. 3-16. https://doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0016.2399.

Backmann, J., Kanitz, R., Tian, A. W., Hoffmann, P., and Hoegl, M. (2020). Cultural gap bridging in multinational teams. Journal of International Business Studies 51(8), p. 1283-1311.

Baporikar, N. (2020). Human Resource Management for Managing Cultural Diversity. International Journal of Applied Management Sciences and Engineering (IJAMSE) 7, p. 74-99. https://doi.org/10.4018/IJAMSE.2020010104.

Bird, A., Mendenhall, M., Stevens, M. J., and Oddou, G. (2010). Defining the content domain of intercultural competence for global leaders. Journal of Managerial Psychology 25(8), p. 810-828.

Bouncken, R., Brem, A., and Kraus, S. (2016). Multi-cultural teams as sources for creativity and innovation: the role of cultural diversity on team performance. International Journal of Innovation Management 20, p. 1650012. https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919616500122.

Boyce, C., Neale, P. (2006). Conducting In-Depth Interviews for Evaluation Input. Watertown: Pathfinder International, p. 37. In: Miński, R. (ed.), Wywiad pogłębiony jako technika badawcza. Możliwości wykorzystania IDI w badaniach ewaluacyjnych [In-depth interview as a research technique. Possibilities of using IDI in evaluation studies]. Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej XIII, 3, p. 30-51. https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.13.3.02.

Celikdemir, D.Z., Katrinli, A. (2020). *E*fficient Diversity Management for Workplace Well Being. In: S. Dhiman (ed.), The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Well-Being (pp. 1 22). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02470-3_5-1.

Cheng, C.Y., Chua, R.Y., Morris, M.W., and Lee, L. (2012). Finding the right mix: how the composition of self-managing multi-cultural teams' cultural value orientation influences performance over time. Journal of Organizational Behavior 33, p. 389-411. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1777.

Choi, S., Lee, S., Choi, K., and Sun, K.A. (2018). Investment-cash flow sensitivities of restaurant firms: a moderating role of franchising. Tourism Economics 24, p. 560-575. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354816618759201.

Cox, T. (2001). Creating the Multicultural Organization: A Strategy for Capturing the Power of Diversity. Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Ely, R.J., Thomas, D.A. (2001). Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. Administrative Science Quarterly 46, p. 229-273.

Gajda, J. (2019). Metody jakościowe w badaniach politologicznych. Wybrane techniki wywiadu i możliwości zastosowania [Qualitative methods in political science research. Selected interview techniques and possibilities of application]. Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Politologica 23, p. 129-145. https://doi.org/10.24917/20813333.23.10.

Glinkowska, B. (2016). Managing Teams in the Multicultural Organizations, Journal of Intercultural Management 8(2), p. 55-69. https://doi.org/10.1515/joim-2016-0009.

Gonçalves, G., Sousa, C., Arasaratnam-Smith, L. A., Rodrigues, N., and Carvalheiro, R. (2020). Intercultural communication competence scale: invariance and construct validation in Portugal. Journal of Intercultural Communication Research 49, p. 242-262. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1746687.

Guzmán-Rodríguez, L.E., Arizkuren-Eleta, A., Agarwala, T. and Bornay-Barrachina, M. (2023). Individual characteristics on multicultural team performance: does the role played by leaders and team members matter? Frontiers in Psychology 14, p. 1281422. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1281422.

Han, S. J., Beyerlein, M. (2016). Framing the effects of multinational cultural diversity on virtual team processes. Small Group Research Journal 47, p. 351-383. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496416653480.

Ho, J., Gaur, S., Chew, K., and Khan, N. (2017). Gender roles and customer organizational citizenship behaviour in emerging markets. Gender in Management 32, p. 503-517. https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2017-0009.

Hoever, I.J., van Knippenberg, D., van Ginkel, W.P., and Barkema, H.G. (2012). Fostering team creativity: perspective taking as key to unlocking diversity's potential. Journal of Applied Psychology 97(5), 982-996. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029159.

Jang, S. (2017). Cultural brokerage and creative performance in multicultural teams. Organization Science 28(6), p. 993-1009.

Johansson, T. R. (2022). In defence of multiculturalism – theoretical challenges. *International* Review of Sociology 34(1), p. 75-89. https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2022.2045141.

Jones, G., Chace, B.C., and Wright, J. (2020). Impact of diversity on innovation. International Journal of Innovation Science 12*,* p. 323-343. doi: 10.1108/IJIS-04-20200042.

Karna, W.J., Knap-Stefaniuk, A. (2019). Wyzwania w zarządzaniu zespołami wielokulturowymi [Challenges in Managing Multicultural Teams]. Perspektywy Kultury 26(3), s. 67-86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.35765/pk.2019.2603.07.

Knap-Stefaniuk, A. (2023). Opinions of European Managers on the Challenges of Team Management in Multicultural Work Environments, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Przyrodniczo-Humanistycznego w Siedlcach, Series: Administracja i Zarządzanie 134(61), p. 5-13. https://doi.org/10.34739/zn.2023.61.01.

Knap-Stefaniuk, A., Karna, W. (2019). Wpływ wielokulturowości na budowanie potencjału społecznego współczesnych organizacji [Influence of Multiculturalism on the Building of the Social Potential of Contemporary Organizations]. Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie Vol. XX, No. 6, Part III, p. 77-89.

Kopertyńska, M.W. (2018). Funkcjonowanie zespołów wielokulturowych w przedsiębiorstwach – doświadczenia badawcze [Multicultural Teams in Enterprises – practice – research experience]. Management Forum 2, p. 1622.

Kowalczyk, A.Z. (2015). Zespoły wielokulturowe – wyzwanie współczesnych organizacji [Multicultural teams – a challenge for modern organizations]. Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Łódzkiej, Organizacja i Zarządzanie 60, p. 93-105.

Kwiatkowska, A. (2019). Wielokulturowość w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym [Multiculturalism from an interdisciplinary perspective]. Warszawa: WN PWN i Instytut Psychologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk.

Mahfud, Y., Badea, C., Verkuyten, M., and Reynolds, K. (2018). Multiculturalism and attitudes toward immigrants: The impact of perceived cultural distance. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 49, p. 945-958. https://doi.org/10.1177/002202211 7730828.

Modood, T. (2021). Can interculturalism complement multiculturalism? Multicultural Education Review 13(4), p. 275-284. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2021.2006115.

Neukam, M. (2017). Managing the fuzzy front-end in multicultural teams. European Journal of Innovation Management 20, p. 578-598. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-11-2016-0112.

Nicińska, M. (2000). Indywidualne wywiady pogłębione i zogniskowane wywiady grupowe – analiza porównawcza [Individual in-Depth Interviews and Focus Group Interviews – comparative analysis]. ASK 8, p. 39-50.

Ratasuk, A., Charoensukmongkol, P. (2020). Does cultural intelligence promote cross-cultural teams' knowledge sharing and innovation in the restaurant business? Asia Pacific Journal of Business Administration 12, p. 183-203. https://doi.org/10.1108/APJBA-05-20190109.

Rozkwitalska, M. (red.), 2013. Wielokulturowość, ukierunkowanie na wartości i społeczna odpowiedzialność. Nowe wyzwania w zarządzaniu organizacją [Multiculturalism, value orientation and social responsibility. New challenges in organization management]. Prace Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej w Gdańsku 19. Gdańsk: Wyższa Szkoła Bankowa.

Schoonhoven, C.B., Woolley, J.L., Shapiro, D.L., Von Glinow, M.A., and Cheng, J.L.C. (2005). Top management teams in an international context. Managing multinational teams: Global perspectives 18, pp. 251-280. Oxford: Elsevier/JAI. Advances in international management.

Sęk, M. (2015). Dobór próby przy pomocy metody kuli śniegowej (Snowballing Sampling). [Sample selection using the snowball method (Snowballing Sampling)]. In: Fatyga, B. (Ed.), współpraca: Dutkiewicz, M., Kietlińska, B., Praktyki badawcze [Research practices], p. 59-76. Warszawa: Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych UW.

Słaboń, E. (2019). Kompetencje lidera w zespole wielokulturowym [Competence of a leader in a multicultural team]. Nowoczesne Systemy Zarządzania 14(2) (April-June), p. 43-52.

Stahl, G.K., Maznevski, M.L., Voigt, A., Jonsen, K. (2010a). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A metaanalysis of research on multicultural work groups. Journal of International Business Studies 41(4), p. 690-709.

Stahl, G.K., Makela, K., Zander, L., Maznevski, M.L. (2010b). A look at the bright side of multicultural team diversity. Scandinavian Journal of Management 26(4), p. 439-447.

Stahl, G.K., Maznevski, M.L. (2021). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A retrospective of research on multicultural work groups and an agenda for future research, Journal of International Business Studies 52, p. 4-22. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00389-9.

Stahl, G.K., Maznevski, M.L. (2021). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: a retrospective of research on multicultural work groups and an agenda for future research. Journal of International Business Studies 52, p. 4-22. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267020-00389-9.

Sogancilar, N., Ors, H. (2018). Understanding the challenges of multicultural team management. Journal of Business, Economics and Finance (JBEF) 7(3), p. 259-268.

Śliz, A., Szczepański, M. (2020). Wielokulturowość: idea, teoria i polityka, Antropologia zaangażowana 2, p. 175-2026. https://doi.org/10.35757/KiS.2020.64.2.10.

Szkudlarek, B., Romani, L., Caprar, D.V., Osland, J.S. (2020). The Sage handbook of contemporary cross-cultural management. London: Sage Publications Limited.

Szpilko, D., Szydło, J., Samul, J. (2022). Challenges And Benefits of Working in Multicultural Teams: Evidence from Poland and Romania, The Journal of Organizational Management Studies 2022, Article ID 493446.

Szreder, M. (2004). Metody i techniki sondażowych badań opinii [Opinion Survey for Methods and Techniques]. Warszawa: PWE.

Thomas, D.C., Liao, Y., Aycan, Z., Cerdin, J.L., Pekerti, A.A., Ravlin, E.C., et al. (2015). Cultural intelligence: A theory-based, short form measure. Journal of International Business Studies 46(9), p. 1099-1118.

Velten, L., Lashley, C. (2018). The meaning of cultural diversity among staff as it pertains to employee motivation, Research in Hospitality Management 7(2), p. 105-113, https://doi.org/10.1080/22243534.2017.1444718.

Villotti, P., Stinglhamber, F., Desmette, D. (2019). The Influence of Multiculturalism and Assimilation on Work-Related Outcomes: Differences Between Ethnic Minority and Majority Groups of Workers. Psychologica Belgica 59(1), p. 246-268.

Wang, J., Grand, H.-L. C., Chen, T., and Leung, K. (2019). Team creativity/innovation in culturally diverse teams: A metaanalysis. Journal of Organizational Behavior 40(6), p. 693-708. https://doi.org/10.5334/pb.472.

Yasmeen, A., Ahmad, M., Raziq, M.M., and Khan, M.L. (2020). Structural empowerment, cultural diversity, and interpersonal conflict: evidence from international NGOs in Pakistan. International Journal of Cross Cultural Management 20, p. 125-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595820904391.

Zane, M. (2023). Multiculturalism in Organizations: Benefits and Drawbacks, Political Orbits Journal 7(2), p. 6-20.