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Women expatriates and factors determining their careers in international corporations

Kobiety ekspatriantki i czynniki determinujące ich kariery w korporacjach międzynarodowych

ABSTRACT

Many researchers see a potential in women's competencies that can bring them tangible profits. Some notice that women are agents of change in the organization, and "female attributes and competencies" such as interpersonal skills, consensus ability, multitasking, empathy, teamwork are an essential supplement to the soft leadership model that appeared in the 1990s. Representation of women and the resulting symbolic status at higher organizational levels limit the development of their managerial careers in the longer term. Therefore, the main goal of this descriptive article was to define the factors determining the employment of expatriate women in international corporations.

STRESZCZENIE

Wielu badaczy widzi w kompetencjach kobiet potencjał, który może przynieść im wymierne zyski. Niektórzy zauważają, że kobiety są agentami zmiany w organizacji, a „kobiece atrybuty i kompetencje” takie jak umiejętności interpersonalne, zdolność do konsensusu, wielozadaniowość, empatia czy praca zespołowa są znacznym uzupełnieniem miękkiego modelu przywództwa, który się pojawił w latach 90. Zauważa się jednak niedostateczną reprezentację kobiet i wynikający z niej symboliczny status na wyższych poziomach organizacyjnych, co w dalszej perspektywie ogranicza możliwości rozwoju ich kariery menedżerskiej. Dlatego też głównym celem artykułu o charakterze deskryptywnym stało się zdefiniowanie czynników determinujących kariery kobiet ekspatriantek w korporacjach międzynarodowych.

Keywords: exile, expatriates, international organizations, diversity.

Słowa kluczowe: ekspatriacja, ekspatriantki, organizacje międzynarodowe, różnorodność.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the processes in many global market areas in the last decade made it necessary to create a "positive culture" of diversity (Abouzahr et al., 2017). These changes relate to the political situation in many parts of the world (armed conflicts, increasing number of refugees, intensification of nationalist movements), technological progress (automation, robotization), increasing international mobility of workers, demographic (aging societies, multigenerational factors on the labor market, shortage of employees) and social changes (increasing the importance of the role of

women in the professional area, changing the family model). Organizations increasingly employ employees from various cultural sites, and multiculturalism is a demographic feature of corporate employees and, at the same time, a unique feature of these global entities (Arasaratnam, 2013).

Many researchers point out that the gender dimension of diversity is gaining more and more importance (Kupczyk, 2013) due to global social trends, e.g., traditional forms of family life change in selecting household members and their number (Wróbel & Dacko-Pikiewicz, 2017).

The gender dimension is also one of the dimensions of diversity with which multinational corporations deal most often and devote their attention when introducing diversity management programs.

Changes in the labor markets and the coexistence of different generations with their various values, attitudes, and expectations towards their careers make it necessary to revise the current approach to shaping the careers of expatriate women. Therefore, there is a need to identify factors that influence international managers' implementation of these careers. The article is theoretical; the main goal is to characterize the factors determining the employment of expatriates in multinational corporations.

1. PARTICIPATION OF EXPATRIATE WOMEN IN THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR MARKET

The topic of women in management has been trending in recent years. The phenomenon of increasing the number of women in managerial positions is considered one of the critical issues related to human resource management and diversity (Davidson & Burke, 2000; Deloitte, 2017; Gross-Gołacka, 2018; Gryszyk, 2009; Kupczyk, 2009; Lisowska n.d.; Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2014; Przytuła, 2019; Wiktorska-Święcicka, 2013). Many researchers see a potential in women's competencies that can bring them measurable profits, even at the level of 9% of GDP in 2025 (McKinsey & Company, 2016) or even a 15% increase in net revenue margin in the case of a management team managed by 30% of women (Noland et al., 2016). Some note that women are agents of change in an organization, and "female attributes and competencies" such as interpersonal skills, consensus ability, multitasking, empathy, and teamwork are a significant complement to the soft leadership model that emerged in the 1990s (Colgan & Ledwith, 1996).

In the dimension of international careers, it is noted that efforts to increase the employment of expatriates and enable them to carry out foreign missions should be intensified due to the anticipated shortages and shortages of expatriates in the future (David et al., 2021). Moreover, according to R. Tung (2016), the involvement of more women in foreign missions will allow international companies to win the war for new talents on the global market.

At this point, it should be noted that the considerations in this article concern expatriates in the traditional sense (assignment expatriates) and not those who independently initiate their foreign mission (self-initiated expatriates).

The definition says that an expat is an employee of an international enterprise, usually, a high-class specialist or manager, who is sent to foreign units (whether a branch, subsidiary or other organizational and legal forms) from the corporate headquarters, in a third country or moves between these units. Such a transfer is voluntary. An expatriate may come from the country of origin of the corporation's head-

quarters or be of a different nationality than the corporation's home country (Przytuła, 2014).

The expatriation cycle is the process of planning a foreign mission, selecting candidates, determining the terms of the contract, preparing for departure, adaptation, stay, and final return (McNaughly & Brewster, 2019). It is worth adding here that, according to J. Selmer and A. Leung (2003), women adapt to the conditions of the host country much faster than men in such positions.

Traditional expatriation means that an employee of a corporation undertakes a foreign mission in the countries hosting subsidiaries or branches of the parent company. The transfer is usually planned for 1–5 years by the sending unit, which provides full organizational support for relocation (travel, accommodation, transport, medical care in a foreign country, cultural preparation, and support for expatriate family members). After the end of the contract, the expatriate returns to the parent unit (repatriation) or undertakes another mission in a different location within the global structure of the corporation (Przytuła, 2017).

Longitudinal studies (BGRS, 2016) show that for over two decades, the population of expatriates has been at a low level, oscillating around 20% of the entire expat population.

About 10% of expatriates are single. In addition, women account for a higher proportion of those undertaking overseas missions than the overall consumer product and healthcare and pharmaceutical industry average (BGRS, 2016). This may reflect that women make up a more significant proportion of the workforce in these industries as a whole. Additionally, it is noted that more cases of women's missions abroad occur in large organizations that have implemented formal programs specifically targeting women's international development and career advancement (BGRS, 2016).

Available statistics, research, and reports indicate that despite the growing number of economically active women with a higher level of education (PwC, 2020) and initiatives undertaken by enterprises themselves, the number of women in managerial positions is growing very slowly (Deloitte, 2012; Deloitte Insights, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2018). It is an even more exciting phenomenon as international corporations see the potential benefits of diversity, yet the actions taken and legal regulations introduced (e.g., parities) do not bring the expected results.

According to the Deloitte (2017) report, in the global perspective women occupy 15% of board positions. Then two years later, that number increased to only 16.9% (Deloitte Insights, 2019). The analysis of available statistics and reports confirms the existing discrimination based on sex, especially in top management positions, despite the regulations introduced in many countries (e.g., Finland, Latvia, Sweden, Norway, France, Germany) to enable the pursuit of managerial careers by women.

The results of the BGRS research (2016) show that women experience more significant difficulties and barri-

ers in deciding on a foreign mission than men. Numerous international studies also confirm this. For example, R. Kanter notes that the small percentage of women in international careers is not due to a lack of motivation but blocked opportunities (after Linehan, 2006).

2. FACTORS FAVORING AND HINDERING THE CAREERS OF EXPATRIATE WOMEN

The percentage of women working and seeking work depends mainly on their level of education, the number of children in the family, ensuring a balance between work and family life, and the cultural model preferred by a given society. According to the PwC study (2017), Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden are among the countries with one of the highest rates of professional activity for women.

However, expatriates are still an untapped source of potential in multinational corporations (McKeen & Bu, 2005; Selmer & Leung, 2003). N. J. Adler (1984) drew attention to the persistence of three myths relating to expat women. (1) women are reluctant to expatriate, which allegedly involves playing specific social roles traditionally assigned to their gender, (2) organizations refuse to send women abroad due to a relatively higher risk of danger. The most frequently used arguments include threats to personal safety, risks of traveling in developing countries, and poor coping with isolation and loneliness (3). The prejudices of foreigners against women make them insufficiently effective in the host countries.

On the other hand, M. Linehan and H. Scullion (2001) points to the barriers influencing the decision of women to undertake a foreign mission. The author includes difficulties from combining a career with responsibilities outside work (e.g., raising children), lack of prospects for a spouse, overt and hidden prejudices related to gender discrimination.

Research has shown that women are more likely to display traits associated with success (Guthrie et al., 2003). The research results by N. J. Adler (1979) and H. Fisher (1999) showed that women are characterized by international management, including collaboration, consensus, team management, and multitasking. This style is often referred to as the "female advantage" (Helgeson, 1990) or as "woman in management" (Calas & Smircich, 1993).

The literature on the subject often indicates invisible obstacles that make it difficult for women to develop their professional careers in organizations. The barrier that prevents women and other underrepresented groups from taking decision-making positions is most often referred to as the "glass ceiling", which appeared in the 1970s in the United States. This is not the only "glass" obstacle and not the only concept appearing in the literature describing the phenomena that hinder the managerial career of women. Table 1 lists some of the terms most commonly used to describe the barriers.

The terms presented in Table 1 describe the barriers (invisible, hence referred to as "glass") that women may en-

Table 1. Selected definitions of barriers hindering the pursuit of a managerial career by women

Term	Definition
Glass ceiling	an invisible but strong enough barrier of negative attitudes and prejudices, preventing women from occupying the highest positions because of their gender, and not because of lack of skills, education, or experience
Glass escalator	is based on the rapid promotion of men to managerial positions in professions stereotypically perceived as "female" while putting barriers to women who want to be promoted; this phenomenon occurs mainly in organizations where men are a minority, yet they are announced.
Glass cliff	exposure to constant criticism of the woman occupying the exposed, the so-called "Male" position; this ostracism does not occur when a man is in a similar situation
Glass walls	hindering the promotion of women from auxiliary positions to male-dominated managerial and expert roles, and as a result, e.g., limited career opportunities for women and lower salaries
A sticky floor	refers to low-status occupations, often feminized, with a low probability of promotion; people who perform them are "stuck" at the lowest level
The Velvet Ghetto	maintaining stereotypical patterns of women and preventing women from managing technical departments
Golden skirts	professional promotion of a selected, narrow group of women (and not many of them), by introducing imprecise equality policy mechanisms, as a result of which one woman sits, for example, on several supervisory boards
Tokenism	consists in admitting single women to male-dominated positions to create a false impression that there is no discriminatory behavior
Escaping ladder	it is about the lack of solidarity among women. Women pursue their careers based on individual strategies as opposed to men who help each other, support each other and employ
Queen of bees	refers to women who strive for individual success in male-dominated organizations by adapting to the male culture, distancing themselves from other women, and supporting and legitimizing the gender hierarchy.

Source: Study based on organizations in which most executive positions are held by men Christoph & Krause (2019), Crampton & Mishra (1999), Derk et al. (2016), Goodman et al. (2003), Kupczyk (2009), Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2014, Nowak (2018), Titkow (2003)

counter at their managerial career levels. They are not justified by rational and objective reasons; on the contrary – they reproduce and reinforce prejudices and stereotypical thinking about women. The most "glass" phenomena presented in Table 1 emphasize men's privileged and dominant position in the business environment. However, the situation of women in management should be considered in a broad socio-cultural context. Whether a woman becomes a manager is influenced by many factors, which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of barriers to the implementation of managerial careers by women

The dimension of barriers	Examples of barriers
OUTSIDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – stereotypes and characteristics attributed to women; – the role of women and the role of men in society, expectations towards women; – the process of cultural socialization pushing women towards a professional but not a managerial career; – expectations for women (e.g., issues of caring for and bringing up children); – negative attitudes and stereotypes created by society towards women's careers; – gender gap; – insufficient number of women studying STEM
INSIDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – stereotypes duplicated in organizations; – no possibility of flexible working hours; – no formal policy for managing women's careers; – lack of role models; – dominant "male" management culture, the dominance of men in managerial positions; – organizational culture; – corporate discrimination; – supervisor's attitude; – favoring men in filling management positions; – underestimating the female style as a value for the company
INDIVIDUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – own beliefs and lack of self-confidence; – self-discrimination and barriers created by women themselves, lack of faith in their competences; – lack of proactivity in creating one's career – upbringing, environment from which a woman comes or lives; – difficulties in reconciling family responsibilities (especially in the case of having children); – lack of interest in a managerial career on the part of women

Source: Own study

There are three main dimensions of barriers to women's managerial careers:

- external (stuck in stereotypes, prejudices, and beliefs about the role of women in society);
- internal (related to the strictly professional environment);
- individual (for women only).

Some researchers from the previous decade indicated that it was not possible to find significant differences in terms of the manager's success factors, separate for women and men (Strykowska, 1995). However, others, e.g. Fairlie and Robb (2009) and World Economic Forum (2015), noticed such differences, and the forecasts indicated by Kupczyk (2009). They said that the ongoing evolution of management towards greater sensitivity, integration, cooperation, and

communication would create more significant opportunities for women (Kupczyk, 2009)

When diagnosing the factors determining the careers of expatriates, they were divided into three groups, i.e., external, internal, and individual conditions.

Therefore, the following external conditions facilitating the participation of women in the international labor market and their professional careers include:

1. Institutional actions and legislative regulations of global and regional scope undertaken by states and international organizations (e.g., the EU) for gender equality.
2. Competitiveness of the labor market and economic activity of women.
3. Social factors (social roles, education model, feminization of international mobility and expatriation, feminist and civic movements).
4. Cultural conditions (national male and female culture).
5. Technological challenges (revolution 4.0, automation, robotization, digitization).

The organizational conditions influencing the managerial careers of women in international corporations include:

1. Industry.
2. Personnel policy focused on parities and the issue of diversity.
3. Inclusive organizational culture.
4. The policy of the corporate headquarters in the management of foreign units and the model of development and promotion promoted in the corporation.
5. Management styles.

In turn, the individual attributes of women (their features, skills, attitudes, behaviors) that are important in working in international corporations include a lower propensity to risky activities, competencies such as the ability to motivate, positive communication and feedback, empathy, and emotional intelligence, professional competences, care for interpersonal contacts and openness to diversity, integrative style of management.

Women are less competitive than men, which may mean they choose less competitive jobs, and jobs where earnings are riskier, for example, because of a more significant proportion of performance-based pay, are usually paid more (Kauhanen, 2017). Moreover, women are less likely to negotiate, especially when they are dealing on their own. This may mean that they are not negotiating as persistently as men about wage increases or promotions. Bertrand's research shows that women demand lower starting wages and are less willing to negotiate, making it difficult for them to fight for promotion (Bertrand, 2011). Success, aggression, domination, position, and competition are more often focused on money for men. However, financial motivations do not play a decisive role (Kupczyk, 2009).

Women are less willing to take the risk related to starting their own business than men and run their own business less

often than men. When they start a business, it often results from a vital necessity, not necessarily from their willingness to develop or change their current professional situation. In terms of the proactivity of both sexes towards their careers, these differences are visible: 50% of men and 42% probably admit that they have an individual development plan. In contrast, more women than men have only "partially" prepared such a development vision (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Compared to men, women are less likely to expect immediate professional success and often underestimate their competencies. Only 25% of women believe in the probability of becoming the top managerial position (McKinsey & Company, 2016), and the expectations and aspirations of women regarding their careers are also different.

At the same time, they also have lower expectations regarding remuneration (23% less than men) or climbing the career ladder; they expect a relatively calm work environment and development opportunities (Plataforma Pracodawców RP, 2009).

In addition, women's strong competencies include the ability to: motivate others (they are energetic and generate enthusiasm), communicate (they keep their employees well informed), give feedback, are ambitious, and set themselves high goals. Men, on the other hand, build knowledge based on past experiences, are innovative, open to new ideas and willing to take risks, have the ability to think strategically, control their emotions to a greater extent by focusing on a rational approach to tasks, they also more often delegate tasks and set goals to others, and can successfully convince others to go along with ideas (Radu et al., 2017). M. Christoph and E. Krause (2019) mention identity factors (often related to the emotional dimension) as decisive for the success of women in a managerial career. Women usually have a more developed emotional intelligence than men; they understand the other person and their behavior better. It is easier for them to establish interpersonal contacts and maintain these relationships. They are more empathetic and more willing to make concessions. In addition, they are less competitive; their management style resembles partnership relations.

J. Tabor-Błażewicz (2020) presented competencies and personality traits of women that influence the achievement of the HR manager position. These were: knowledge and experience, social and interpersonal skills, and personal qualities.

Similarly, M. Christoph and E. Krause (2019) point to substantive factors that determine women's managerial careers. These are primarily professional qualifications, seniority, professional experience, leadership skills, and readiness to retrain or supplement one's capabilities.

A set of factors influencing the careers of employees sent on foreign missions include: the ability to cooperate with others (74%), achieving goals in the workplace (70%), commitment to work (66%), level of professional experience (58%), level of formal education (50%). The factor of "involvement in work"

in research is perceived as a predictor of success for both the individual and the organization (Miś, 2016).

Merger research on various aspects of expatriation and mobility of international workers shows that expatriate women, compared to their colleagues, are characterized by higher flexibility and adaptability to different working and living conditions, more often use an integrative team management style, and have a higher level of emotional intelligence, which makes that work in a place characterized by high variability, with diversity, will be better performed by them (Meier, 2019).

However, the tendency of women to undertake foreign careers is very low, which is confirmed by research: only 4% of respondents – international workers admitted that women are prone to spatial displacement (World Economic Forum, 2012). Moreover, P. Caligiuri and W. Cascio (1998) and M. Linehan and H. Scullion (2001) pointed to the informal barriers faced by women working abroad, the so-called "Glass borders" that discouraged women from undertaking foreign missions as well as the lack of mentoring and support from the parent company.

CONCLUSION

According to many researchers, the "female" style of leadership is becoming increasingly important. Initiated in the 1990s, it appreciated empathy and other "female attributes and competencies", including interpersonal skills, the ability to reach consensus, multitasking, and teamwork (Colgan & Ledwith, 1996). Changes in the global labor market, the growing importance of diversity, and the coexistence of different generations with their various values, attitudes, and expectations towards their professional career require a revision of the current approach to shaping professional careers and thus constitute an opportunity for women.

Although women are more and more professionally active, they still constitute a group underrepresented in the labor market, especially in typically male dominated industries. Due to the difficulties in combining professional and family roles, women's careers are interrupted, weakening their professional position in the labor market and access to top management positions. On the other hand, more and more organizations operating in global markets, aware of the advantages and benefits of diversity, hire and promote women for managerial positions. However, there is still a discrepancy between the companies' declaration and the actual personnel practices that are implemented.

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