

## Pole position – survey reveals common traits of Polish executives – Part 2

**Warsaw, Poland** – Almost three decades have passed since Poland began its journey towards capitalism, and now that the Polish millennial generation has entered the labour market as part of the globalised disruptive wave, it's worth examining the ways in which Poles position themselves towards other nationalities in the business environment. Many of the most sought-after executives in Poland have experienced both worlds, and know the old ways and new ways of doing business. The unique traits of Polish managers are frequently touched upon during Executive Search projects and in meetings with middle and senior managers (from both Eastern and Western Europe).

In an earlier introductory [article](#), the background, status and perceptions of this positioning were presented. We launched a study aimed at tackling these issues. Our study was focused on managers, with the points of reference formed by their counterparts from developed western economies (both expat managers working in Poland, and foreign managers working abroad but closely cooperating with Poles). We asked a large group of Polish managers to make self-assessments of Polish managers as a group (not of themselves as individuals), and then create comparative evaluations in relation to foreign countries using twenty detailed questions (personal characteristics, human relations, human-company relations).



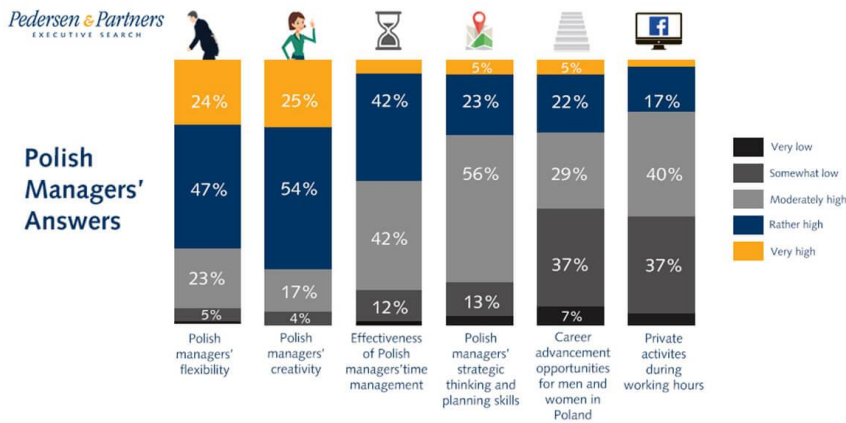
A total of 183 managers participated in the survey. The fundamental parameters for selection were age and years of experience in managerial positions in international organisations. Almost 88% of the participants were over 35, so their business and life experience is inextricably linked to the changes that have taken place over the last twenty years in Poland – in fact, this is the first generation to receive these unique life and career opportunities and actively make use of them. This is also the generation that has

gained experience from the transformation to a market economy and the presence of Poland in the international business community, making it particularly relevant for assessing these international contacts. More detailed data about the survey participants can be found [here](#).

The interviewed respondents answered twenty questions, each addressing the assessment of a single characteristic. The participants made self-assessments as a whole group, using a five-grade scale – from negative to positive – ‘not very’-‘somewhat’-‘moderately’-‘rather’-‘very’. The same parameters were then inquired about western managers using a three-grade scale: ‘worse’-‘comparable’-‘better’.

Prior to analysing the detailed data, the general distribution of the answers should be noted. It enables us to see the points of highest density on a two-grade 'negative-positive' scale. This preliminary analysis takes account of the psychological drivers applied when making any choice – the natural tendency to avoid extremes and find a point at the centre of a scale. On the first 'five-grade' scale, the bulk of the answers can be distributed as follows:

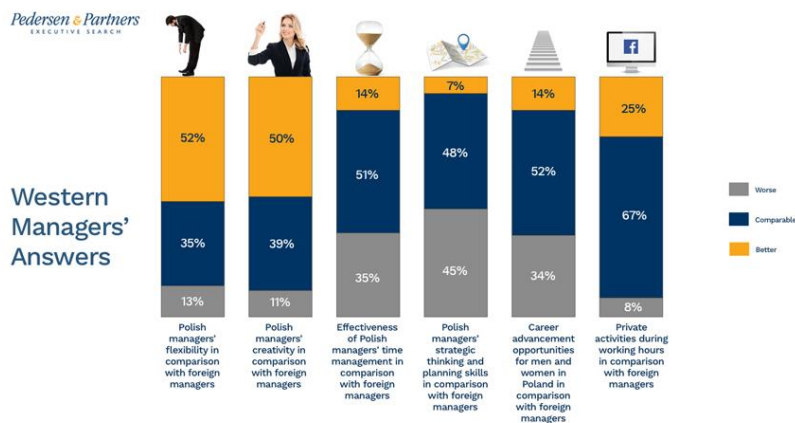
**1.5% (not very) - 13% (somewhat) - 34% (moderately) – 41.5% (rather) - 10% (very)**



A plurality of the answers (41.5%) were at the 'rather' level (i.e. the second-highest level on the scale), with 51.5% and 14.5% of answers above and below 'moderately' respectively. The conclusion is simple – Polish managers provided at least 3.5 times as many positive answers as negative answers. Broadly speaking, the self-assessment of Polish managers is really positive!

In comparison with foreign managers, the results amount to:

**25% (worse) - 51% (comparable) - 24% (better)**



This is a normal distribution, symmetrically dispersed with the highest density at the centre of the scale. Our preliminary conclusion is that the myths about Polish inferiority and lack of self-esteem are no more than myths. Polish managers are more or less similar to their western counterparts, and twenty years has been a sufficiently long period of time to gain confidence in using their intellectual skills on an equal level.

We will now analyse the survey questions individually. Interesting aspects have been revealed in individual categories, because the data is not distributed symmetrically. In the **Autonomy-Flexibility-Creativity** category, the self-assessment is very clear. The respondents specified 85%, 71% and 79% positive votes respectively (!). Moreover, NOBODY indicated that the Polish managers are 'not very independent' or 'not very creative,' and only 1% chose the answer 'not very flexible.' The above-mentioned three characteristics show a sense of equality, if not a little superiority over foreign managers. As many as 52% of the Polish managers claim that they are more flexible, 50% that they are more creative and 39% that they are more independent than their foreign counterparts. Far fewer (13%, 11% and 9%, respectively) admit inferiority in these areas.

Consistent with such positive assessments are the managers' self-assessed skills for **working in a multi-task environment**. The high levels of positive answers – 60% and 29% respectively – speak for themselves, with only 11% of answers below "moderate." The comparison to colleagues from developed countries favours the Polish managers: 30% of respondents claim that they are better in this area, 56% at a similar level, and only 14% worse.

**The level of knowledge** was evaluated more rigorously. In general terms it is not so bad (35% - level 'moderately', 51% - 'rather high', 10% - 'very high'), but in the context of foreign managers' self-image, it proved to be worse (58% of Polish managers perceive their level of knowledge as 'lower', 24% - 'comparably high' and 18% 'higher'). What can Polish managers offer instead? **Diligence** is their great advantage: 90% of the interviewed managers described themselves as 'rather or very diligent' (above the average standard). Polish managers state that they 'love' to spend time working, which corresponds perfectly to the results of our survey from last year about professional burnout in a group of Polish managers. Work is an important part of Polish lives, and Poles can sacrifice a lot to achieve good results. However, they are starting to feel the negative consequences of the opportunities afforded by the economic and social changes of the last twenty years. To paraphrase a statement from a Polish writer: Polish managers still very much 'want to want' (to work, take up challenges, ambitious tasks, etc.).

Diligence is a facet of efficiency, but is not decisive without proper **effectiveness of time management**. The respondents also assessed themselves quite positively in this area: 45% of managers responded positively and 42% chose 'moderately.' The distribution has higher density in its 'better' part, but more improvements are needed, especially as Polish managers assess their foreign counterparts as superior in this area. This is claimed by 35% of the surveyed managers, with only 14% saying that Polish managers are more effective in managing their time.

A matter seldom touched upon, yet quite important for the overall assessment of time management capabilities is the notion of **private activities during working hours**. Poles are realistic and down-to-earth, admitting that they do it with moderate frequency (40% of managers). 21% of managers said that they do this 'rarely' and 'very rarely' whereas 19% answered 'frequently' and 'very frequently.' 25% of the interviewed managers admit that they perform private activities in working hours more frequently than their foreign colleagues (only 8% claiming that they do this less frequently...). The majority of the participants, 67%, assess that they are similar to foreigners in this respect.

The Polish managers gave quite a critical self-assessment of their **strategic thinking and planning skills**: 56% of the surveyed managers have a 'moderately good' opinion about these skills, but the negative-to-positive answer ratio ranges between 28% and 16%. That's quite a good result, but 45% think that Poles are worse than foreign managers in this respect. 48% think that we are comparable, and only 7% that we are better.

Polish managers believe that they are **adequate and punctual in fulfilling tasks**, giving 67% and 69% of positive answers respectively. They do not see any significant differences between themselves and foreigners. A large percentage of the survey participants claim that they are the

same, with a small percentage of the remaining answers distributed more or less equally between 'better' and 'worse'.

All the issues described above were related to the characteristics of Polish managers. The next group of questions served to investigate self-assessments of human relations. Generally speaking, the respondents assessed themselves positively, but the Poles clearly notice their advantages in relation to western managers.

The **approach toward subordinates** is perceived positively as an exchange of partner relations (45% of answers assessed themselves as 'average' with 38% above). But 37% of Poles think that they are worse than foreign managers in this respect, and only 17% that they are better.

A similar assessment is given to **effectiveness of communication**. Polish self-assessment is highly positive (30% 'moderately' and 39% 'above average'), but 48% of managers consider foreign colleagues superior in this aspect.

The structure of the answers looks similar for **conflict resolution skills**. It is generally positive (34% above average, 48% average), but there are more negative answers when comparing foreign managers – 28% think that Polish managers are worse and only 8% that Polish managers are better.

Last but not least is the assessment referring to **teamwork skills**. This was optimistic too (49% average level, 38% above average) but 42% think that Poles don't match foreign managers in this respect, and only 7% believe that Poles are better.

The conclusion is that although a Polish manager can operate at a good and professional level, he will nevertheless perform less efficiently than his western counterpart. A lot of hard work must be dedicated to improving this.

The next researched issue was **openness to other cultures**. Poles assessed themselves 55% positively and 31% moderately. However, there was no clear answer regarding the comparison to foreign counterparts: 40% claim that Poles are similar, 33% that Poles are less open, and 27% that Poles are more open.

44% of Polish managers also noticed **a lack of equal opportunities available to men and women in advancing their careers**. Interestingly, this percentage is more than double the percentage of female respondents to this survey. Moreover, a relatively significant number of women answered this question more positively. 34% of the surveyed managers believe that the career opportunities for women in Poland are worse than in the west (14% believe that Poland is better in this respect).

The last question in the human relations category investigated friendship among colleagues. In this case the distribution was almost symmetrical. The vast majority of the participants, 59% claimed that it is moderately frequent, with 18% claiming 'rare' and 19% claiming 'frequent'. 30% of respondents claimed that Poles are more sociable than foreign managers, and only 13% stated that Poles are less sociable.

The third and last compartment covered the relationship between Polish managers and their companies. Poles perceive themselves as **loyal to and proud of a company**. 61% of the interviewed managers adopted this attitude as their own. The following 28% indicated a moderately high level of identification, and only 11% did not identify with this characteristic. Poles are similar to western managers in this respect. The percentage of self-assessment votes on the 'lower-comparable-higher' scale is symmetrical; half of the respondents were in the middle and 23% and 27% at the respective extremes of the scale.

Polish managers believe that they are good at complying with the rules of regulations and procedures: 44% answered 'rather satisfactory' and 'very satisfactory' and 37% 'moderately satisfactory'. In relation to foreign countries, however, they assessed themselves poorly; 44% answered that Poles are worse and only 10% that Poles are better.

## Conclusions

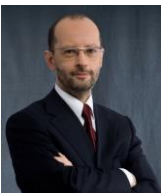
First and foremost I would like to thank all the survey participants for their sincere and open opinions. They showed a really professional approach in presenting a balanced and deliberate image of their group. They were unstinting with honest praise and self-criticism – it adds a true human dimension to the results. The image that emerges from the survey is extremely coherent. The survey provides considerable insights into further analysis and discussions about the status and direction of the development of Polish managers twenty years after the transformation to a market economy.

As we approach the end of the 2010s, what is a Polish manager like? Obviously all individuals are different and we must respect that in everyday contacts. However, statistically we can ascribe the following characteristics to a Polish manager (in his own opinion):

- Very independent, flexible and creative - active and imaginative in an intellectual way;
- Very diligent, perceives work as one of life's priorities;
- Good time management;
- In comparison with western colleagues, a Polish manager manifests an average level of communication, conflict solving and teamwork skills - people management is still an area of possible development to be focused on;
- Deals well with on-going tasks, less so with strategic ones. Combined with human relations, this is perhaps the most **interesting conclusion** from our survey, demonstrating that the Polish manager is in fact **more of a manager than a leader**;
- Loyal toward the company and proud of his or her own achievements;
- Open towards other cultures and matters of equal opportunities.

Summing up in one sentence: Polish managers are self-confident and their self-assessment is realistic. I am happy to conclude that the stereotypes and myths about the Polish inferiority complex can be written off as fiction.

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