INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN MANAGERS OF AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITIES IN THE ERA OF BUILDING THE SOCIETY 5.0

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Purpose: Contacts with foreigners and their somewhat different ways of thinking and behavior (often incomprehensible to the Polish society), reaching back to the roots of the culture of a given country, region or community, are becoming an everyday reality nowadays. These processes also affect the change of standards in the field of intercultural competencies of managerial staff. The aim of this paper is to discuss the development of cultural competencies in managers that are necessary in the management of intercultural organizations.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper uses the desk research method of analysis. The analysis of available subject literature and data obtained from the websites of six Polish agricultural universities enabled establishment of facts, verification of data and presentation of results.

Findings: The considerations presented in the article indicate that the key element of the changes taking place in organizations are intelligent human resources with cultural competencies. International cooperation and foreign contacts are important – whether through participation in common projects, conferences, research or student internships. Joint actions are also required rather than individual actions and the initiatives undertaken are consistent with the concept of the society 5.0.

Practical implications: A common space for development, modern technology, creative thinking and joint commitment of the managerial staff and the academic community enable the building of a super-intelligent society and universities fit for the 21st century.

Social implications: The advances in technology should always be used with consideration of the needs and the good of people, regardless of cultural differences. The world of people, machines and their surroundings should be interconnected and all these elements should be able to communicate with each other.

Originality/value: The article is an original approach to searching for solutions that influence the change of standards in the area of key competencies of managerial staff, including intercultural competencies.

Keywords: cultural competencies, intercultural manager, changes in organizations.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The vision of a super intelligent society uses the latest technologies and databases to optimize human activities in all dimensions of life (Rybak, 2023). In the face of the process of globalization and the internationalization of management, cooperation and communication with people from different countries and even continents are becoming more and more common. International teams are being created to implement projects; businesses are faced with mergers and strategic alliances. Contacts with foreigners and their somewhat different ways of thinking and behaviour (often incomprehensible to the Polish society), reaching back to the roots of the culture of a given country, region or community, are becoming an everyday occurrence. The abovementioned processes have also significantly influenced the change of standards in the field of key competencies of managerial staff, including intercultural competencies.

Polish universities focus their activities on the education of managerial staff. Changes are occurring, both in the activities of schools themselves and in the environment in which they operate. This is related not only to the development of infrastructure, but also to broadly understood changes in curriculums. New extramural branches of higher education institutions are being opened (also abroad) and new fields of study and college departments are being created to meet the needs of the labour market. New postgraduate studies are launched, including foreign-language courses for managers; cooperation is established with employers and numerous foreign partners; national and international conferences are systematically organized – all this in order to educate staff for the innovative economy in the best possible way. Students' science clubs that operate locally fit perfectly into the activities of universities. The best proof of how Polish universities have changed over the past 20 years is their growing position in various rankings and the number of awards they receive each year. Their activity is not only strictly and exclusively related to education, but is also intertwined with the sphere of social life through sports, cultural or even charity activities. It is thanks to the authorities of universities, their passion, creativity, perseverance and commitment that it was possible to create universities fit for the 21st century, not only by building modern campuses and infrastructure, but most of all by shaping the academic community.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the development of cultural competencies in managers that are necessary in the management of intercultural organizations, in the aspect of the activities of Polish agricultural universities.

2. Material and Methodology

The aim of this work is to discuss the development of cultural competencies in managers that are necessary in the management of intercultural organizations. These include universities whose activities are aimed at strengthening the academic community's natural curiosity about the world, educating, stimulating imagination, competency acquisition and openness to changes using the latest technology advancements, including artificial intelligence. The paper uses the desk research method of analysis. The analysis of available subject literature and data obtained from the websites of six Polish agricultural universities enabled establishment of facts, verification of data and presentation of results.

3. Society 5.0 – the Society of Imagination

Society 5.0, also called super-intelligent or creative, is a recipe for a new era man. According to the Japanese, it is defined as a human-centric society model of interpersonal relations. It uses economic progress to solve social problems using systems and technologies that strongly integrate cyberspace with real physical space. This is another society, which follows the hunting, agrarian, industrial and finally information society that we currently have (Twaróg, Mieczkowski, 2019; DuVall, 2019). In Society 5.0, of which Japan is considered a model, all aspects of society are shaped by the latest technologies. The society of the future is to be one in which new values and services are constantly created, making people's lives more comfortable, while ensuring sustainable and lasting development (Twaróg, Mieczkowski, 2019). Society 5.0 is intended to improve life through the effective use of data on a large scale, in which the world of people, machines and their entire surroundings are interconnected and able to communicate with each other (Tomański, 2023).

Society 5.0 assumes the connection of cities and societies, which is supposed to change the customs, industry, services and living space. Artificial intelligence is to be able to provide necessary products and services to people who need them, at the required time and quantity (Twaróg, Mieczkowski, 2019).

Reaching level 5.0 depends on cooperation between business, states and science which is the basis for creating innovations at both national and global levels. The key element is the use of the big data and the coordination of many existing systems to optimize human activities in all dimensions of life: from shopping to improving production and decision-making processes (Rybak, 2013). 5.0 assumes the creation of one data system based on trust and exchange of information, and the most important thing in this aspect is international cooperation, which is sometimes difficult to achieve (Trends of the future..., 2023). In the school of the future,

the teacher should be a friendly and helpful guide in the world of knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary to invest in the education of managerial staff and, most importantly, give them the opportunity to implement modern and diverse education methods. Moreover, the current way of teaching (lecturing knowledge, disciplining and checking the learned material) must be replaced by learning through experience, which will unleash creativity and develop the ability to solve various problems because *The economy of the future needs (...) schools whose walls are left by people who are curious about the world and open to new knowledge* (Trends of the future..., 2023).

Continuing education in the field of modern technologies may soon turn out to be a necessary condition for the development of any organization and may also involve the need to retrain employees or the necessity to acquire new competencies or specialists. The future will therefore require not only openness to new technologies but also knowledge of how to use them, which may become the key to increasing competitiveness and business development (Rybak, 2023).

4. Cultural Competencies

In the subject literature, there is no unanimity in the numerous definitions of competencies. G. Filipowicz defines competencies as dispositions in the field of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow the performance of professional tasks at an appropriate level (Filipowicz, 2004). A. Sajkiewicz also recognizes the knowledge used at work, experience, abilities and predispositions to cooperate in achieving the company's goals, the ability to act professionally and ethical cultural values (Sajkiewicz, 1999).

For the purposes of this article, it was assumed that cultural competencies are the abilities to use cultural patterns within a given culture (Encyclopedia..., 2023). Thus, cultural competencies include a set of acquired features and abilities that enable free participation in culture, in accordance with norms and values. It is the ability to recognize, learn and change the content of culture. Thanks to specific competencies, cultural content can be passed on to the next generations and the cultural capital can be enriched with new values and patterns. These are necessary for full participation in society (Zacłona, Lisowska, 2018).

According to A. Thomas's concept, intercultural competencies are understood as the ability to notice and respect in oneself and in other people the cultural conditions and factors that affect perception, evaluation, feeling and behaviour. Moreover, it is the ability to use them productively, in the meaning of mutual adjustment, from tolerance towards incompatibilities to the development of synergistic forms of cooperation and patterns of interpretation and creation of the reality around us. Intercultural competence understood in this way is an increasingly

necessary element in modern organizations, which increases flexibility in situations of contact with different behaviours and communication styles (Thomas, 2003).

As can be seen from the above definitions, the concept of intercultural competence is a broad concept. It includes not only knowledge of customs, behaviour, language, values, social norms, the ability to respond appropriately in the event of contact with a different culture, but also attitudes of openness, tolerance and respect towards culturally different people (Barney, 1991).

In business, intercultural competence plays a significant role in every area of a company's activity, i.e. formulating a vision and mission, establishing a business profile, obtaining various permits, designing goods and services, managing human capital, acquiring and retaining customers, building relationships with the environment and the employer's image. The dynamically changing conditions in which enterprises operate increasingly require the expansion of their operations into foreign markets and the building of a network of international contacts.

It should be remembered, however, that cultural competencies are not only the responsibility of the managers, but also the employees of the entire organization. It is important to create awareness of the existence of cultural differences and the benefits resulting from them.

The acquisition and development of cultural competencies is a complex and long-term process. Initially, it is important to get to know the native culture, because the environment is perceived and assessed best through the prism of the values rooted in it. Next, it is important to develop cultural awareness among all the employees and even their families. Finally, it is important to model the organizational culture towards flexibility and innovation and to shape a favourable climate for it (Nikitrowicz et al., 2019).

5. Intercultural Competencies of a Manager

A global manager combines the role of an intercultural connector, an intercultural negotiator, a person initiating the process of intercultural synergy and a leader operating at the crossroads of cultures (Nowakowski, 1999). It is not possible to build a universal profile of an intercultural manager, which results from the diversity of organizations and their environments. However, it can be attempted to identify certain key components of these competencies.

They include but are not limited to: high interpersonal skills (including greater orientation towards people than tasks), linguistic skills, motivation to live abroad and cultural curiosity, tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity, flexibility and willingness to adapt, patience, expressing respect for others, cultural empathy, a sense of humour (as a buffer for frustration, a safety valve in depression or a trigger for interpersonal relationships) as well as cross-

culturally determined specialist knowledge and skills regarding the type of work or task performed. Naturally, an additional area are qualification requirements depending on the area and culture of the manager's country of work. The cultural factor is one of the most important variables that determine the success of international management (Stor, 2009).

The competence profile of an intercultural manager is closely related to the specificity of the international market. Therefore, the manager must be characterized by high sensitivity to cultural needs, the ability to adapt and learn from others, the spirit of entrepreneurship and communication skills in conditions of cultural diversity. Other desirable features include: the ability to identify and combine the best elements from different cultures, the ability to introduce a new work culture in multinational teams, and the efficiency in using practical instruments that counteract cultural clashes. These features are characteristic of a global leader who achieves cultural synergy (Pocztowski, 2007; Bieniek, Steinerowska, 2014).

The managers' command of intercultural competencies in modern organizations has become a necessity and is a valuable resource of the company as it provides many benefits. It constitutes significantly facilitated cooperation with foreign partners and building lasting relationships with them (Kacprzak et al., 2017); it enables minimizing or avoiding failure associated with introducing goods and services to foreign markets. Intercultural competencies also help to avoid losing an attractive contract as a result of poorly conducted negotiations and increase the effectiveness of communication with clients. They can also help to improve the process of managing employees of different cultures or increase the number of innovations implemented as a result of the work of teams which consist of culturally diverse employees. For example, in this context the word *planning* is optimized, e.g. in relation to the meaning of the word *tomorrow* – in some cultures it means *immediately*, in others *never*. The manager's cultural competencies can significantly reduce stress before business meetings and improve the quality and comfort of work in intercultural environments. Important benefits also include preventing the repetition of stereotypes and reducing the risks associated with running a business in other countries or on other continents (Dołęga, 2023).

6. The Role of Managers in Shaping the Cultural Competencies in Employees

A modern manager must play many important roles in the organization, which is closely related to the dynamics of changes taking place both inside and outside them. According to I. Stańczyk (2018), the roles of a modern personnel manager include: leadership, implementing changes, improving communication, negotiating and the development of oneself and one's subordinates.

A personnel manager in the role of a leader – thanks to his knowledge, skills, attitudes and personality traits – is a person in the organization who serves as a role model that determines courses of action and influences the behaviour of others in order to accomplish a specific task. The manager focuses on employees and tasks in effective fulfilling of the role of a leader, (Stańczyk, 2018).

The manager is also a change promoter. He or she is the one who prepares, organizes, manages and implements changes in order to introduce them effectively and convince those who are undecided. In addition, he or she ensures the implementation and maintenance of new procedures and behavioural patterns. The leader indicates the direction and vision in the process of change in the organization. It is the leader's task is to motivate towards efficiency and creative work – they therefore inspire and engage members of the organization in the process of changes implemented (Kania, 2015).

One of the important roles of the managerial staff is also to ensure efficient, fair and precise communication within the organizational unit. Thanks to their skills, the personnel manager can anticipate communication difficulties and remove obstacles, while recognizing the communication styles of co-workers, superiors and employees (Stańczyk, 2018; Żukowski, 2008).

The manager in an organization must also be an effective negotiator. This skill is one of the basic characteristics of managers in general, not only because of their contact with customers, but also due to the need for fruitful cooperation with employees and superiors.

The manager is also the creator of their own and their subordinates' development. In order to increase efficiency and effectiveness, he or she fulfils the remaining roles needed to develop its own competencies. At the same time, the manager's role is to motivate and control the development of their subordinates (Żukowski, 2008).

The manager's role in competency management is to define a specific competence model, applicable to employees. This role should be described and classified by the scope of responsibility, authority and behavioural patterns. The manager should appropriately define competency profiles in several possible ways. An example would be a radar chart, containing competencies arranged in rings with radiating scales of competency levels. If the scale has an equal number of levels for all competencies, such a representation takes the form of a radar (Parsloe, Wray, 2002). The radar levels here are: conscientiousness, drawing conclusions, vision, strategic perspective, resource management, communication skills, motivation, ability to develop, achieving goals, self-awareness, emotional resilience, intuition, feeling and exerting influence.

Table 1.

The manager in the shaping of cultural competencies in employees

Item	UP Wrocław	SGGW Warszawa	UP Poznań	UR Kraków	UP Lublin	UP-H Siedlce
Is a role model	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Focus on employees and tasks	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Change promoter	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Ensuring efficient communication	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Effective negotiator	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Creator of own and subordinates' development	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Attitudes focused on tolerance and mutual respect	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Openness to others, to cooperation with people of other cultures and nationalities	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Source: author's own study based on the websites of agricultural universities.

With reference the above considerations, managers play a significant role in shaping employees' competencies, including cultural competencies. These include mainly promoting among employees the attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect, openness to others, active participation in the process of learning and sharing the acquired knowledge and experiences and openness to cooperation with people of other cultures and nationalities (Żukowski, 2008). The managers in modern organizations, including those of higher education, have a wide range of tools to help them achieve the above goal, such as: training, evaluation, motivational instruments, including non-remuneration ones (such as work-life-balance programs, benefits, etc.), which shape a particular culture and climate of the organization. Naturally, the managerial staff itself should be a role model for their subordinates and set a good example through the adopted patterns of attitudes and behaviour.

7. Shaping the Manager's Intercultural Competencies

Shaping the manager's intercultural competencies is quite a broad issue, due to the increasing number of available instruments for implementing related activities, such as constantly modified or emerging new types and kinds of training.

The competencies of the managers, and all the employees in general, can be developed in three key areas, i.e. cognitive (knowledge), affective (skills, including communication) and behavioural (attitudes).

In the subject literature various divisions of competence improvement methods can be found, by many authors and according to various criteria. The basic division includes formal education, on-the-job training and learning in action (Jabłoński, 2009).

The basic ways of improving competencies include: lectures, conferences, reading, e-learning, role-playing, case analysis, job rotation, quality circles, survival training, *self-coaching, coaching, e-coaching*, mentoring or learning by doing. (Musioł-Urbańczyk, 2010). The choice of the appropriate method depends on many factors. What should be taken into account first is the type of competence to be improved and the preferred, individual learning style of a given person (Musioł-Urbańczyk, 2010).

The specificity of intercultural competencies results in a specific typology of intercultural training, which should be supplemented with several non-standard areas. These include: information training, attribute training, cultural awareness training, conscious behaviour modification, experiential learning and interactive behaviour. Below is a brief description thereof.

Information training involves making the managers aware of the socio-economic conditions that prevail in a given country and explaining the reasons for experiencing culture shock. They usually take the form of traditional lectures, often supported by audiovisual recordings.

Attribute training is a method of the so-called cultural assimilation, which enables the adoption of international standards through the analysis of critical situations (a variant of *case study*).

Cultural awareness training involves making people aware of cultural differences by analogy to the values specific to their own culture and by making participants familiar with the basics of international relations.

Training in the modification of conscious behavior is a method of teaching by solving various adaptive problems. Learning through experience, on the other hand, involves explaining cultural differences through active participation in simulation games that enable direct contact with another culture.

The interactive approach includes solutions that allow participants to interact with representatives of culturally different countries, which is to contribute to shortening the time needed for full adaptation when taking up a foreign position (Beniek, Steinerowska, 2014; Schroeder, 2000).

To sum up, intercultural training aimed at developing "global minds" is conducted using a wide set of tools, including both traditional and modern training techniques that range from classic lectures or simulations to language training, knowledge exchange platforms, videoconferencing and online advisory (Rakowska, 2007; Król, 2016). More frequently, appropriate educational methods include: work in culturally diverse teams, implementing international projects or occasional trips abroad, aimed at familiarizing the managers with the target environment (Rakowska, 2007; Bieniek, Steinerowska, 2014).

People with a well-developed awareness of their own intercultural competence are more flexible, tolerant, and distanced from using stereotypical thinking and prejudices. Eliminating these barriers promotes effective communication and building relationships within the team.

This is a step towards effective cooperation and openness to changes (Król, 2016; Kacprzak, Król, 2015).

In addition to training in cultural differences, language courses and training in disciplines such as international law, stress management, and e.g. savoir-vivre in multicultural business are also important (Rakowska, 2007; Król, 2016; Bieniek, Steinerowska, 2014).

Table 2.
Improving managerial competencies at universities fit for the 21st century

Item	UP Wrocław	SGGW Warszawa	UP Poznań	UR Kraków	UP Lublin	UP-H Siedlce
Employment of foreigners	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
International exchange	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Foreign trips of scientific staff	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
International projects	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Working in culturally diverse teams	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Knowledge exchange platforms	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Cooperation and openness to change	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Training and language courses	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Source: author's own study based on the websites of agricultural universities.

Each of the universities indicated in table 2 fits into the concept of society 5.0 or a society of imagination, a society using modern technologies and modern teaching techniques.

To sum up, a manager's work requires continuous improvement of general and specialized knowledge, acquisition and development of new skills and managerial competencies. Managers must constantly be ready to adopt new ideas, technologies, structures, good economic practices and cultural values; they must seek opportunities for permanent learning. It is their responsibility to establish the standards of values and behaviour required by the institution. Hence, it is necessary to constantly improve the in-depth knowledge of the institution and its area of operation, while striving for the highest possible efficiency and dedication at work, responsibility for one's own actions and the work of one's subordinates, sensitivity to human affairs, interpersonal and intercultural problems, tolerance towards different cultures, supporting and stimulating the development of colleagues and subordinates (Żukowski, 2008).

8. Summary

It has become an essential requirement in the face of changes taking place in organizations for the managers to have cultural competence. Functioning in a culturally different world has become a reality. These changes were also gradually noticed in all agricultural universities. Curriculums have changed and a trend related to intercultural competencies can be clearly seen in the implementation of individual subjects. When analyzing the profile of graduates from

particular fields, the emphasis on key cultural competencies can also be noticed. International conferences and seminars are systematically organized at universities, and the publications issued are an important instrument for developing this type of competencies. Also, by undertaking studies with foreigners, cooperation with foreign lecturers and international projects, the students have contact with representatives of different cultures and have the opportunity to practically develop intercultural competencies and recognize their essence and importance. With reference to the above considerations, it should be stated that it is not an overstatement to say that Polish agricultural universities are tailored for the 21st century and fit into the concept of society 5.0.

This article certainly does not exhaust the topic, but it is undoubtedly a basis for opening a discussion in this area, especially in matters of improving activities related to the development of competencies, especially the cultural competencies of future managerial staff and the development of higher education.

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