Negative and Positive Aspects of Cross-Cultural Interactions: A Case of Multinational Subsidiaries in Poland

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Traditionally, literature and researches on cross-cultural interactions in Multinational Companies (MNCs) and their foreign subsidiaries emphasize typically negative aspects of such relationships. Researchers widely discuss problems faced in a cross-cultural setting and how they affect overseas operations. Less effort has been made so far to study the positive aspects of human interactions in MNCs. Generally, cross-cultural interactions are a peculiar type of social interactions that may contribute to building of social capital of MNCs as well as creativity and innovations, among other positives, which all have a beneficial influence on MNCs' functioning. Thus, there is a need for a deeper understanding of mutually oriented human behaviors when the borders are crossed. Since the author wants to present a more balanced approach for analysis of human relationship in multicultural settings, the aim of the paper is to identify negative and positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions. The author's main research was focused on the barriers to cross-cultural interactions while the pilot study also reflects the evidence of positive aspects of such an interaction. The data were collected via a qualitative study in foreign subsidiaries of MNCs in Poland. The analysis provided in the article may contribute to a better understanding of the genuine nature of cross-cultural interactions. There is also emphasized that creativity and innovation may be enhanced in MNCs due to cultural diversity.

Keywords: *cross-cultural interactions, creativity, cultural barriers, foreign (multinational) subsidiaries, innovations, multinational companies.*

Introduction

Due to the growing presence of multinational corporations (MNCs) on host economies" markets via foreign subsidiaries, cross-cultural contacts of host country nationals employed by MNCs are becoming more and more common. A part of such subsidiaries" staff is involved, frequently on a daily basis, in interactions with representatives of different countries while carrying out their occupational duties. International business literature (IB) on MNCs and intercultural management (IM) literature widely describe problems faced in a cross-cultural setting that is typical for working relationships of the multinational subsidiaries" personnel. For example, the literature concerning MNCs" functioning portrays that cultural differences negatively affect managing overseas operations (Chang, 1997; Shenkar, 2001), viability of strategic partnerships and their chances of success (Patel, 2007), integration process after cross-border merger or acquisition (Lodorfos & Boateng, 2006; Stahl, 2006; Rozkwitalska, 2012), cultural adaptation of expatriates (White *el al.,* 2011), development of cultural competences of managers (Johnson *et al.,* 2006), multicultural group effectiveness (Martins *et al.,* 2003; Kirkman *et al.,* 2004), social integration of staff (Bjorkman *et al.*, 2007), etc. Traditionally, the authors have been looking for barriers caused by cultural diversity, which currently seem to be sufficiently well-documented. Yet, the positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions appear to be the missing element in IB and IM studies, especially if cross-cultural interactions in MNCs and their subsidiaries are considered.

Therefore, this so-called traditional approach[1] seems to be incomplete and impoverishes the knowledge of the genuine nature of cross-cultural interactions. For instance, it neglects the fact that cross-cultural interactions are a particular type of social interactions and as such may contribute to building of social capital of MNCs. They can foster creativity and innovations as well. Management literature also appreciates a beneficial influence of social interactions on enterprises" functioning, e.g. via supporting knowledge sharing - a necessary element for creative ideas (Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1996; Tsai, 2002).

Taking the foregoing into account, *the aim* of this paper is to provide a more balanced view on cross-cultural interactions of MNCs" subsidiaries by analyzing both the negative and positive aspects of such an interaction. Therefore, *the research problem* is to scrutinize a genuine nature of cross-cultural interactions in foreign subsidiaries of MNCs. The article is based on a relevant literature review and empirical findings from the author"s qualitative research, both of which constitute *the research method* applied to solve the research problem.

The paper is structured as follows: 1) the literature review section includes the existing studies overview from the angle of the aim of this paper; 2) the second section describes the research method and the sample characteristics; 3) the next part reports the empirical findings from the research concerning the negative aspects of cross-

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[1] The terms "traditional approach" or "traditional perspective" are used to describe the studies that mainly emphasize negative aspects of multiculturalism (problem-focused view) in accordance with Stevens *et al.,* (2008) and Stahl *et al.,* (2010).

cultural interactions, namely the barriers to them while the positive aspects are also signaled; 4) the concluding section deals with implications of the study, its contributions and limitations; the suggestions for future research are put forward as well.

Although IB literature made MNCs the major object of study, cross-cultural interactions, i.e. contacts among people from different cultures within the MNCs" system, have been rather neglected by the authors who have been concerned with e.g. modes of foreign expansion, the internationalization process and direction, knowledge transfer, strategy, subsidiaries" roles, etc., to mention just a few (Rugman & Brewer, 2003). Furthermore, the headquarters" (HQ) perspective has dominated the majority of the research that, to some extent, it can be seen as their limitation since it is foreign subsidiaries that carry the main burden of cross-cultural challenges (Dorow & Blazejewski, 2003). In contrast to the majority of IB studies, the author"s analyses in this paper apply a local perspective on human interactions in MNCs. Such a local perspective may appear significant when expatriates and local managers are considered due to the fact that they should be able to bridge a subsidiary with the HQ (Petison & Johri, 2008; Fitzsimmons *et al.,* 2011; Rozkwitalska, 2012a). Furthermore, such an approach reflects the emphasis on an active role of a subsidiary in MNC that is stressed in IB literature (Birkinshaw, 1997).

In IM literature, MNCs are analyzed primarily from the geocentric approach. This perspective assumes that MNCs transcend national cultures and therefore operate independently of them (Alder, 1983). The geocentric approach may pose a risk of neglecting the existence of cross-cultural challenges and consequently the need for managing them. There is another research perspective in IM, i.e. a synergistic approach, which is focused, among other things, on the effective interactions of multicultural staff in MNCs (Adler, 1983). Current stage in IM field development can be named a combined perspective (Jacobs, 2003), which is aimed at reconciling cultural divergence and convergence streams in IM. As far as this paper is concerned, it can be numbered among the synergistic and combined streams in IM, filling the gap in the literature and research that are more geocentric-oriented. A significant portion of IM literature is concerned with diversity issues. Cultural differences are one of the sources of diversity among gender, race, age, creed, educational background, learning styles, problem-solving ability, etc. (Stahl *et al.,* 2010a; Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). It can be assumed that cultural diversity has its specific outcomes, although some of them may be in conformity with other diversity sources (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Stahl *et al.,* 2010a). Since most of the studies on diversity do not distinguish between the types of diversity, their applicability to the analysis of cross-cultural interactions can be limited. It also suggests a significant gap in the field literature. Therefore, this paper, while focusing on cultural diversity impact on human interactions, fills the gap indentified above.

Literature review

Cross-cultural interactions

In general terms, *cross-cultural interactions* can be defined as mutual influences of people who are representatives of different cultures (Rozkwitalska, 2011). Such influences can be regarded as an element of *social interactions* that according to Rummel (1976) reflect behaviors mutually oriented toward one another i.e., they affect or take into account other side"s experiences or intentions. Since a physical contact is not a prerequisite of social interactions, they include all types of direct and indirect contacts among people, yet only those that are mutually oriented behaviors. Social interactions can be also associated with the communication process among people, because communication is understood as a complex system of behaviors (Novinger, 2001). Taking the foregoing into account, cross-cultural interactions bring together individuals with diverse patterns of behaviors and cognitive blueprints that are used to interpret the surroundings (Webb & Wright, 1996). As a result, cross-cultural interactions reflect how representatives of various cultures affect one another and behave in a given situational context. With regards to MNCs, cross-cultural interactions embrace all the types of internal and external, direct and indirect contacts of individuals in every element of MNCs, including their foreign subsidiaries. Such a contact may be e.g. working in multicultural teams, being a peer or subordinate of an expatriate, conducting cross-cultural negotiations with customers or suppliers, contacting with a MNC"s other units while carrying out occupational tasks, business trips to other countries, knowledge sharing within a MNC, etc. (see Figure 1). *Culture* is perceived as blueprints of all human activities directing them, the lens, which enables perception of the surrounding reality (Luna & Gupta, 2001), and "the collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 1997, p. 5) that affects cognition of interacting people. Thereby, when individuals interact in a cross-cultural setting, they interpret or define one another"s actions/behaviors through the lens of their cultures. It is worth mentioning that interactions not only reflect behaviors of individuals but they also impact on human behaviors (Bourantas & Nicandrou, 1998).
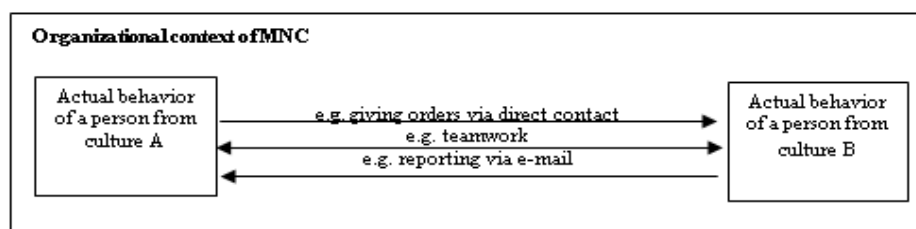

Figure 1. Cross-cultural interactions in MNCs

Cross-cultural interactions in the traditional perspective

Traditional perspective on cross-cultural interactions suggests that cultural diversity negatively affects the quality of interpersonal contacts. The main reason lies in potentially conflicting patterns of behaviors resulting from the differences in cultures when such an interaction occurs. The so-called inappropriateness of behaviors caused by cultural differences decreases the quality of mutual relationships, because it leads to misunderstanding and consequently to conflicts (Yoshitake, 1996; Sano & Di Martino, 2003; Cooper *et al.,* 2006). *Inappropriateness* means that participants of cross-cultural contacts mutually observe that there are discrepancies in their behaviors, which are not congruent with their expected behavioral norms affected by culture (Cooper *et al.,* 2006). As a result, negative reactions arise and quality of personal interactions in an organization goes down (Yoshitake, 1996).

Considering MNCs‟ context, the situation appears to be even more challenging, since in MNCs there are various overlapping subcultures that affect human behaviors (Dorow & Blazejewski, 2003; Cooper *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, warranting of effective working relationships among MNCs‟ employees is perceived as one of the major challenge these organizations face in their daily operations (Cooper *et al.,* 2006).

In the research based on the social identification and social categorization theory as well as the similarity-attraction theory it is implied that cultural diversity of group members interferes social identity and decreases attractiveness of those who are seen as different, resulting in problems of cross-cultural interactions (Cooper *et al.,* 2006; Stahl *et al.,* 2010). Likewise, theory of social comparison states that individuals are not attracted to those whose opinions are dissimilar. Therefore, if discrepancies are too large, mutual relationships suffer (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). It therefore suggests that in a multicultural environment of MNCs people encounter specific, so-called *cultural barriers*.

Although MNCs face serious cross-cultural challenges, IB literature seems to neglect the issue of cultural barriers. Some scholars have considered differences in national cultures as a barrier to communication and understanding (Hambrick *et al.,* 1998; Von Glinow *et al.,* 2004; Stahl *et al.*, 2010; Lauring & Selmer, 2011). In other studies it was a language that was mentioned as a potential barrier within MNCs (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Tange, 2009).

Nevertheless, the concept of cultural barriers has been sufficiently recognized in the studies on knowledge management (KM) (Senge, 1990; Kim, 1993; Birkner & Birkner, 1998; Bures, 2003; Hernandez-Mogollon *et al.,* 2010). The authors have associated cultural barriers with the following: 1) individual, personal assumptions, generalizations and biases that are deeply ingrained (Senge, 1990; Birkner & Birkner, 1998); 2) the context which affects people‟s perception and drives someone‟s behavior (Kim, 1993; Birkner & Birkner, 1998); 3) local, national approaches to management of an organization different than those applied by MNCs that are the result of cultural distance between the parent and foreign companies (Baddar Al-Husan *et al.,* 2009). Such cultural barriers

(regarded as assumptions, generalizations, and biases or context) are the consequences of an individual‟s lack of familiarity with a novel situation and as a result lead to his/her ineptitude to predict the outcomes of his/her behavior (Bures, 2003; Hernandez-Mogollon *et al.,* 2010). They can be associated with individuals‟ mental models that "reflect an internal personal view of how the world works and which behaviors are appropriate for dealing with events in the world" (Friedman, 2004, p. 113). As a result of cultural barriers, a person experiences confusion, helplessness, uncertainty, fear and anxiety (Hernandez-Mogollon et al., 2010). Inappropriateness of behaviors shows its strength, since people cannot behave accordingly and evaluate another party‟s behavior as improper.

Several cultural barriers to cross-border KM have been identified so far by the authors (McDermott & O‟Dell, 2001; Bures, 2003; Hernandez-Mogollon *et al.,* 2010). These barriers to cross-cultural interactions (since KM is a specific type of such an interaction) can be seen at three levels (Rozkwitalska, 2012): national culture bonded barriers, (e.g. ethnocentrism, cultural distance, cultural stereotypes), organizational barriers (a MNC‟s strategic predisposition, a cultural gap, institutional ethnocentrism) and individual rooted barriers (insufficient cultural competence, a poor command of a foreign language, inaccurate perception). The authors stressed a necessity of overcoming cultural barriers due to their negative effects that hamper maintenance of open-mindedness. Open-mindedness is not only a prerequisite of organizational learning and knowledge sharing (McDermott & O‟Dell, 2001; Bures, 2003; Hernandez-Mogollon *et al.,* 2010) required for effective functioning in a cross-cultural setting (Magala, 2005), but it also supports cultural intelligence and cultural competence of individuals equipped with such an attitude (Ang *et al.,* 2006; Magala, 2005; Rozkwitalska, 2012b). Other authors found that cultural diversity can be a barrier to functioning of a multicultural workforce and reported its negative consequences such as process losses, conflicts, problems in social integration, communication, decision making and changes, and decrease in the satisfaction level (Mannix & Neale, 2006; Stevens *et al.,* 2008; Stahl *et al.,* 2010a).

Cross-cultural interactions - positive aspects

Literature on cultural diversity in teams provides some evidence of positive effects of interactions of multicultural workforce, suggesting their beneficial impact on creativity, productivity, quality, learning and vitality and positive organizational change (Watson *et al.,* 1993; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Davidson & James, 2006; Stevens *et al.,* 2008). Stevens *et al.,* (2008) posited that so-called all-inclusive multiculturalism is a necessary approach to managing diversity and therefore establishing fruitful interactions among diversified employees within an organization. Similarly, Stahl *et al.,* (2010a) founded that contextual factors determine whether cross-cultural interactions bring about increased creativity and satisfaction posing at the same time a risk of process losses due to a task conflict and problems in social integration.

Positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions can be inferred from the theory of information-processing. This theory allows assuming that diversity in teams offers a

broader range of information, networks, perspectives, mental models, information processing, and approaches to a problem. These later support problem-solving within a group, prevents group-thinking, contributes to creativity, innovation and adaptability (Watson *et al.,* 1993; Cox, 1994; Stahl *et al.,* 2010; Stahl *et al.,* 2010a).

A series of meta-analyses based on the previous research that was conducted by Stahl et al. (2010a) proved the following positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions in teams: increased creativity, satisfaction and more effective communication. Regarding the last one, communication effectiveness was signaled in studies which scrutinized deep-level attributes of diversity (Stahl *et al.,* 2010, 2010a). The following explanation may be given: 1) if multicultural team members focus on the differences in values and attitudes (deep-level attributes of diversity), cross-cultural communication is more effective because then it becomes a channel of transmitting knowledge and learning; it may also generate more creativity; 2) interactions between multicultural team members foster the creation of social bonds; 3) social bonds increase the efficiency of communication and stimulate job satisfaction.

Considering a surprisingly positive link between cultural diversity and satisfaction that contrasts with more traditional approaches to cross-cultural interactions, Stahl *et al.,* (2010) pointed at opportunities provided in a multicultural environment. Namely, working in MNC may satisfy person"s needs for variety, development, and adventure. Moreover, such exposure to diverse setting that is abundant in different ideas and learning opportunities proved to be highly satisfying for some people. Working with peers from other cultures can be also interesting to them (Suutari & Makela, 2007). Moreover, if an individual successfully handles with cross-cultural challenges and surmounts barriers inherent in a multicultural environment, his/her satisfaction may arise (Stahl *et al.,* 2010).

Another positive aspect of cross-cultural interactions can be observed basing on the intergroup contact theory. By meta-analysis of the previous intergroup contact research, Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) substantiated that frequent and extended interactions between diverse groups may reduce prejudice, which positively influences cross-cultural relationships (Turner *et al.,* 2008; Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). Considering expatriate management, it has been confirmed that cross-cultural interactions between an expatriate and host country nationals have a beneficial influence on his/her adaptation in a new environment, which later affects the chance of success of overseas assignment (White *et al.,* 2011). Summarizing the literature review section, the concept that integrates the traditional approach and more positive oriented studies in the research on cross-cultural interactions is portrayed in Figure 2.

The analyses above suggest that cross-cultural interactions may foster creativity, learning and knowledge sharing, contributing to better problem-solving and innovation. They can also bring about improved adaptability, communication and job satisfaction. Correspondingly, MNC may benefit from building of social capital. However, to achieve the positive outcomes, there is a need for understanding and overcoming cultural barriers.
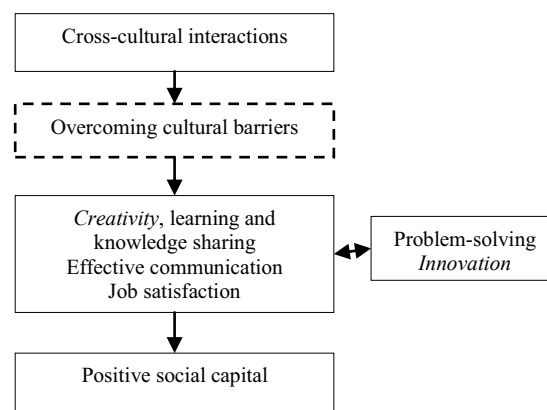

Figure 2. Positive outcomes of cross-cultural interactions

Research characteristics

The empirical findings presented in the subsequent section were obtained from the author"s main qualitative research on the barriers to cross-cultural interactions of MNCs" subsidiaries" staff and additional qualitative pilot study on the positive aspects of such interaction. Both research projects were conducted in foreign subsidiaries of MNCs operating in Poland; the first one was performed in winter at the end of the year 2009, while the pilot study was carried out at the beginning of the year 2013.

The same sample and consequently a similar group of respondents were initially approached in both projects. However, there was an attempt to enlarge the original pool of contacts in the pilot study to collect more reliable data. The group of 48 respondents in the main and pilot studies consisted of mostly top and middle level managers in subsidiaries, primarily men in their thirties. They represented the following functional departments: technical/manufacturing, administrative, sales, Human Resources, finance, accounting, quality, logistics, and others. The respondents" years of services in subsidiaries were at least 1,5, whereas more than 40 % of the respondents had more than 4,5 years of work experience in MNCs. The majority of them had international experience before their present jobs, which could have influenced their perception of cross-cultural interactions they have been involved in. The author approached in the study the subsidiaries" staff to reflect the local units" viewpoint on the issue. The non-probabilistic sample consisted of 48 subsidiaries with diverse capital origins, i.e.: European (almost 70 percent of the sample), North-American (12,5 percent) and Asian. Concerning the size of these entities, the sample mostly included large incorporated subsidiaries (more than 65 percent of the total), whereas medium-sized affiliates achieved 26 percent respectively. The sample was also diversified with regards to belonging to sectors. Yet, 56,5 percent of the subsidiaries were different servicing companies whereas the remaining part represented various manufacturing sectors. There were 40 percent of joint venture establishments in the sample. 82 percent of subsidiaries have been running their business for at least 5 years with 20 percent of entities in the operation for 15 years. The empirical findings from the main research are based on the information obtained via personal semi-structured in-depth interviews, thus this study was of

qualitative nature. The method was considered the most appropriate for several reasons: 1) it allows for scrutinizing issues due to the open-ended character of asked questions and flexible manner of such an interview; 2) interviewees have a chance of expressing their own experience and attitudes; 3) respondents may provide new insights into the research which may not have been noticed earlier by the researcher; 4) the method offers a more detailed and accurate observation, yet generalization and comparison of the data are limited (Lodorfos & Boateng, 2006; Brenner, 2009; Kühlmann & Hutchings, 2010).

Each interview in the main study lasted approximately 1,5 hours and was mainly carried out in the subsidiaries" offices. The issues that were tackled referred to the research questions concerning barriers to cross-cultural interactions and mechanisms used to identify and overcome such obstacles. With regards to the former, the research questions scrutinized the areas of occurrence, the interviewees" perception of barriers to cross-cultural interactions, the sources of problems encountered in a multinational environment and their significance (Rozkwitalska 2011, 2012).

To get new insights into the positives of cross-cultural interactions the pilot study was conducted. The method applied in the pilot study was an e-mail survey. The respondents were asked: "Do you see any positive aspects (effects) of cross-cultural interactions (contacts with foreigners) at your work? If the answer is „yes", please describe your experience/remarks concerning the issue." The collected, elaborated answers allowed to confirm previous observations from the other studies as well as to shed some new light on the positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions.

The result of the research is presented in the subsequent section.

Barriers to cross-cultural interactions and their positive aspects – empirical findings

Barriers to cross-cultural interactions in foreign subsidiaries – examples from the research (Rozkwitalska, 2011, 2011a)

The interviewees admitted that they had experienced barriers to cross-cultural interactions while performing their occupational duties, which had posed some problems at work and could limit the quality of interpersonal contacts. For example, they observed potential disruptions that had been caused by cultural differences. Cultural distance created discrepancies, among other issues, between the expected and granted autonomy of subsidiary"s staff:

Interviewee A: Japanese culture does not allow an employee to question his/her superior"s orders.

Interviewee B: Poles frequently question their boss"s decisions.

Interviewee C: Even the most trivial problem must be reported to the headquarters. As a result, the decision process is extremely long.

Interviewee D: Korean managers do not take into account the opinions and suggestions of their subordinates, even if they are right.

Cultural differences were also observed in the desired working styles:

Interviewee D: First of all, the attitude of Poles and our investor towards work differs. The investor is very often surprised that people finish their work day and do not want to stay any longer at the office. The working style differs as well. It is expected that everything should be done right away, no matter whether you are able to meet requirements or not.

Generally, the following problems were ascribed to cultural distance by the interviewees: 1) differences in preferences within the superior role and the leadership style, scope of authority, information flow, and formalization; 2) differences in verbal and nonverbal behavior, including communication styles; 3) differences in importance assigned to interpersonal relationships at work and conflicting life priorities.

Ethnocentrism and cultural distance were the major reasons for conflicts that occasionally arose among the various MNC"s affiliates disrupting cross-cultural interactions. MNCs are a specific type of organizations where internal solutions and corporate culture affect the quality of interpersonal relationships among their diversified workforces. Therefore, during the interviews the respondents specified a number of organizational impediments to cross-cultural interactions in MNCs that brought about their reluctance and sometimes resistance. The most obvious one was institutional ethnocentrism:

Interviewee E: Those in the HQ do not respect people who run their business in the subsidiary in Poland.

Interviewee F: You could frequently hear from the expatriates: „If this proved to be effective in our market it will work here, too."

Yet, the interviewees also remarked that the mutual relationships usually suffered if there was a discrepancy between the declarations of the HQ or expatriates and their actual performance and if there was an insufficient understanding of specific host environment due to an overwhelming belief in universality of whatever came from the parent company, and consequently, a lack of necessary adjustments:

Interviewee G: The central that declares a geocentric attitude is not always prone to increase the subsidiary"s autonomy in decisions making process if the local adaptations are required by circumstances.

Interviewee H: Our MNC that states a geocentric mindset actually reveals a typical American thinking pattern.

Interviewee I: Usually, solutions are first sought on the home market. If a solution is implemented there successfully, then it is imposed on remaining subsidiaries abroad, regardless of different considerations there.

Moreover, some respondents remarked difficulties in the integration process, i.e. a cultural gap, mainly in MNCs involved into inorganic growth. One could have noticed some discrepancies in working styles between the small local units and a large MNC and problems with social integration after mergers or acquisitions:

Interviewee J: After the takeover of our Polish company by the Dutch MNC, you can still notice that a significant part of the Polish staff do not identify with our other overseas units. Some people do not even know that we

are now a part of the international organization, what is going on in the HQ or what our subsidiary is expected to do.

Some barriers to social integration have been caused due to the tendency of the parent company to use a cultural dominance approach to impose a new culture on a subsidiary. In general, the interviewees claimed that communication with foreigners was the most frequently impacted by cultural barriers, among the problems with internal cooperation and implementation of company"s culture and its solutions. Firstly, it was indicated that occasionally required translation may bring about communication noises. Secondly, cross-cultural communication was time-consuming and costly. Some respondents also reported that they had experienced discomfort and a feeling of being excluded when their foreign partners used to speak their mother tongue (different than the MNC"s official functional language) in meetings to discuss some issues in their midst. The others claimed that subsidiary"s personnel whose command of functional language was insufficient or even lacking might feel worse than those who were able to speak fluently. In consequence, this factor interrupted social integration. Some interviewees expected that the expatriates should know at least the basics of the local language to establish a fruitful cooperation with the home country nationals and ensure social integration. Finally, a poor command of functional language among MNC"s staff sometimes created barriers to tasks realization causing certain process losses. Although the interviews have witnessed cultural barriers at work, only 25% of them acknowledged that "It is impossible to cooperate effectively with some nations", suggesting process losses in cross-cultural interactions. According to one of them, the concept of effectiveness itself is culture-bound. Cultural barriers that have affected the quality of mutual contacts made another interviewee conclude:

Interviewee K: You can work with some foreigners, yet it cannot be effective.

The respondents while largely appreciating working in multicultural teams also indicated that such a team may be reluctant to make a decision which breaches the interest of some units.

Severe cultural barriers that could have been observed in a few subsidiaries contributed to the lack of job content among some interviewees and their neutral attitude towards the representatives of different cultures and contacts with them.

Positives of cross-cultural interactions in foreign subsidiaries – examples from the research

The evidence for the positive aspects of cross-cultural interactions presented in this section is mainly based on the empirical findings from the pilot study. Nevertheless, the interviewees in the main research provided some personal remarks concerning the positives of such interaction as well, especially with regards to job satisfaction.

First of all, it is worth mentioning that the results of the author"s research confirm the empirical findings of the previous studies in all but one areas, i.e. communication. Moreover, the research revealed that cross-cultural contacts may be seen as a significant factor in human resource development and MNCs" competitiveness.

The respondents indicated specifically that the contacts with representatives of different cultures contributed to knowledge sharing, experience broadening, and learning:

Respondent L: In spite of over 20 years of market economy in our country you can still see a distance (more or less willful) in some areas of knowledge and corporate culture. This is not only about some obvious matters such as knowledge or effective business experience transfer. The very significant maters are motivation, a holistic approach to business, effective delegation of authority, or paradoxically, being open to quick and efficient changes. I am not saying that the only solution is gaining knowledge or using experience of different (usually western) business cultures, yet I am sure it is the positive of (cross-cultural) interactions.

Respondent M: Cooperation gives us a chance of learning, gaining experience (…).

Moreover, cross-cultural contacts have brought about more ideas, solutions, and a wider range of perspectives preventing group-thinking that have resulted in more creativity, innovations and competitiveness for a company:

Respondent N: (..) someone „from outside" helps to break a group „inertia" – if anyone in a work environment comes from the same region, school, university, all have the same interests, habits, etc.; work is simply boring and you can easily fall into stagnation and long-term (economically ineffective) status quo. A foreigner has a great chance of breaching such a construction, which is very often positive for an organization.

Respondent O: I think that contacts with foreign suppliers and partners increase the level of innovation and creativity in a company, help to transfer to our home environment the latest technology and consequently to raise a competitiveness level. Cross-cultural interactions enable to overcome stereotypes as well as common thinking and acting patterns.

Furthermore, cross-cultural interactions have been necessary to make MNC more adaptive. They also might translate into the higher quality:

Respondent N: In MNCs an interaction with people from different cultural circles is crucial. The reason is very simple – if you prepare any product or service for a global market you need a „local" approach. It means your product must be adjusted to the customers" needs regardless of their cultural background. A contact with a foreigner lets you understand how different needs of clients in various parts of the world are.

Respondent O: Diversity translates into quality if a firm is capable of utilizing it.

Cross-cultural contacts have introduced a possibility to establish social bonds as well:

Respondent P: I have more than 18 years of work experience in (…) MNCs. From the very nature such job means contacts with foreigners (…) Parts of these relationships transformed into sustained private relations – for years my first boss - an Englishman – is the best friend of mine and my family (…).

Additionally, working relationships with foreigners might have allowed challenging someone"s stereotypes, too:

Respondent M: Cooperation gives us a chance of (…) getting rid of stereotypes, and debunk myths.

Respondent O: I have also confronted stereotypes with real people and, as a matter of fact, it has indicated we were quite similar.

Respondent Q: (…) I guess that the most important positive aspect of contacts with foreigners is a chance of confronting stereotypes, which are ingrained in our minds concerning particular nations and the actual representatives. Then we see that e.g. Russians or Germans are very likable and open people.

MNC may benefit from cross-cultural interactions since they can contribute to personal growth, satisfying a need for self-actualization (see also Table 1) and, as a result, the development of human resources, as reported by the respondents:

Respondent M: Cooperation with people from different cultures, speaking foreign (frequently to both parties) language is a very interesting experience. The working style of different nations can surprise you as well as may contribute to changes in your own approach to work. (…) Cooperation gives us a chance of (…) personal growth, e.g. getting more self-confidence.

Respondent O: First of all, now I feel more ease in my international contacts, I mean speaking English and generally being more self-confident. (…) I also have gained more work experience, which is not limited to a single country reality (…). From the company perspective I think that contacts with foreigners brings about many benefits mentioned already, including growth of competences of human resources.

Respondent P: Persisting that only our perspective and worldview are legitimate makes us of marginal importance and excludes us from work in the world of various cultures. Tolerance, humiliation, respect and openness to others are the basis necessary to ensure cooperation on substantive issues. During the first years of my work for MNCs I witnessed personal changes very important to me: (…) I got rid of an inferiority complex in relations with my peers from the West – there is no reason for it, quite the opposite, there are areas where we are superior.

Respondent R: It is really interesting experience when you can observe and witness how representatives of different cultures see the sense of work itself. (…) The pluses (…) are: increased knowledge, new experience, new people, different perspective on working styles, and above all, self-development.

The main research also indicated that contacts with foreigners were satisfactory to the majority of the interviewees, i.e. being the third, in order of priority of reasons for job satisfaction (Rozkwitalska, 2011) (see Table 1). These findings are specifically interesting with regards to the relatively low level of job content in Poland and other post-socialistic countries in comparison to Western Europe (Alas and Edwards, 2011). Yet, cross-cultural interactions affected by severe cultural barriers in the analyzed subsidiaries might have contributed to job discontent as well (see Table 1).

Table 1

Level of satisfaction in cross-cultural interactions and job content according to the interviewees

The level of satisfaction in cross-cultural interactions	Percentage of persons (%)
satisfactory	54,5
highly satisfactory	38,6
neutral	6,8
dissatisfactory	4,5
Job content	**Percentage of persons (%)**
Occurrence of job content	87,5
Reasons for the job content	**Reasons for the job discontent**
- self-actualization needs satisfaction; - work for MNC; - contacts with foreigners; - material incentives (salary, financial stability); - atmosphere; - material incentives other than salary; - esteem needs satisfaction; - security needs satisfaction.	- cultural barriers; - burnout; - weak growth of the Polish subsidiary.

Conclusions

The analysis conducted in this paper suggests, in conformity with some latest research, that cross-cultural interactions are a double-edged sword, i.e. they can result in negative effects due to potential barriers, which lower the quality of relationships, yet they may also contribute to many positives, including more creativity and innovations.

The study on the positive aspects of interactions in MNCs is in accordance with Positive Organizational Scholarship lens that looks for the positive symptoms of human behaviors in organizations (Dutton and Sonenshein, 2007). Cross-cultural interactions, as a particular type of interpersonal relations, can be regarded as explanatory mechanisms that determine positive outcomes in enterprises.

Practical implication of the analysis is that understanding of genuine nature of cross-cultural interactions is necessary to effective managing of such interaction. Barriers to relationships in a multicultural environment need to be overcome, whereas the positives of them suggest that MNCs may use cultural diversity to their advantage. Creativity and innovation as well as other positive aspects can be strengthened if cross-cultural interactions occur. Moreover, the author's research supports the idea that cross-cultural interactions can be fruitful to MNCs and, consequently, a society. Cultural

diversity may be an asset in contrast to a more traditional view in prior research that treats it more as liability.

Nevertheless, future research on barriers to cross-cultural interactions is required and a quantitative method should be also applied to a larger sample of subsidiaries to obtain more cases along with additional qualitative studies. The research on positives of cross-cultural interactions is based only on the pilot study. More cases need to be collected to confirm the data and to identify how MNCs may boost positive effects of cross-cultural interactions.

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Neigiami ir teigiami kultūrų sąveikos aspektai: tarptautinių filialų Lenkijoje pavyzdys

Santrauka

Dėl didėjančio tarptautinių koorporacijų (TTK) skaičiaus šalies ūkio rinkose, tam panaudojant užsienio įmonių filialus, šalies-šeimininkės tautų kultūriniai kontaktai, kuriais naudojasi TTK, tampa vis svarbesni. Nemaža dalis personalo, atlikdamas savo tiesiogines, su darbo santykiais susijusias darbo pareigas, yra įtraukiami bendrauti su skirtingų šalių atstovais. Dėl šios priežastys labai svarbiu tampa kultūrinių sąveikų aspektas.

Šiame straipsnyje bandoma išsiaiškinti neigiamus ir teigiamus kultūrų sąveikos aspektus. *Darbo tikslas* yra pateikti labiau subalansuotą požiūrį į žmonių santykius daugiakultūrėje aplinkoje. Darbe siekiama nustatyti tikrąją kultūrų sąveikos prigimtį tarptautinių kompanijų filialuose, nes ji sudaro šio darbo tyrimo problemą. Kadangi autorė tradiciškai žvelgia į kultūrinės įvairovės sukeltas problemas, (kurie šiuo metu yra pakankamai gerai išaiškinti dokumentuose), šiame darbe bandoma ištirti teigiamus kultūrų sąveikos aspektus, labiau atkreipiant dėmesį į kūrybiškumą ir naujoves. Toks tyrimo būdas pasirinktas todėl, kad jis nebuvo taikytas anksčiau panašia tema rašytuose darbuose. Šio darbo struktūra: teorinės literatūros apžvalga, tyrimo metodas ir pavyzdys, empiriniai rezultatai apie neigiamus ir teigiamus kultūrų sąveikos aspektus, išvados. Išanalizavus teorinę literatūrą matyti, kad į kultūrų sąveiką mes galime pažvelgti iš dviejų pusių. *Pirmoji*, t. y. tradicinė, pabrėžia problemas, kai individai susiduria su kultūrine įvairove. Jie susiduria su *kultūriniais barjerais*, todėl nukenčia ryšių tarp asmenų kokybė. Įvairūs autoriai yra nustatę neigiamas kultūrinės įvairovės pasekmes: tai ir procesiniai nuostoliai, konfliktai, socialinė integracija, bendravimo, sprendimų priėmimo bei pokyčių problemos bei sumažėjęs pasitenkinimas darbu. *Antroji*, kuri atspindi naujausius darbus apie kultūrinę įvairovę, teigia, kad kultūrų sąveika gali prisidėti prie kūrybiškumo ir naujovių, geresnio našumo, pritaikomumo, kokybės, pokyčių, dalinimosi žiniomis bei patirtimi, problemų sprendimo, geresnio bendravimo, išankstinio nusistatymo mažėjimo, socialinių ryšių sukūrimo ir pasitenkinimo darbu. Šio straipsnio tyrimo dalis yra atlikta autorės TTK užsienio įmonių filialuose, kurie veikia Lenkijos rinkoje. Pirmasis, *pagrindinis*, darbas buvo susijęs su kultūrų sąveikos barjerais ir buvo atliktas 2009 metų pabaigoje. Buvo pritaikytas pusiau struktūrizuoto interviu metodas. Antrasis, t. y. *kontrolinis*, darbas buvo paremtas kultūrų sąveikos pozityvais ir atliktas 2013 metų pradžioje. Apklausa atlikta elektroniniu būdu. Tyrime dalyvavao 48 užsienio įmonių filialai. Informacija buvo gauta daugiausia iš šių įmonių aukščiausio ir vidutinio lygio vadovų.

Iš empirinių rezultatų galima daryti tokias išvadas: apklaustieji savo darbe susidūrė su kultūriniais barjerais. Šie barjerai nebuvo labai reikšmingi. Toks rezultatas galėjo būti mažesnis dėl kontaktų tarp asmenų kokybės ir filialo personalo priverstinio požiūrio ar net pasipriešinimo pagrindinės įmonės remiamiems sprendimams. Dažniausiai pastebėti barjerai susiję dėl kultūrinio atstumo ir etnocentrizmo (tautinio ir institucinio), ir, galiausiai, būtinų priderinimų prie vietinės aplinkos trūkumų. Respondentai taip pat jautriai reagavo į neatitikimus tarp pagrindinės kompanijos tikrųjų veiksmų ir jos pareiškimų. Jų bendravimui įtaką darė kultūriniai barjerai, tokie kaip kompanijos kultūros ar sprendimų įdiegimas ir vidinis bendradarbiavimas TTK viduje. Tyrimas taip pat parodė, kad kultūrų sąveika tenkino apklaustuosius ir darė teigiamą įtaką jų darbo turiniui.

Kontrolinis darbas atskleidė, kad respondentai pastebėjo kultūrų sąveikos pozityvus. Visi teigiami kultūrinės įvairovės rezultatai, išskyrus vieną, t. y. „efektyvesnį bendravimą", kurie aprašyti kituose autorės darbuose, taip pat buvo patvirtinti ir *kontroliniame* darbe. Be to, respondentai teigė, kad tarpkultūriniai kontaktai padėjo žmogiškiesiems ištekliams bei bendrai jų kompanijų konkurencingumo plėtotei. Respondentai paminėjo, kad jų kontaktai su užsieniečiais prisidėjo prie dalinimosi su jais žiniomis, patirties plėtimo ir mokymosi, kūrybiškumo, naujovių ir pagerinto TTK konkurencingumo, pritaikomumo, socialinių ryšių kūrimo, pakeitimo stereotipinio mąstymo bei žmogiškojo kapitalo tobulėjimo panaudojant asmenų, įtrauktų į kultūrų sąveiką, asmeninį augimą.

Gauti rezultatai gali padėti geriau suprasti tarpkultūrinius iššūkius, su kuriais susiduria TTK filialai, ir dėl kurių gali kilti ir neigiamų ir teigiamų pasekmių. Taip pat manoma, kad reikia įveikti barjerus, trukdančius žmonių santykiams daugianacionalinėje aplinkoje, jei atsiranda tokių teigiamų rezultatų kaip naujovės ir kūrybiškumas.

Aptariant tyrimą, reikia paminėti tai, kad darbai buvo atlikti Lenkijoje esančių užsienio įmonių filialuose. Pavyzdys buvo *ne tikimybinis*, todėl gauti rezultatai negali būti apibendrinti. Rekomenduojama atlikti tolesnius kiekybinius tyrimus norint išsiaiškinti daugiau atvejų. Taip pat reikia atlikti ir *kokybinius* tyrimus norint turėti geresnį supratimą apie kultūrų sąveikas. Reikia nepamiršti, kad tokių sąveikų pozityvai šiame darbe buvo aprašyti remiantis tik *kontroliniu* darbu. Taigi, reikia surinkti daugiau ir tikslesnių duomenų. kad būtų galima argumentuotai atsakyti jau į iškeltą klausimą ir patvirtinti jau gautus empirinius rezultatus.