



E-ISSN: 3108-4176

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies

2023, Volume 4, Page No: 186-193

Available online at: <https://apsshs.com/>

Annals of Organizational Culture, Leadership and External Engagement Journal

Managers' Awareness of Diversity Management Benefits: An Empirical Study of Organizations in Poland

Jonas P. Eriksson^{1*}, Lena Holm¹, Karin Sjöberg¹

1. Department of Business Administration, School of Economics and Management, Lund University, Lund, Sweden.

Abstract

A fundamental step in developing a strong business case for diversity is gaining a clear understanding of how diversity is defined in the workplace and the advantages it offers organizations. Moreover, the effective implementation of inclusive workplace practices requires managers to be aware of the potential outcomes and value generated by diversity management. In response to this need, the present article reports the findings of a survey examining organizational representatives' perceptions of the benefits associated with adopting diversity management principles. The empirical analysis is based on data collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic from a sample of 1,076 representatives of small, medium-sized, and large enterprises operating in Poland. The study examined both familiarity with the diversity management concept and awareness of its perceived benefits, considering the overall sample as well as comparisons across firms of different sizes. To achieve this, selected modified multi-criteria decision-making techniques appropriate for ordinal data were applied. This analytical approach enabled the identification of the key benefits that representatives of organizations of varying sizes associate with the implementation of diversity management. Overall, respondents reported a relatively strong positive influence of diversity management practices on most of the organizational benefits discussed in the study. Nevertheless, correlation analysis revealed notable differences in perceptions between representatives of small, medium, and large enterprises regarding the advantages diversity management may offer. In contrast, the views expressed by respondents from medium-sized and large organizations showed a relatively high degree of consistency.

Keywords: Diversity management, Business diversity, Work environment, Organization, Diversity management concept

How to cite this article: Eriksson JP, Holm L, Sjöberg K. Managers' awareness of diversity management benefits: An empirical study of organizations in Poland. *Ann Organ Cult Leadersh Extern Engagem J.* 2023;4:186-93. <https://doi.org/10.51847/9giqnfH07>

Received: 24 November 2022; **Revised:** 05 February 2023; **Accepted:** 05 February 2023

Corresponding author: Jonas P. Eriksson

E-mail ✉ jonas.eriksson@gmail.com

Introduction

Despite the extensive attention given to diversity and diversity management in academic discourse since the 1980s, and its widespread adoption as a managerial approach, the concept remains ambiguous and lacks a universally accepted definition. Historical analyses indicate that during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, organizational efforts related to diversity were primarily focused on addressing discrimination based on race and gender [1-3]. These initiatives were largely driven by three main factors. First, organizations sought to prevent potential social unrest from affecting workplace stability. Second, compliance with equal employment opportunity legislation and regulatory requirements was necessary. Third, ethical considerations motivated organizations to act in accordance with prevailing moral standards and organizational values.

It was only in the late 1980s and 1990s, alongside emerging demographic and economic transformations, that diversity began to be approached from a strategic perspective. Organizations increasingly recognized diversity as a source of innovation and economic value rather than solely as a response to legal obligations or ethical imperatives. Although some progressive firms acknowledged the importance of proactive diversity initiatives as early as the 1970s and 1980s, it was not until the end of the



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twentieth century that diversity management gained broader recognition as a formal organizational concept. Consequently, diversity-related programs started to be viewed as instruments for enhancing organizational performance and competitive advantage, rather than merely as mechanisms for preventing discrimination [4, 5].

In the contemporary business environment, organizational activities are shaped by both internal dynamics and external market conditions, requiring continuous adaptation to global and local competitive pressures. As a result, organizational success and long-term competitiveness increasingly depend on the ability to embrace workforce diversity and effectively leverage its potential benefits [6-8]. From this perspective, organizations can no longer afford to disregard diversity among key stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and shareholders, if they aim to sustain a competitive position.

The literature characterizes diversity management as an interdisciplinary concept drawing on economic, social, and biological perspectives. Diversity is often framed as a learning-oriented approach embedded within inclusive practices [9] and equal opportunity policies. This perspective assumes that recognizing and valuing individual differences fosters a productive organizational climate in which employees feel respected, their capabilities are fully utilized, and organizational objectives are more effectively achieved [10]. Moreover, diversity management is frequently described not merely as a corrective or balancing mechanism, but as a strategic effort to transform organizational culture, addressing critiques of traditional liberal approaches to equality [11].

Accordingly, when diversity is regarded as a desirable organizational attribute, companies are encouraged to take deliberate actions to increase workforce heterogeneity. Conversely, when diversity is already present—whether as a result of earlier initiatives or external circumstances—diversity management must focus on creating an inclusive work environment that supports and integrates existing differences [3, 12].

Despite growing interest in the topic, relatively few empirical studies have examined how organizations actively contribute to building and managing a diverse workforce, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. This research gap persists even though previous studies have highlighted the positive effects and advantages associated with diversity management. In response to this gap, the present study addresses the following research question: what level of knowledge do managers of small, medium-sized, and large enterprises in Poland possess regarding the benefits of diversity management?

To answer this question, the study draws on data from a nationwide survey examining intellectual capital management and diversity management practices among Polish enterprises. The survey was conducted using CATI and CAWI methodologies on a representative sample of 1,067 companies employing at least ten individuals. The research design assumed a confidence level of 0.95 and a maximum estimation error of 3%. The sample was proportionally structured according to enterprise size, geographical location (by province), and sector of economic activity, in line with the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD). The sampling framework was developed using data from the Central Statistical Office as of January 2019. Interviews were carried out with managerial-level representatives of the participating organizations.

Raising awareness of the potential benefits associated with diversity management has both educational and promotional significance. Such knowledge constitutes an important resource that organizations can leverage to strengthen their competitive advantage. The remainder of this article begins with a review of relevant literature, followed by a presentation of the research objectives. Subsequently, the research methodology and empirical findings are discussed. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and final conclusions.

Literature review

In its broadest sense, diversity encompasses any noticeable differences or similarities among individuals, whether visible or not, leading to a comprehensive and inclusive framework [8, 13-18]. Diversity is conceptualized as the collection of traits that differentiate one individual from another within a workforce context, while also acknowledging shared attributes.

Furthermore, diversity can be described as the integration of individuals with varied backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints to accomplish organizational objectives. Beyond mere inclusion, workplace diversity involves appreciating these distinctions, ensuring employees from various groups feel at ease, fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment, and developing strategies to attract and retain members of underrepresented populations.

Scholars frequently adopt a more limited viewpoint, focusing primarily on cultural elements like gender or race [19]. This narrower lens often aligns closely with equal employment opportunity (EEO) initiatives rather than full-fledged diversity management. Nonetheless, additional dimensions—such as age, ethnicity, disability, and religion—have received growing attention in recent years [16]. At its core, diversity encompasses every way in which individuals may differ [8, 18], and it is valuable to emphasize that this includes areas of similarity as well. Critics of the narrow approach contend that diversity rooted in race, ethnicity, or gender cannot be equated with differences based on organizational roles or abilities, as these variances produce distinct impacts. It is crucial to recognize behaviors that may lead to discrimination or exclusion of specific groups within organizations [20-22]. Additionally, adopting an all-encompassing view of diversity across every social category can complicate efforts to pinpoint discriminatory actions.

Diversity management, meanwhile, is a wide-ranging concept with varying interpretations across scholarly works [18, 23]. Examining these contributions reveals it as an interdisciplinary domain drawing from economic, social, and biological viewpoints.

According to Özbilgin and Tatli [24], diversity management represents a managerial approach that acknowledges and appreciates organizational diversity to boost performance. Egan and Bendick [4] portray it as the deliberate development of initiatives and processes to enhance interactions among employees differing in ethnicity, gender, and culture, transforming diversity into a driver of innovation, synergy, and greater effectiveness. Overall, diversity management entails leveraging the full spectrum of organizational talent while avoiding ethnocentric biases and preconceptions [1]. For employee cohorts, it involves enacting policies that promote innovation and creativity, address skill shortages, and elevate service quality. This aligns with strategic adaptation to external environments [16, 25, 26].

Benefits of diversity management in organizations

Insights from scholars and practitioners indicate that adopting diversity management yields numerous advantages across strategic, tactical, and operational levels. It enhances short- and medium-term operational efficiency while strengthening long-term strategic resources. Efforts in diversity management help build and reinforce human and organizational capital, key drivers of contemporary success. As Poczowski [27] highlights, managing human resource diversity requires cultivating leadership attuned to cultural and other differences, capable of uniting teams with varied backgrounds and preferences.

A synthesis of studies on workforce diversity and its oversight suggests that diversity positively influences outcomes like productivity, creativity, and innovation [28, 29], alongside benefits for teams and individuals [30]. Employees can expand their expertise by drawing on colleagues' varied experiences.

The prevailing business justification [5] for diversity initiatives is that a heterogeneous workforce delivers advantages, including superior talent acquisition and retention from broader pools; synergistic creativity boosting productivity; deeper insight into diverse markets [19, 31, 32]; and mitigated talent shortages with lower turnover from an economic standpoint [33]. Scholarly agreement exists on diversity management's organizational gains, though variations emerge based on factors like firm size or sector [2, 29].

For this investigation, the following research questions have been posed: Do small, medium, and large enterprises in Poland report a substantial influence from diversity management on firm performance? Is there variation in how these company sizes in Poland view the advantages of diversity management adoption? Do small firms in Poland assess the gains from diversity management differently compared to their medium and large counterparts?

Materials and Methods

Data sources

This study aimed to pinpoint and rank the primary advantages stemming from effective diversity management within organizations. Insights were drawn from managerial-level respondents across small, medium, and large Polish companies.

The data originated from a comprehensive nationwide survey called "Intellectual Capital and Diversity Management in Polish Enterprises: Opportunities and Obstacles," executed by the Łukasiewicz Research Network – Institute of Organisation and Management in Industry (ORGMASZ) before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research utilized both Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) and Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) approaches. It involved a statistically representative sample of 1,067 enterprises in Poland (all with a minimum of 10 employees), achieving a 95% confidence interval and a 3% maximum sampling error.

Prior academic work and empirical studies strongly support the positive influence of diversity management on business operations (e.g., Kornau *et al.* [3]; European Union [29]; Bell [13]; Köllen [12]; Konrad *et al.* [34]; Jefmański *et al.* [35]; Mor Barak [16]). By synthesizing these findings, we compiled a list of the main potential advantages that diversity management offers to companies, presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Key Potential Advantages for Organizations from Implementing Diversity Management

No.	Organizational Benefit
B1	Enhanced employee retention rates
B2	Improved ability to attract and retain talented employees
B3	Reduction in workplace stress levels
B4	Strengthening of internal employee communication
B5	Growth in employee motivation
B6	Higher levels of employee involvement and commitment
B7	Decrease in the occurrence of workplace conflicts
B8	Enhancement of teamwork quality and operational efficiency

The study applies the Intuitionistic Fuzzy Synthetic Measure (IFSM) approach, incorporating two benchmark reference points—namely, the ideal reference point and the anti-ideal reference point—to establish a ranking of organizational benefits evaluated by respondents using a nominal measurement scale. The IFSM value for the i -th evaluated object is computed using the following formula:

$$\text{IFSM}_i = 1 - \frac{d_i^+}{d_i^\pm} \quad (1)$$

where d_i^+ represents the distance between the i -th object and the ideal reference point, and d_i^\pm denotes the distance between the ideal and anti-ideal reference points.

The resulting IFSM values are normalized within the interval [0,1] [0,1] [0,1], with higher values indicating a more favorable ranking position among the assessed benefits. A comprehensive description of the IFSM methodology, including each procedural step, is provided by Roszkowska *et al.* [36].

The IFSM technique enabled the ordering of benefits based on entrepreneurs' perceptions expressed through three response categories: yes, no, and I do not know. These categorical responses were subsequently converted into intuitionistic fuzzy numbers following a transformation procedure detailed by Jefmański *et al.* [35]. The intuitionistic fuzzy representations of benefit assessments are presented in **Tables 2–4**, differentiated by enterprise size.

Table 2. Assessment of diversity management benefits among small enterprises

Benefit Code	Membership degree (mi)	Non-membership degree (ni)	Hesitation degree (pi)
B1	0.621	0.187	0.192
B2	0.745	0.129	0.126
B3	0.748	0.131	0.120
B4	0.865	0.065	0.070
B5	0.847	0.067	0.085
B6	0.843	0.061	0.097
B7	0.785	0.098	0.117
B8	0.853	0.060	0.088

Table 3. Assessment of diversity management benefits among medium-sized enterprises

Benefit identifier	Degree of membership (mi)	Degree of non-membership (ni)	Degree of uncertainty (pi)
B1	0.583	0.179	0.238
B2	0.781	0.106	0.113
B3	0.715	0.139	0.146
B4	0.815	0.093	0.093
B5	0.815	0.099	0.086
B6	0.808	0.060	0.132
B7	0.715	0.152	0.132
B8	0.821	0.086	0.093

Table 4. Assessment of diversity management benefits among large enterprises

Benefit code	Membership degree (mi)	Non-membership degree (ni)	Indeterminacy degree (pi)
B1	0.409	0.182	0.409
B2	0.682	0.091	0.227
B3	0.545	0.182	0.273
B4	0.727	0.136	0.136
B5	0.818	0.045	0.136
B6	0.727	0.045	0.227
B7	0.591	0.091	0.318
B8	0.773	0.091	0.136

Two benchmark reference points were identified based on the most advantageous and least advantageous values of the intuitionistic fuzzy parameters observed in the dataset. These benchmarks correspond to the ideal and anti-ideal reference points. To compute the distances between intuitionistic fuzzy sets, the Euclidean distance metric was applied.

Results and Discussion

To establish a hierarchy of diversity management benefits, a method employing two reference points—ideal and anti-ideal—was applied. This approach facilitates the ranking of benefits evaluated by respondents using a nominal response scale. The selection of this method was driven by the nature of the data collection tool, namely an electronic questionnaire, and the ordinal scale used to assess perceived benefits.

The application of the Intuitionistic Fuzzy Synthetic Measure (IFSM) enabled the determination of benefit importance rankings for small, medium-sized, and large enterprises. The resulting rankings are presented in the subsequent tables (Tables 5–7).

Table 5. IFSM scores and ranking of diversity management benefits in large enterprises

Benefit code	Rank position	IFSM value
B1	8	0.000
B2	5	0.667
B3	7	0.345
B4	3	0.748
B5	1	1.000
B6	4	0.748
B7	6	0.423
B8	2	0.874

Table 6. IFSM scores and ranking of diversity management benefits in medium-sized enterprises

Benefit code	IFSM value	Rank position
B1	0.000	8
B2	0.790	5
B3	0.537	6
B4	0.853	3
B5	0.821	4
B6	0.936	1
B7	0.516	7
B8	0.872	2

Table 7. IFSM scores and ranking of diversity management benefits in small enterprises

Benefit code	IFSM value	Rank position
B1	0.000	8
B2	0.505	7
B3	0.517	6
B4	0.973	1
B5	0.926	3
B6	0.896	4
B7	0.673	5
B8	0.941	2

Descriptive statistics for the IFSM measure in three groups of enterprises are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary statistics for IFSM values by enterprise size

IFSM statistic	Small enterprises	Medium-sized enterprises	Large enterprises
Maximum value	0.973	0.936	1.000
Minimum value	0.000	0.000	0.000
Standard deviation	0.334	0.310	0.325

The evaluations of organizational benefits expressed through IFSM values across all three enterprise groups are generally high, with scores exceeding 0.5 in the majority of cases. The degree of variability in these assessments, as indicated by the standard deviation, is very similar across the analyzed groups. Correlations between the benefit rankings, calculated using Kendall's tau-b coefficient, can be described as moderate. The strongest statistically significant association, at the 0.05 significance level, was identified between the rankings of small and large enterprises ($\tau = 0.643$; $p = 0.026$). In contrast, the relationship between the rankings of small and medium-sized enterprises did not reach statistical significance ($\tau = 0.500$; $p = 0.083$).

The IFSM values reported in Tables 4–6 indicate that respondents generally perceived the implementation of diversity management practices as having a substantial influence on most of the organizational benefits examined in this study. Nevertheless, analysis of the correlation matrix demonstrates that perceptions of these benefits differ among representatives of small, medium-sized, and large enterprises operating in Poland. A relatively high level of consistency was observed between the views expressed by respondents from medium-sized and large organizations.

When comparing the benefit rankings, both large and medium-sized enterprises identified the same benefits at positions 2, 5, and 8. These shared rankings relate to employee retention (B1), talent acquisition and retention (B5), and increased employee motivation (B2). Representatives of large enterprises indicated that the most significant impact of diversity management is observed in enhanced employee motivation (B5), while respondents from medium-sized enterprises emphasized increased

employee engagement (B6) as the primary benefit. In contrast, participants from small enterprises most frequently identified improved communication among employees (B4) as the key outcome of diversity management.

Across all three organizational size categories, the second most highly ranked benefit of diversity management was the improvement of teamwork quality and effectiveness (B8). Furthermore, respondents from large and medium-sized enterprises consistently identified enhanced employee communication as the third most important benefit. Finally, irrespective of organizational size, respondents agreed that diversity management exerts the least influence on increasing employee retention (B1).

Organizations of all sizes operating in Central and Eastern Europe—including Poland—are increasingly confronted with culturally and generationally diverse workforces, which present new and complex managerial challenges [2, 37, 38]. Despite these developments, empirical research on diversity management and its organizational benefits in this region remains limited, with most existing contributions confined largely to conceptual or theoretical discussions [4, 12, 39]. In Poland, systematic and deliberate efforts to manage workforce diversity and foster inclusive organizational environments have only gained momentum in recent years. These efforts reflect both an increasing recognition of the potential embedded in diverse human resources and a growing awareness of the need for intentional diversity-related management practices.

These changes are occurring in the context of broader demographic shifts, globalization processes, and rising migration flows, all of which significantly influence labor markets and organizational workforce structures [6, 31, 40-42]. Given persistent labor shortages, organizations may partially address staffing challenges by more effectively leveraging underutilized human capital, including employees from different age groups and cultural backgrounds.

The findings presented in this study reveal substantial differences in how small, medium-sized, and large enterprises in Poland perceive the benefits of implementing diversity management practices. Representatives of large organizations identified enhanced employee motivation, improved teamwork quality and efficiency, and better internal communication as the most significant outcomes of diversity management. In contrast, benefits such as increased employee retention, reduced stress levels, and fewer workplace conflicts were considered less influential. Responses from medium-sized enterprises showed partial alignment with those of large firms, with respondents emphasizing increased employee engagement, stronger teamwork, and improved communication as the primary benefits, while again assigning lower importance to employee retention, conflict reduction, and stress mitigation. Notably, respondents from small enterprises most frequently highlighted improved communication among employees as the key advantage of diversity management.

Recognizing the benefits associated with workplace diversity constitutes a critical step in the effective implementation of diversity management practices. Prior research suggests that perceptions of diversity-related outcomes may vary depending on organizational size [19]. Accordingly, examining the perceived benefits of diversity management across small, medium-sized, and large enterprises in Poland provides valuable insights into how organizations can better utilize human capital and strengthen the competitive position of the regional economy [18, 32].

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on diversity management and human resource management by offering an empirical examination of diversity management practices across organizations of different sizes operating in Poland. The primary objective was to develop a more nuanced understanding of which diversity management benefits are recognized by small, medium-sized, and large enterprises, as well as the relative importance assigned to these benefits by organizational decision-makers.

By identifying patterns in managers' perceptions, the study provides insights that can support human resource professionals in more effectively managing organizational knowledge, including its creation, dissemination, and application. Transforming empirical data into actionable knowledge enables managers to enhance organizational performance and supports the integration of diversity management into broader strategic decision-making processes. In this sense, information regarding the perceived benefits of diversity management can serve as a valuable source of operational and strategic knowledge that organizations may leverage to achieve long-term competitive advantage [12, 16].

Furthermore, this article highlights the strategic relevance of diversity management in organizational contexts, particularly for companies operating in Poland. For practitioners, the findings emphasize that the deliberate development of a diverse workforce can be a meaningful contributor to competitive advantage. For scholars, the results underscore the importance of considering organizational size when examining diversity management outcomes and point to the need for continued empirical research in this area.

From a practical perspective, the implications of the study are twofold. First, the findings stress the critical role of managerial awareness and understanding of diversity management in achieving organizational success. Second, they demonstrate that insufficient knowledge of the benefits associated with diversity management may impede its effective implementation. Addressing this challenge requires organizations to go beyond data-driven approaches and invest in developing managerial competencies that facilitate meaningful engagement with workforce diversity.

Limitations and future research

Research on workplace diversity continues to evolve, with increasing attention devoted to identifying priorities, measurement approaches, and the links between diversity management initiatives and organizational outcomes. Ongoing societal and demographic transformations in Europe, including Poland, are likely to further influence organizational structures and management practices. As organizations become more diverse in both their internal composition and external environments, the need to deepen understanding of diversity management and its role in organizational effectiveness becomes increasingly pressing.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. One constraint relates to the focus on organizations operating within a single national context. Future research could extend the scope by including a broader range of industries, a larger number of organizations, or comparative cross-national analyses. Additionally, further studies may explore barriers to the implementation of diversity management practices and examine how these barriers interact with perceived organizational benefits. Such research would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which diversity management can be most effectively leveraged in organizational settings.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: None

Ethics statement: None

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