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# Cultural Diversity Management: The Theoretical and Practical Aspect

Discussion on the essence of the concept of cultural diversity management, analysis of best practices in this area as implemented by IBM, and the premise behind the creation of a model of cultural diversity management are the goals of this article. It also presents the problems associated with defining the concept of *cultural diversity management*. However, it does define the terms *culture*, *diversity*, and *cultural diversity*, going on to characterize their dimensions. Additionally, the article analyzes activities undertaken in the field of cultural diversity management by IBM. It ends with thoughts on a concept for a cultural diversity management model. The study also reviews topical literature applying the descriptive method.

**Key words:** culture, diversity, cultural diversity management

## Introduction

Ongoing globalization, intensifying integration processes, an increasing scale of migration, and labor market changes all mean that the labor environment of contemporary organizations is made up of people from various cultures. This makes the concept of managing cultural diversity grow in importance and finds expression in numerous scientific publications devoted to the matter itself as well as ways of managing it. Topical literature indicates that effective employee diversity management makes possible an increase in the level of innovation in the organization and, as a consequence, the achieving of competitive advantage on the market. It also facilitates the creation of optimum working conditions in order to fully utilize the potential inherent in diverse human capital. The multi-aspect nature of this subject is a result of the multiplicity of theoretical concepts and practical experience. In

entering the debate on questions of employee diversity management, the goal of this article is a discussion on the essence of the concept of cultural diversity management as well as an analysis of best practice in this area as undertaken by IBM—a premise for the building of a postulative model for cultural diversity management. This article also provides an overview of topical literature utilizing the descriptive method.

## The Essence and Dimensions of Cultural Diversity

The word *culture* is from the Latin *cultura*, which means cultivation or care (Latusek and Puchalska, 2003). In many languages the word *culture* is associated with civilization or a defined and refined intellect as found in art, literature, and education. Such an understanding refers to a narrow view of culture. In line with a broad approach, something that is characteristic of social anthropology, culture is seen as a manner of thinking, feeling, and reacting (Hofstede, 2000).

Analysis of economic literature indicates a plethora of definitions of the concept of culture. This confirms the multidimensional nature of this subject matter. Among the most well-known researchers into culture are G. Hofstede, E. H. Schein, K. S. Cameron, and R. E. Quinn. According to a proposal by G. Hofstede (2000), culture is a collectively programmed mind that differentiates members of a defined group or people of a given category from another. The group defines people who are in direct contact. The category describes people who, in spite of having common qualities, do not have to be in direct contact.

As seen by G. Hofstede (2000), culture may be analyzed on many levels corresponding to the layers of culture he isolated:

- National (and national cultures in the case of emigrants);
- As stemming from belonging to an ethnic, regional, language, or religious group;
- In connection with a defined sex;
- Generational;
- By social class (defining the ability to gain an education, profession, or perform work);
- Organizational or corporational (with respect to role or position in a defined workplace).

In management science, the question of culture is most often examined in the context of the organization. It is the view of E. H. Schein (2004) that organizational culture is the model behind commonly held fundamental assumptions learned by a group during the solving of problems tied to external adaptation and internal integration that function sufficiently well to be considered as being sufficiently valu-

able and important to be passed on to new members of the group as a proper way of thinking, perceiving, and feeling with respect to such problems.

As to the basic assumptions shared by a given group, the definition of the concept of culture was formulated by K. S. Cameron and R. E. Quinn (2006). In line with their interpretation, organizational culture defines the way of thinking, values, paradigms, management style, and approach to the solving of problems. A similar position was taken by L. W. Rue and P. G. Holland (1989). In their view organizational culture is a set of convictions and beliefs that function within the given organization. They relate to the manner of conducting business, treating employees, and behavior in the work environment.

The results of the empirical research conducted by N. J. Adler and A. Gundersen (2008) point to the significant impact of national culture on the professed values, behavior, and attitudes of people in the workplace. The importance of national culture as a determinant of differences among people in the work environment is also confirmed by the research results received by G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede, and M. Minkov (2010). It was on the basis of research results that these authors built a model encompassing the following dimensions of national culture: power distance (from large to small), individualism or collectivism, masculinity or femininity, uncertainty avoidance (from weak to strong), long-term orientation or short-term orientation, and indulgence or restraint. Also worth stressing is that the above-isolated culture levels are determined by significant cultural diversity among the employees of a given organizations.

Topical literature indicates numerous ways of looking at cultural diversity. The essence of diversity is reflected in the definition developed by M. Linehan and E. Hanappi-Egger (2006). In their view diversity relates to divergences in the social and cultural identities of people functioning together in a given work environment. According to an interpretation by T. H. Cox (1993), cultural diversity means the representation, within the framework of a single social system, of people belonging to many groups of decidedly different cultural meanings. E. E. Kossek and S. C. Zonia (1993) formulated a definition of cultural diversity as it relates to determinants of diversity. According to them, cultural diversity defines the differences that exist among people depending on their race or ethnic origins. Examples include language, religion, dress, or moral code. Topical literature also presents many classifications of the dimensions of employee diversity (Table No. 1).

Analysis of the dimensions of diversity as presented in topical literature indicates that the most commonly identified are those defined as primary and secondary. The primary dimension applies to the most visible qualities, which are usually biological in nature. The secondary dimension relates to qualities that are less visible

or invisible and whose recognition in the workplace requires time. Worth stressing is that a concrete category of diversity may be assigned to many different dimensions. Moreover, many researchers understand diversity dimensions in a similar way. This is confirmed in the classification of diversity dimensions as found in Table No. 1.

**Table No. 1.** Overview of Employee Diversity Dimensions

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Authors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Primary</li> <li>■ Secondary</li> </ul>	B. L. Reece and R. Brandt (1993) E. Lim and P. Noriega (2007) C. Rosado (2008)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Primary</li> <li>■ Secondary</li> <li>■ Tertiary</li> </ul>	R. Rijamampianina and T. Carmichael (2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Primary</li> <li>■ Secondary</li> <li>■ Organizational</li> </ul>	P. Arrendondo (1996) B. Jamka (2011)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Observational</li> <li>■ Non-observational</li> </ul>	A. Woźniakowski (2005)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Predictable</li> <li>■ Non-predictable</li> </ul>	A. Wziątek–Staško (2012)

Source: Own study.

It is the view of R. Rijamampianina and T. Carmichael (2005) that the primary dimension encompasses age, sex, race, ethnic origins, and disabilities. In his turn, in addition to those named, C. Rosado (2008) includes sexual orientation among the primary diversity dimensions, which R. Rijamampianina and T. Carmichael (2005) consider to be an expression of secondary diversity, however. Among other determinants of the secondary dimension, these authors include language, education, culture, profession, learning style, way of thinking, geographical location, family status, lifestyle, economic status, and political views. R. Rijamampianina and T. Carmichael (2005) additionally identify a tertiary diversity dimension within the framework of which they indicate belief, convictions, attitude, manner of perception, group standards, feelings, and values.

As understood by A. Woźniakowski (2005), diversity may be observable or non-observable in character. Among observable qualities, the author includes age, sex, race, ethnic origins, and physical disability. This interpretation is identical to the primary dimension of R. Rijamampianina and T. Carmichael (2005). Among non-observable qualities he indicates education, professional experience, job seniority, and lifestyle and life attitude preferences. A. Wziątek–Staško (2012) subdivides di-

iversity determinants into predictable and non-predictable. The author identifies age, sex, race, nationality, disability, language, family status, and place of residence among predictable qualities. The non-predictable ones include sexual orientation, personality, religion, commitment, temperament, ambition, interests, dreams, values, interests, and experience.

The organizational dimension as indicated in topical literature refers to the work environment and encompasses such elements as job position and content as well as the scope of work performed (Jamka, 2011). There is also a view in topical literature that cultural diversity is only determined by secondary diversity dimensions such as communication style, professed religion, ethnic customs, marital status, and external appearance (Reece and Brandt, 1993; Rosado, 2008). These considerations confirm the complexity and multi-aspect nature of the discussed subject matter.

**Interpretation of the Concept of "Cultural Diversity Management"**

Studies of topical literature confirm the multiplicity of ways in which the concept of "cultural diversity management" is seen (Table No. 2). The presented definitions include common elements. They indicate that cultural diversity management involves the utilization of human resource management instruments in order to achieve long-term business benefits. They stress that this is related to the shaping of organizational culture, facilitating the full use of the potential flowing from employee diversity. They also underscore the fact that its goal is the creation of a friendly workplace that is free of any manifestations of discrimination, is characterized as being tolerant, accepting, and demonstrating respect for human differences, both visible and invisible.

**Table No. 2.** Overview of Definitions of the Concept of Cultural Diversity Management

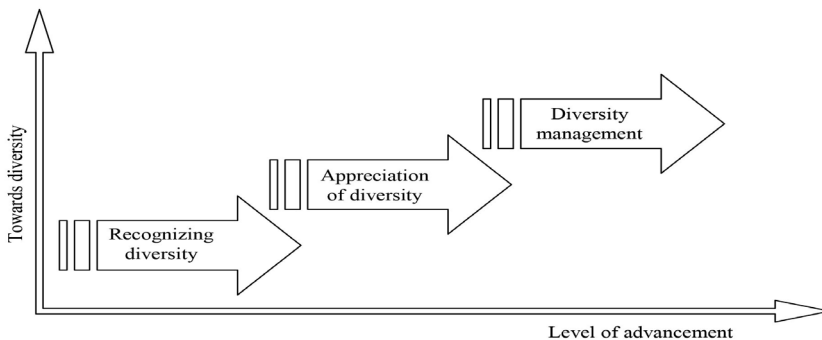
Authors	Definition
R. Thomas (1991)	The mindset is aimed at creating a work environment facilitating the achievement and utilization of the full potential by each employee in striving to reach organizational goals.
R. Kandola and J. Fullerton (1998)	Based on the assumption that the utilization of differences among people (visible and invisible) makes possible the creation of a productive work environment and where all employees feel valued and their talents are fully used in the achievement of organizational goals.
E. Friday and S. S. Friday (2003)	The effective organizing of organizational entries that consist of employee diversity.
D. A. Thomas (2004)	A key competency used to assess managerial staff results.

Authors	Definition
M. Keil et al. (2007)	The process of management and communication involving the active and conscious development of the organization on the basis of values. This is a process oriented towards the future that comes from the acceptance of differences and by treating them as potential creating added value for the organization.
S. Stańczyk (2007)	Directed cultural modification through the application of appropriate management tools, defining desirable directions, and creating and implementing effective attitude transforming programs.
J. E. Olsen and L. L. Martins (2012)	Utilizing practices in the area of human resource management in order to maintain or develop the diversity of human capital within defined dimensions as well as to guarantee that diverse human capital will not only not impede, but actually play a part in the achievement of the goals of the given organization.
D. Stankiewicz (2014)	Signifies that what is characteristic of the given organization is an adapting to diversity through the use of a cohesive system of diversity policy, tools, methods, and training making possible the continuous overcoming of social and organizational restrictions that are the result of the impact of the dominant culture.
B. Urbaniak (2014)	The application of appropriate methods in various areas of human resource management allowing the use of various individual qualities in order to optimize organizational benefits, especially in the long-term.

Source: Own study.

Topical literature differentiates between matters relating to appreciating the benefits flowing from diversity from employee diversity management. E. Friday and S. S. Friday (2003) have presented these differences in the form of a diversity continuum model (Figure No. 1).

**Figure No. 1.** Diversity Continuum



Source: Own study on the basis of Friday and Friday, 2003, p. 871.

The imaged diversity continuum encompasses three components. The first comes down to recognizing the existence of diversity by employees who are in direct contact with it. After all, they differ from each other. In order for employees to really recognize diversity, they must experience it, acquire knowledge regarding it, and fully understand it. The second component is tied to an appreciation of diversity by employees who should have an awareness of the value of employee diversity for the organization. These two components are vital for the third to come into existence—employee diversity management. Employee diversity management involves the planning, organizing, and directing of diverse employees (e.g., in terms of cultural circles) so as to utilize their potential in order to achieve the strategic goals of the organization (Friday and Friday, 2003).

Summarizing the considered reflections, it may be stated that implementation of cultural diversity management practices fosters a fuller utilization of human capital in the organization thanks to the identification, acceptance, respect for, promotion of, and appreciation of diversity in the workplace. This makes possible the shaping of an organizational culture fostering the maintenance and strengthening of employee diversity as well as its utilization by the organization and the creation of optimum working conditions. This also makes possible the harmonizing of employee goals with those of the organization, which brings it significant benefits in the long-term.

### **Managing Cultural Diversity in Economic Practice: IBM as a Case Study**

The example of IBM<sup>1</sup> has been used in order to demonstrate possibilities of applying the concept of employee diversity management in economic practice. IBM was selected because it is an organization that can boast a heritage of experience in utilizing the potential in diversity spanning over a century.<sup>2</sup> The effectiveness of the best practices in employee diversity management as applied by IBM is borne out by the numerous awards received by the organization over the years. What is important is that they apply to all categories of employee diversity as managed by

1 IBM (International Business Machines) – A global leader in creating, developing, and producing the most advanced information technology solutions, offering software, micro-electronic solutions, computer systems and networks, and consulting services. One of the largest computer companies in the world that has been behind growth in business innovation for over one hundred years, also active in Poland as of 1991 <<http://www.ibm.com/ibm/pl/pl/>; <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/pl/pl/background.wss>>.

2 See <<http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/heritage.shtml>>, accessed on March 23, 2016.

IBM.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, IBM is involved in actions aimed at developing the potential inherent in diversity on a permanent basis, not incidentally, which makes possible the achievement of the status of one of the world's leading organizations integrated on a global scale. Diversity management at IBM goes beyond a recruitment model free of any expressions of discrimination or protection for the rights of all categories of employees. Generalizing, it may be stated that it encompasses actions aimed at integrating various elements so as to create an innovative, integrated whole—an approach termed *inclusion* (IBM, 2015).

IBM is made up of various employees who mold the organizational culture and shared corporate values, which is a key to success. Diversity (including in the realm of thinking) is the norm for the IBM work environment and it obligates the creation of innovation aimed at customer needs (IBM, 2015).

In line with diversity policy at IBM, business activities in dimensions such as employment, (including with respect to foreigners and immigrants), training, remuneration, promotions, transfers, lay-offs, pro-social activities, and recreation are all conducted without discrimination. Thus, no manifestations discrimination on the basis of race, skin color, religion, sex, sexual identity, expression, sexual orientation, national origins, genetics, disability, age, or veteran status are allowed. The organization operates in line with legal regulations in force, including those governing equal opportunity. IBM supports adaptive processes for employed people with disabilities as well as the cultivation of religious practices. Managers create a work environment that is free of all forms of discrimination and harassment with respect for and an appreciation among IBM employees and stakeholders. In order to guarantee equal opportunities for those applying for work as well as current employees, IBM manages numerous programs—e.g., in favor of women, the disabled, veterans, and various minorities (IBM, 2015).

Effective diversity policy management is an important strategic goal at IBM. For this reason, all managers are expected to adhere to this policy and maintain commitment to preserve diversity at IBM. The IBM slogan speaks best of IBM's approach to diversity management: The diversity of people and their thoughts is the more intelligent road to everyday innovation (IBM, 2015).

There is a conviction at IBM that diversity and innovation are vital to the success of business operations. It is thanks to diversity that better innovation is created, which gives customers broad potential for development. Moreover, diversity gives employees and customers the possibility of the complete utilization of their potential. At this point it is worth stressing that IBM employees are talented in many ways.

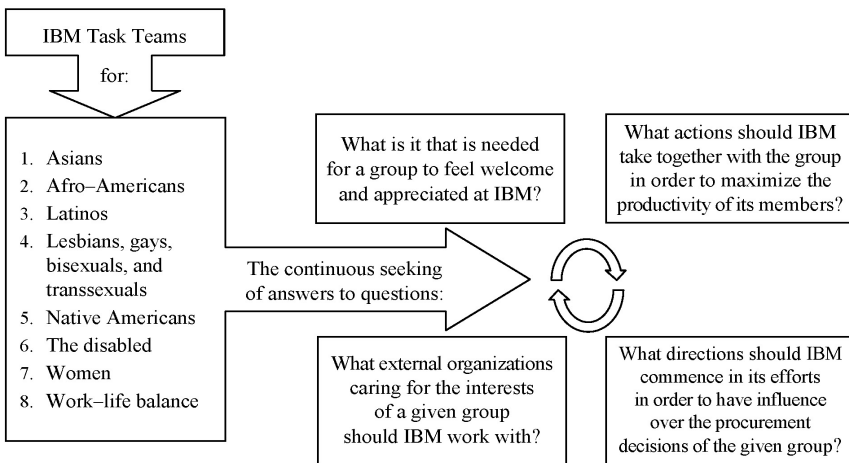
3 See <<http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/awards.shtml#Work>>, accessed on March 23, 2016.



Achieving full potential as stemming from various talents is one of the priorities of the organization that determines its competitiveness (IBM, 2015).

In order to more fully depict the concept of IBM employee diversity management, worth noting is one of the key best practices applied in the organization. Eight task teams were established in 1995 in order to support the main diversity directions existing at IBM. The main goal of their activity was assumed to be the continuous search for possibilities for utilization of diversity for the good of individual categories of employees and the whole organization. This search concentrated on the unceasing finding of ever better answers to four key questions. What is important is that team members were obligated to seek the answers looking at IBM through the lens of the concrete category of employee diversity (IBM, 2015). Figure No. 2 presents the idea behind this best practice.

**Figure No. 2.** IBM Task Teams Aimed at Maximizing the Utilization of Employee Diversity Potential



Source: Own study on the basis of IBM, 2014.

The results of the work of the established task teams have been systematically implemented, while the formulated answers to questions continue to serve as a guide in the process of creating structures and priorities for employee diversity management. The developed solutions shall facilitate the recruitment, maintenance, and development of talents representing the individual circles of diversity at IBM. Moreover, they assist in creating an integrated work environment based on honest dialogue and strong relations among employees who differ from each other (IBM, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

4 In such an environment everyone can really be himself or herself.

It is on the basis of the mentioned relations that a network of diversity groups made up of employees–volunteers has been established. The groups collaborate for the success of IBM, utilizing meetings, integration, networking, coaching, and mentoring. They also help in the recruitment and adaptation of new talents. For example, the group on market development is responsible for the development of products addressed to individual categories of customer diversity (IBM, 2015).

In order to expand the diversity program, IBM is developing relations with other organizations. In 2013 a total of 236 diversity groups active within the framework of networks created by IBM commenced the process of transformation into business resources. These are groups consisting of talented IBM specialists in various fields. Their mission is the involvement of diversity groups and other communities in even more effective support for IBM employees, their customers, and all other stakeholders. Business resource groups consist of employees who within the framework of volunteer work want to act jointly for the overriding goal that is the success of IBM and its employees (IBM, 2015).

Annual awards in competitions propagating diversity management are confirmation of the involvement and achievements of IBM in supporting diversity in the workplace. Numerous awards also indicate the effectiveness of cultural diversity management practices as implemented by the organization. Worth stressing is the fact that IBM has received awards in the following categories: Overall Diversity, Asians, Afro–Americans, Latin American Population, Native American Population, Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transsexuals (LGBT), People with Disabilities, Women, and Work–Life Balance. All in all, the organization received 140 awards over the years 2010–2016.<sup>5</sup>

IBM is also mentioned each and every year in the prestigious The DiversityInc Top 50 Ranking. This ranking is prepared by the DiversityInc company, which is concerned with popularizing best practice in diversity management. The DiversityInc Top 50 Ranking is based on an analysis of empirical data (relating to sex, race, and ethnic origins) received thanks to the voluntary completing of a questionnaire by the given organization. Research results allow an assessment of initiatives undertaken by the given organization that are aimed at promoting and supporting women, ethnic minorities, the disabled, LGBT, and veterans in the workplace.

Analysis of empirical results as conducted for The DiversityInc Top 50 Ranking indicates that at organizations honored in the ranking, including IBM, on average women account for 39.2% and Afro–Americans, Latinos, and Asians for 15% of the highest management. For comparison, worth noting is that the corresponding

5 See <<http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/awards.shtml>>, accessed on April 23, 2016.

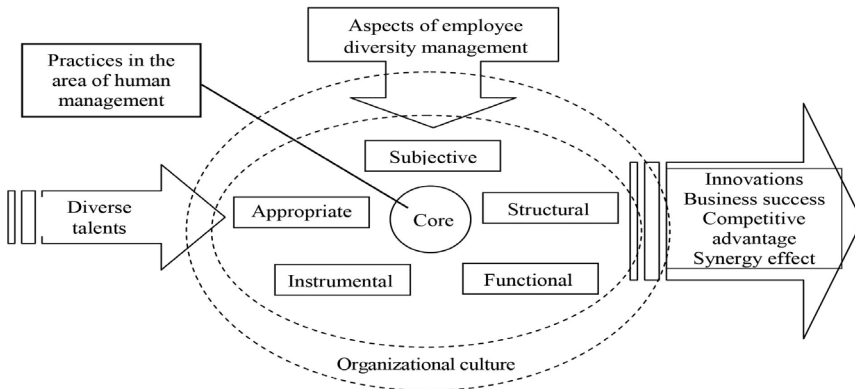
indicators for the average American company are 28.8% and 13.0%. Moreover, in the Top 50 organizations, on average women make up 47.6% and Afro-Americans, Latinos, and Asians 31.2% of all management levels (the corresponding indicators for the average American company are 39% and 22.5%).

Organizations honored in The DiversityInc Top 50 Ranking are also characterized by greater human capital diversity as compared with the Fortune 500 group—the group of largest companies in the United States. An example might be the share of minority groups on supervisory boards. In the Top 50 organizations, women account for 26%, Afro-Americans for 9.1%, Latinos for 6.5%, and Asians for 2.6% of members of supervisory boards. Corresponding figures for Fortune 500 companies are 18.5% for women, 7.4% for Afro-Americans, 3.3% for Latinos, and 2.6% for Asians).<sup>6</sup>

### A Proposed Cultural Diversity Management Model

Topical literature studies as well as an analysis of solutions in employee diversity management as applied at IBM made possible the development of a cultural diversity management model (Figure No. 3). This model takes into account the management system aspects as identified by A. Stabryła (2010): appropriate, subjective, structural, functional, and instrumental.<sup>7</sup>

Figure No. 3. A Cultural Diversity Management Model Concept



Source: Own study.

6 See <<http://www.diversityinc.com/2016-top-50-facts-figures>>, accessed on April 23, 2016.

7 A. Stabryła (2009) identifies the same aspects with respect to knowledge management systems.

For the purposes of the developed model, it has been assumed that it applies to all aspects of diversity.<sup>8</sup> Employee diversity management is aimed at eliminating all manifestations of discrimination that have to be diagnosed on a running basis. A central spot in the proposed model is occupied by a core serving as a link among the various aspects of diversity. This core is made up of solutions facilitating efficient communications as well as practices in the area of human management, such as the recruitment of diverse talents, their maintenance and development, collecting and analyzing data relating to employee diversity, employee participation, and the management of interdisciplinary teams.

The model identifies five key aspects of employee diversity management:

1) Appropriate – Relates to the system of goals for employee diversity management that are cohesive with respect to the goals, mission, and vision of the organization. They find expression in employee diversity management policy, the code of values, strategies, and action plans.

2) Subjective – Encompasses the staff responsible for employee diversity management, e.g., the diversity management team as well as task and advisory teams.

3) Structural – Identifies the place of employee diversity management in the organizational structure, its configuration, placement of decision-making powers, subdivision into tasks, and the scope of responsibility of each employee.

4) Functional – Defines the function served by employee diversity management for the organization as a whole as well as the individual parts of its operations.

5) Instrumental – Identifies tools and instruments used in the management of employee diversity.

All aspects of diversity should be supported by the organizational culture whose qualities include openness, tolerance, respect, trust, and a pro-innovation orientation. The model also underscores the recruitment of diverse talents<sup>9</sup> thanks to which employee diversity is managed. Also indicated is the fact that effective<sup>10</sup> cultural diversity management may bring positive effects, such as innovation, synergy, achieving competitive advantage, or, generally speaking, business success.

## Summary

The concept of cultural diversity management grows in importance in connection with the intensification of international economic cooperation. This is clearly visible in both the dimension of the European Union and the world. Increasing freedom

8 Many of them have been indicated within the framework of the discussed concept of cultural diversity management at IBM.

9 The building of a work environment fostering the development of human capital is vital for the recruitment of talent.

10 More on this topic may be found in Wiśniewska, 2015.

in the flow of human capital, the internationalization of organizations, growth in the economic activity rate for women, and demographic problems all mean that the level of employee diversity in the organization is on the increase. What is more, it may be assumed that this tendency shall grow in strength. Thus, it is vital that solutions be created that make possible the more efficient management of cultural diversity. This is not an easy task in light of the numerous categories of diversity that must be managed as well as the problems that stem from employee diversity in the given organization. The skillful management of employee diversity is to not only eliminate the problems ushered in by diversity, but also make possible the reaping of numerous benefits of strategic importance from it.

Thus, the conducting of a scientific discourse aimed at the further development of the concept of cultural diversity management as well as the identification of best practice that may be found in world topical literature and economic practice is worthwhile.<sup>11</sup> This should make possible the development of models, systems, and canons of best practice that will support the managerial staffs of organizations in the day-to-day facing of the challenge that is the utilization of the potential stemming from diversity. This is especially important in light of the fact that the question of employee diversity management is beginning to apply to a large group of small and medium enterprises, not only corporations operating on a global scale. Small entities need solutions adapted to their scale of operations that translate into financial and staffing potential.

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11 Experience in diversity management as gained by IBM was used for the needs of this article.

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### **Zarządzanie różnorodnością kulturową – aspekt teoretyczno-praktyczny**

#### Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przeprowadzenie dyskusji nad istotą koncepcji zarządzania różnorodnością kulturową oraz analiza dobrych praktyk w tym obszarze wdrażanych przez IBM, jako przesłanka budowy postulatywnego modelu zarządzania różnorodnością kulturową. W artykule omówiono problemy definicyjne związane z pojęciem „zarządzanie różnorodnością kulturową”. Po zdefiniowaniu terminów: „kultura”, „różnorodność” i „różnorodność kulturowa”, scharakteryzowano



jej wymiary. Dokonano analizy działań z zakresu zarządzania różnorodnością kulturową podejmowanych przez IBM. Na zakończenie zaproponowano autorską koncepcję modelu zarządzania różnorodnością kulturową. W artykule, wykorzystując metodę opisową, dokonano przeglądu literatury przedmiotu.

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