

## Managing international assignments in Polish companies operating in foreign markets –analysis of preliminary empirical results\*

Joanna Purgal-Popiela\*\*

*The purpose of this paper is to identify managerial practices concerning diverse forms of cross-border employee flows that take place in Polish companies in the process of internationalization. Two dimensions of their international maturity (involvement in foreign activities, and length of time over which they are undertaken) are applied in a comparative analysis covering strategic orientation, policies and procedures concerning international assignments, and use of particular forms of IAs. In part, it confirmed the validity of the assumption of congruity between a company's international maturity and approach to managing IAs.*

*Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist die Identifikation von praktischen Lösungen im Bereich des Managements von Mitarbeiteraußendienstleistungen, die von polnischen Unternehmen auf internationalen Märkten praktiziert werden. In einer Vergleichsanalyse wurden zwei Dimensionen der internationalen Reife von Unternehmen unterschieden (Umfang der internationalen Tätigkeit und die zeitliche Länge dieser Tätigkeit), wobei die strategische Orientierung, Methoden und Verfahren bezüglich internationaler Außendienstleistungen sowie die Verwendung bestimmter Formen der internationaler Außendienstleistungen erfasst wurden. Die Gültigkeit der Hypothese über die Kongruenz zwischen der internationalen Reife des Unternehmens und der Managementpraxis bei internationalen Mitarbeiterleistungen wurde teilweise bestätigt.*

*Keywords: Polish companies, international assignments, managing expatriation, internationalization (JEL: F23, M12, M10, M19)*

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\*\* Joanna Purgal-Popiela, Dr., Adjunct Prof., Faculty of Economics and International Relations, Cracow University of Economics, Poland. Main research interests: international and sociocultural aspects of strategic and human resource management, intra-organizational knowledge transfer. E-mail: purgalj@uek.krakow.pl

## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, many Polish companies have been expanding the scope of their operations by entering foreign markets. Such activities usually imply a need for sending employees abroad. Rarely is the range of international activity limited to one option, but in an early stage of their overseas expansions, companies often rely on some less risky ‘methods’, i.e. export/import. Nevertheless, it can be expected that the extent of an enterprise’s involvement in foreign business may affect the scope, forms, goals or directions of international assignments (IAs), as well as choice of policies and methods to support assignees. With Polish companies, it should be emphasized, that there’s no comprehensive empirical research which could verify this assumption. Therefore, this paper provides an overview of managerial practices concerning IAs that are used in Polish firms in the process of international expansion. In particular, an attempt has been made to answer:

- (1) What kind of experience in carrying out international activities do Polish enterprises have?
- (2) How do Polish companies use various forms of international assignments?
- (3) Are managerial practices concerning IAs changing in the course of internationalization,

and if so, how?

Answering these questions requires combining theories of company internationalization and managing expatriation, which serve as a starting point for analysis of empirical results (obtained at a preliminary stage of research concerning IHRM in Poland). The latter were conducted in 2013 and involved 50 Polish companies operating in foreign markets.

The essence of internationalization reflects international experience of a company as a participant in the global market, which implies the necessity to consider it as a multidimensional construct. The proposed approach takes into account two dimensions (1) the scope and forms of activity in foreign markets, and (2) the length of time over which it is undertaken. On the basis of these dimensions, four categories were utilized. They acted as a framework for a comparative analysis covering the following subjects: strategic orientation, policies and procedures concerning managing IAs, use of particular forms of IAs, goals and directions of delegating employees abroad, activities supporting the assignees, and general rules of applying them. In part, they confirmed the validity of the assumption of the congruity between a company’s international maturity and managing IAs. However, conclusions drawn at this stage of research are preliminary, therefore, they may serve primarily as a starting point or inspiration for further research.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 *Internationalization of an enterprise as a context for bringing IAs into play*

Internationalization of an enterprise, understood as a process of undertaking activities abroad, can be analysed from various perspectives (Zorska 2007). Nevertheless, in order to show the role of employee flows in this process, it is worthwhile to draw on behavioural concepts of internationalization (Whitelock 2002: 342-347).

The Uppsala model of internationalization (Johanson/Vahlne 1977) not only explains the importance of the "psychological distance" (difficulty caused by cultural, social, political and other differences) in choosing the foreign location for business activity but also, indirectly points to the changing needs of the company in terms of using various solutions to acquire knowledge about foreign markets (sufficient for its expansion abroad), and to decrease the above-mentioned distance (Fonfara 2009:14). The process is gradual due to the social character of the acquired knowledge, built through relationships (which enable the exchange and acquisition of knowledge) and requires time (Tsang 1999). Consequently, it's assumed that organizational practice of delegating workers abroad will change over time, causing the "knowledge gap" to decrease.

According to the evolutionary theory (Kogut/Zander 1993), a company's international expansion is closely connected with its ability to transfer knowledge across borders. New knowledge, which would normally be rather poorly structured and tacit, may actually constitute a key asset to the company, provided that it is able to come up with effective methods of knowledge diffusion between its geographically scattered parts. One such method is direct human interactions between assignees and host staff (Dickmann/Müller-Carmen 2006).

In light of strategic IHRM literature, a company during its international expansion evolves towards a transnational solution. This process is accompanied by declining importance of expatriation as a tool of controlling international operations (by headquarters) as well as by an increasing need to use various types of IAs for the purpose of horizontal/lateral coordination of scattered activities (Evans et al. 2011:173–176). Companies in their initial phase of international expansion often demonstrate ethnocentric orientation, which is reflected in sending managers from headquarters abroad (Dowling et al. 2008: 80-81). This helps to reduce uncertainty stemming from a shortage of competent, "trustworthy" local employees or an information gap concerning new markets. In contrast, geocentric orientation, which is coherent with the concept of a transnational company, emphasizes the importance of integrating and coordinating activities, multidirectional communication, knowledge diffusion, and employees' mobility. Such an approach fosters assigning employees from different locations and choosing variable directions of the assignees flow.

## 2.2 *Activities of Polish enterprises operating in international markets*

Internationalization is becoming a more characteristic development strategy for Polish enterprises. A dynamic increase of their activity abroad has been observed since 2005 (Polskie... 2013). Research carried out by Karaszewski's team (2009) shows that Polish entrepreneurs clearly prefer such forms of FDI which allow them to run a business abroad independently (keep control over it). They are predominantly active in Europe (97.3% of Polish FDI in 2011), which points to the fact that geographical and cultural proximity are still considered priorities while making strategic investment decisions (Polskie... 2013).

For the above reasons, one may expect that international assignments in the course of this expansion are still a real challenge for Polish companies. IAs remain a useful tool to control and coordinate scattered activities, transfer knowledge, and develop staff through international experience (Bartlett/Goshal 2002; Dowling et al. 2008). However, substantial changes can be observed in these practices (Dowling et al. 2008; Dickmann et al. 2008; Evans et al. 2011):

- they are becoming much more diverse in terms of delegating, and forms of stay;
- the domination of a specific expatriate profile is in decline;
- due to increasing popularity of short business trips, a growing number of staff undertake multiple IAs without accompanying persons.

This diversification is also typical for Polish enterprises operating abroad (Pocztowski 2012).

## 3. **Materials and methods**

Fifty enterprises took part in research structured by a questionnaire (PAPI method, interviews with HR managers) in the second and third quarter of 2013, and had to meet two criteria: operate in a foreign market, and have 100% Polish capital in their ownership. It turned out nearly impossible to prepare a complete and updated list of Polish companies that met these criteria (based on a database such as PAliIZ, MSZ [the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]), and to get access to information required from their HR senior managers. Therefore, the choice of companies selected for the database was based on their availability<sup>9</sup>. This solution was considered to be sufficient for drawing up preliminary conclusions due to the descriptive character of this study and its predicted scope. The basis for analysis was information obtained from two parts of the questionnaire, "international activity of a company", and "international mobility of its staff".

<sup>9</sup> In light of previous experience of the research team (formed by Department of Human Capital Management of the Cracow University of Economics: DHCM, including the author) the required information is difficult to obtain in these companies, due to high proportion of rejection to participate in the research; an additional problem also a high risk of refusal to answer some proprietary questions.

The examined enterprises were typically large companies, 38 of which (76%) employed over 250 workers, 10 (20%) which employed between 50-249, and 2 firms which employed 49 workers or less. They represented industry (22 firms, 44%), service sector (13 firms, 26%), construction (9 firms, 18%), and commerce (6 companies, 12%). All had been operating in international markets for a relatively long period of time, 78% of which (39 firms) had a dozen or so years of experience. The geographical range of these activities was usually restricted to Europe (44 firms, 88%) while only 6 firms operated outside of Europe.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 *What kind of experience in carrying out international activities do Polish enterprises have?*

Using internationalization as a starting point, two dimensions were simultaneously applied in order to come up with the four categories and with diversified international experience. The first dimension refers to the forms of activities in the foreign market, including export and import, managerial contracts<sup>10</sup>, keyturn projects, sales/purchase of licenses, franchising, strategic alliances with foreign partners, joint ventures, greenfield investments, and purchasing an existing enterprise (setting up a partnership). It therefore describes the scope of enterprise's involvement in foreign activities that is relatively bigger when an enterprise directly invests in foreign countries by means of a branch, subsidiary, or joint venture. It should be noted that the choice of such forms is not necessarily an effect of earlier international experience in exporting/importing activities, as it is in the case of born global companies<sup>11</sup>. The second dimension is the length of time over which an organization operates abroad. It has been assumed that the longer period of time, the greater the experience of a company is as a global player. This assumption derives from the concept of internationalization as a learning process (Tsang 1999:92). The following categories have been distinguished on the basis of both dimensions (See Table 1):

- (1) global experts – operating in foreign markets for 10 years or longer in the form of branches/subsidiaries/joint ventures;
- (2) cautious veterans – carrying out their international operations (which do not include branches/subsidiaries, nor joint ventures) for 10 years or longer;
- (3) active beginners – operating in foreign markets for a few years (less than 10) in the form of branches/subsidiaries/joint ventures;

<sup>10</sup> Managerial contracts are defined as forms of making knowledgeable and experienced staff teams temporarily available to foreign partners (Rymarczyk 2004:185).

<sup>11</sup> Companies which swiftly internationalize, "skipping" stages that are normally suggested in sequential approach to internalization (Zorska 2007).

- (4) prudent novices – carrying out their international operations (which do not include branches/subsidiaries, nor joint ventures) for less than 10 years.

*Table 1: Characteristics of Polish companies operating in foreign markets*

| Category          | Number of companies <sup>12</sup> | Forms of activity   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| GLOBAL EXPERTS    | 16                                | FDI: subsidiaries established by means of purchasing an existing enterprise (10 companies), and built from the scratch (6 companies), joint ventures with foreign partners (7 companies); additionally: export/import (all) |
| CAUTIOUS VETERANS | 19                                | managerial contracts (13 companies), import/export (8 companies), purchase/sales of licenses (7 companies); turnkey projects abroad (5 companies); strategic alliances with foreign partners (5 companies).                 |
| PRUDENT NOVICES   | 5                                 | managerial contracts (all), additionally: turnkey projects (2 companies), export/import (2 companies).  |
| ACTIVE BEGINNERS  | 6                                 | FDI: subsidiaries built from scratch (5 companies), and established by means of purchasing an existing enterprise (3 companies); additionally: managerial contracts (4 companies), export/import (3 companies).             |

Based on the above categorization, a comparative analysis of the following issues has been made including strategic orientation and formalization of IA process, the applied forms of IAs, goals and directions of assignments, scope and principles determining the choice of activities supporting assignees.

Strategic orientation of management at enterprises operating internationally is, on one hand, an important factor which determines goals and directions of IAs. On the other hand, the attitude of management staff and "international maturity" of a company are interdependent. It can be assumed, with regard to Perlmutter's typology (2004) and the transnationality concept by Bartlett and Ghosal (2002), that the development of an enterprise into an international entity is reflected in evolving perception of relationships between headquarters and other parts of the organization.

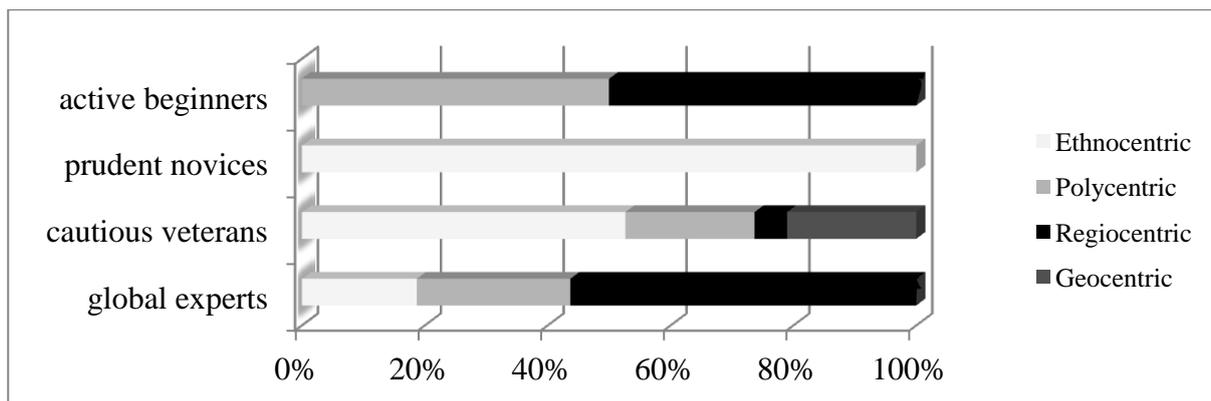
As for the strategic orientation<sup>13</sup> of Polish companies, research results have been to a large extent compatible with the expectations about the congruity between internationalization and the management staff attitudes based on literature stud-

<sup>12</sup> Four companies were not taken into account for the analysis, one of which did not declare any forms of international activity (and could not therefore be matched into any category), and three firms lacked too much (about half) information on IAs.

<sup>13</sup> Such orientation has been defined for the purpose of this study in the following way: (1) ethnocentric approach - applying solutions (for foreign activities) suggested by the headquarters, (2) polycentric approach - finding solutions unassistedly at a local market level, (3) regiocentric approach – applying solutions which combine head office policy and regional specificity, (4) geocentric approach – applying solutions developed within the company as a whole – both at the headquarters and outside it.

ies (Figure 1). It should be stressed that the ethnocentric approach clearly dominated in the case of prudent novices whose experience in both time scale and scope of international activities was the smallest. Secondly, above mentioned orientation was rarely (in the case of global experts) or never (in the case of active beginners) observed in those Polish enterprises which were more engaged in international activities, i.e. via FDI. Thirdly, the most advanced global experts chose a regiocentric approach<sup>14</sup> more frequently than the remaining groups. At the same time, it should be noted that this orientation type was chosen by as many as four cautious veterans. Such results may be quite surprising due to the lack of subsidiaries and branches. However, such a choice to some extent, is justified by the fact that some firms participated in strategic alliances with foreign partners and acquired common "standards" within their networks of cooperation.

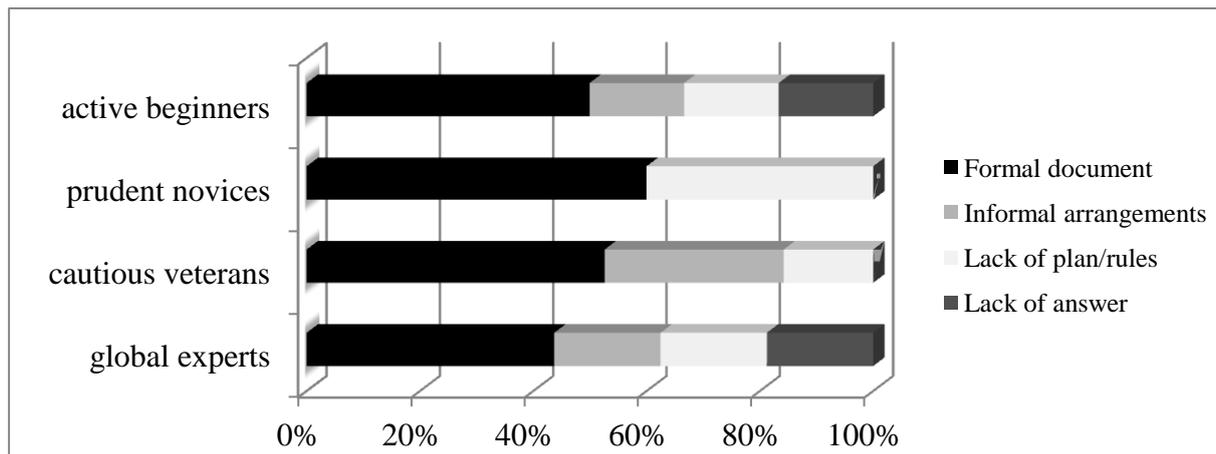
Figure 1: Strategic orientations in Polish companies [in % of each category]



Another aspect considered in this study is the scope of formalization within strategy concerning IAs. In general, an increase or a substantially high frequency of any phenomenon in an organizational reality, as well as its relative permanence and high importance for current or future activity, normally push the management staff to choose a transparent, official regulation in a form of a strategy or plan. Accordingly, formalization of an expatriation policy is expected to take place when a company expands internationally, as the process naturally involves IAs. Research carried out in Polish enterprises shows that IAs are highly valued; this has been confirmed by the presence of an official strategy of managing IAs in half of the companies (Figure 2). Nevertheless, such strategies were not so popular among prudent novices. One should note, however, that formalization of managing IAs occurred in companies which did not have subsidiaries, branches or joint venture partnerships (more than half of cautious veterans and prudent novices), which appears to be quite an astonishing observation. This could be justified by an essential role of managerial contracts which require clear internal regulations and which are used by these companies as a typical form of activity abroad.

<sup>14</sup> which may precede most "mature" geocentric orientation.

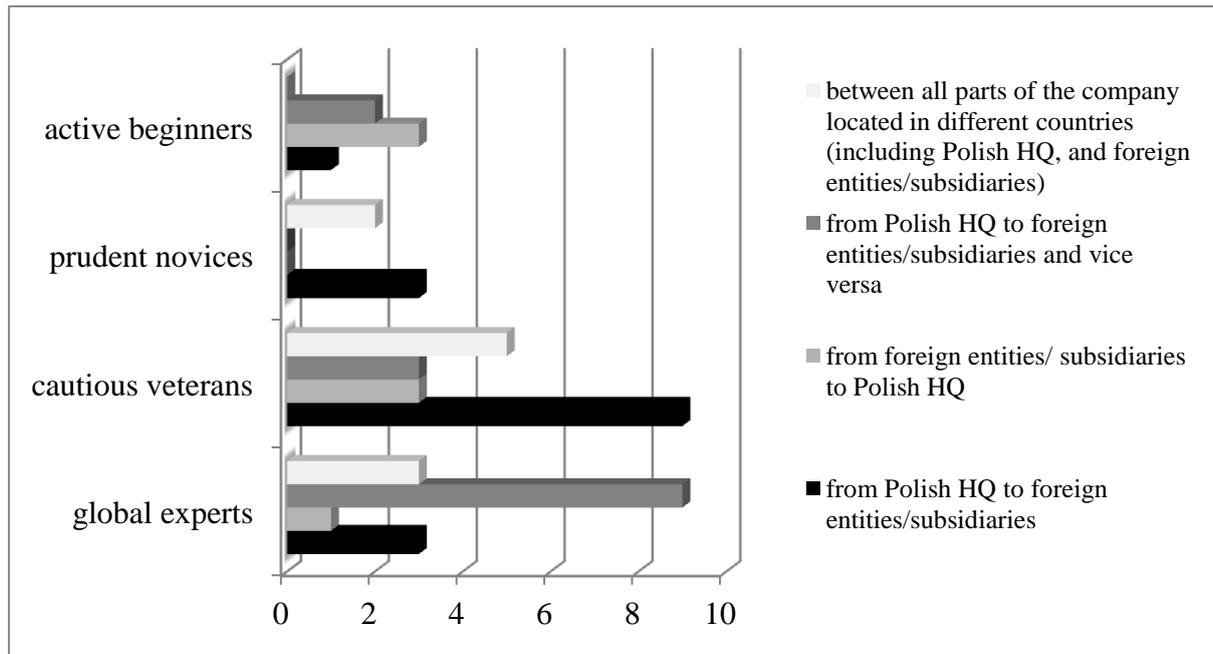
*Figure 2: Formalization of policy concerning IAs in Polish companies [in % for each category]*



#### **4.2 How do Polish companies use various forms of international assignments?**

Although IHRM literature suggests there is an interdependence between strategic orientation and directions of IAs, the results carried out at Polish enterprises have been different from what was expected (Figure 3). Furthermore, these results have been similar to findings previously carried out by the DHCM team (cf. Poczowski 2012). It turned out that the largest group of enterprises are those companies in which traditional flow from the head office to other countries/units prevailed. Such direction of delegating, however, seems to be typical for entities without subsidiaries, branches or joint ventures. The second most popular practice was a two-way employees' flow, i.e. from Poland to foreign units and vice versa. Such a solution turned out to be the most popular among global experts (more than half of the firms). Results obtained from the least numerous category (prudent novices) raise the most doubts (Figure 3). Most companies in this group (3 out of 5) delegate Polish workers abroad (e.g. on the basis of managerial contracts which are characteristic for this group), however, two companies reported that the flow takes place between "foreign organizational units/partnerships and the head office over the whole company". One possible reason for providing such replies may be the fact that the companies cooperate with foreign partners within various networks of interconnections in different countries. This in turn, may imply the necessity to "transfer" teams from one location to another after completing a certain task (contract) with a given partner.

*Figure 3: Main directions of international employee flows in chosen categories of Polish companies*



Research shows that Polish enterprises clearly prefer short-term IAs (Figure 4). This observation reflects a phenomenon described in the IHRM literature (cf. Dowling et al. 2008; Evans et al. 2011). Most Polish companies delegated their employees for a few days (32 companies, 69.6%) or months, including assignments of up to 3 months (31 firms, 67.4%), or a year (30 companies, 65.2%). International Business Travels (IBTs –multiple trips lasting 1-2 weeks) were pointed out by half of the interviewed managers. Research suggests that IAs in the global experts group stand out when compared to other enterprises in terms of high frequency of IAs (especially a few days business trip and assignments which last several months), and a higher diversity of applied IA forms. The latter is reflected in the presence of short-term and long-term assignments (not used in other categories).

International assignments lasting less than 2 weeks served predominantly to control a company's activities abroad (31 companies, 67.4%). Somewhat less frequently (in over 40% of companies) IAs aimed at supporting activities in new markets (21 firms, 45.7%), developing local staff (21 firms, 45.7%) or improving the communication process in an enterprise (20 firms, 43.5%). Certain differences in the scope of their use in certain categories of companies can be observed (Figure 5). For example, over half of global experts used IAs to exert control, and over 40% to facilitate communication within an organization. Most cautious veterans and prudent novices assigned their staff for a maximum of 2 weeks in order to control the activities and support the company in a new market. Active beginners usually applied this type of assignment not only for controlling foreign units but for know-how transfer and development of local staff.

Figure 4: Forms of IAs used in chosen categories of Polish companies

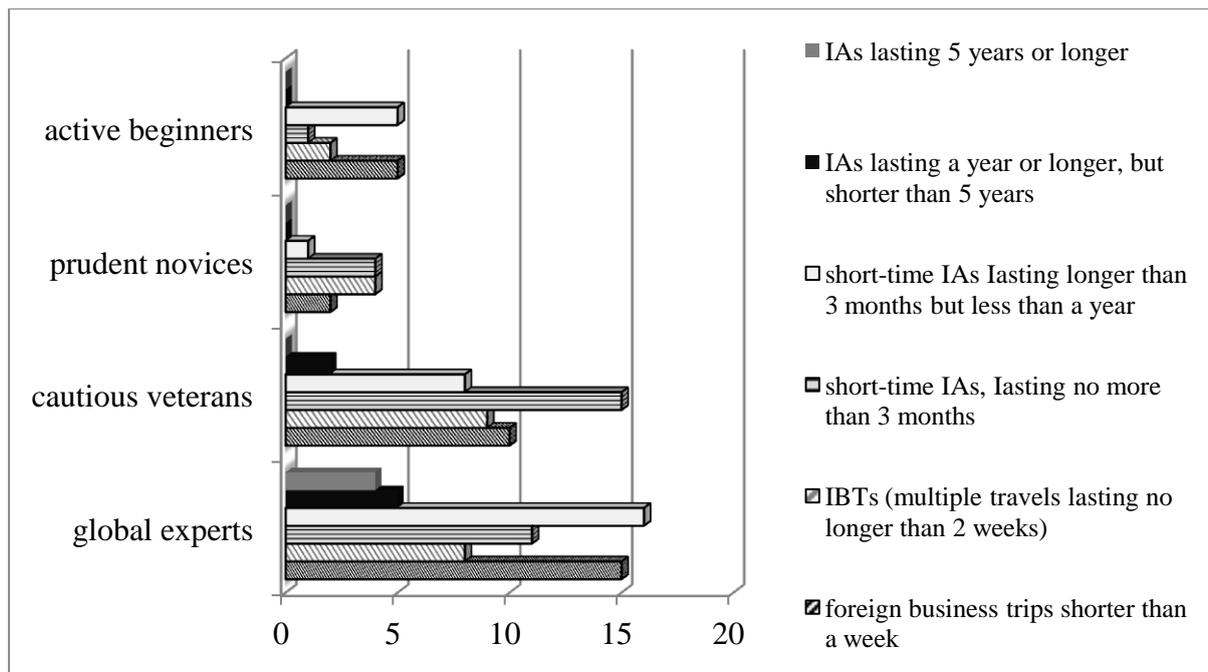
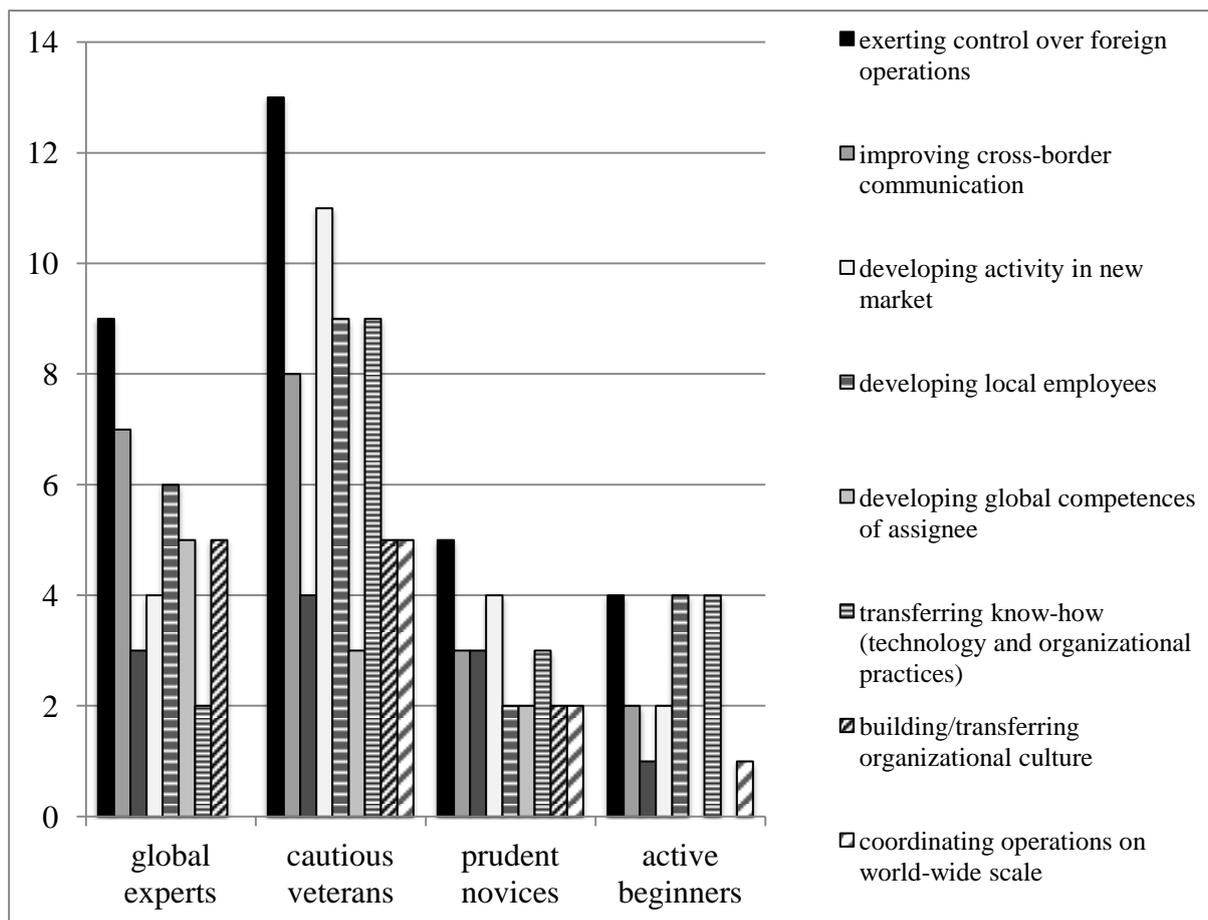
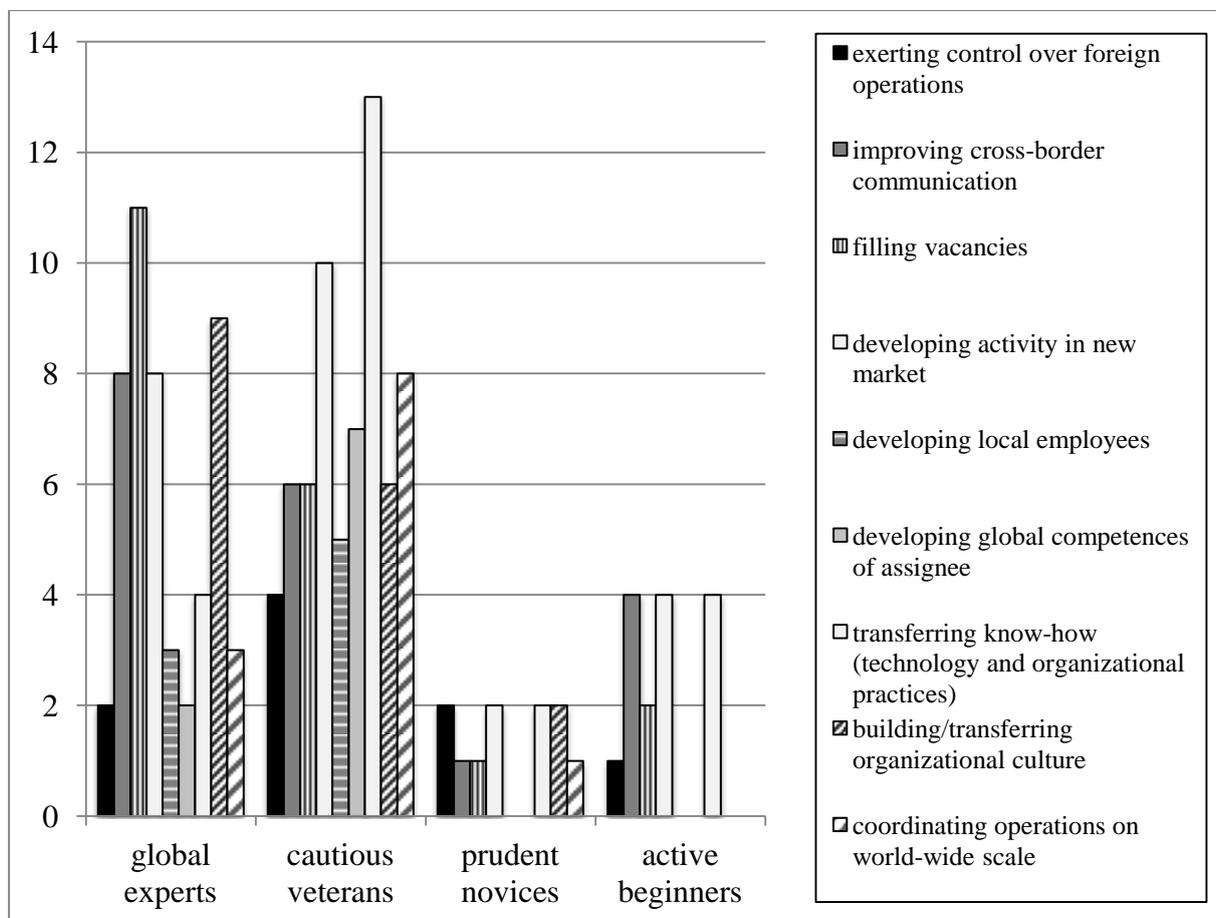


Figure 5: Goals of IAs lasting no longer than 2 weeks (short business trips + IBTs) in chosen categories of Polish companies



A few months' assignments were the case in half of the enterprises in order to support their activity in a new market (24 companies, 52.2%) and/or to transfer technologies or organizational know-how (23 companies, 50%). They also served in more than 40% of firms to prevent qualified staff shortages in a given location (20 firms, 43.5%), and to facilitate communication (19 firms; 41.3%). The aims of these IAs were plainly different in individual groups of enterprises (Figure 6). Over half of global experts implied the above mentioned solutions to fill vacancies and set up organizational culture (the latter constitutes an important mechanism of coordination and normative control in mature corporations). Cautious veterans used these solutions most frequently to support their activities in new markets or to transfer knowledge. Active beginners used IAs in order to improve communication as well as transfer knowledge and support activities in a new market (typical phenomena for early stages of internationalization). Prudent novices sent their employees on such assignments less often than other groups and they did it for a variety of purposes (no prevailing preference).

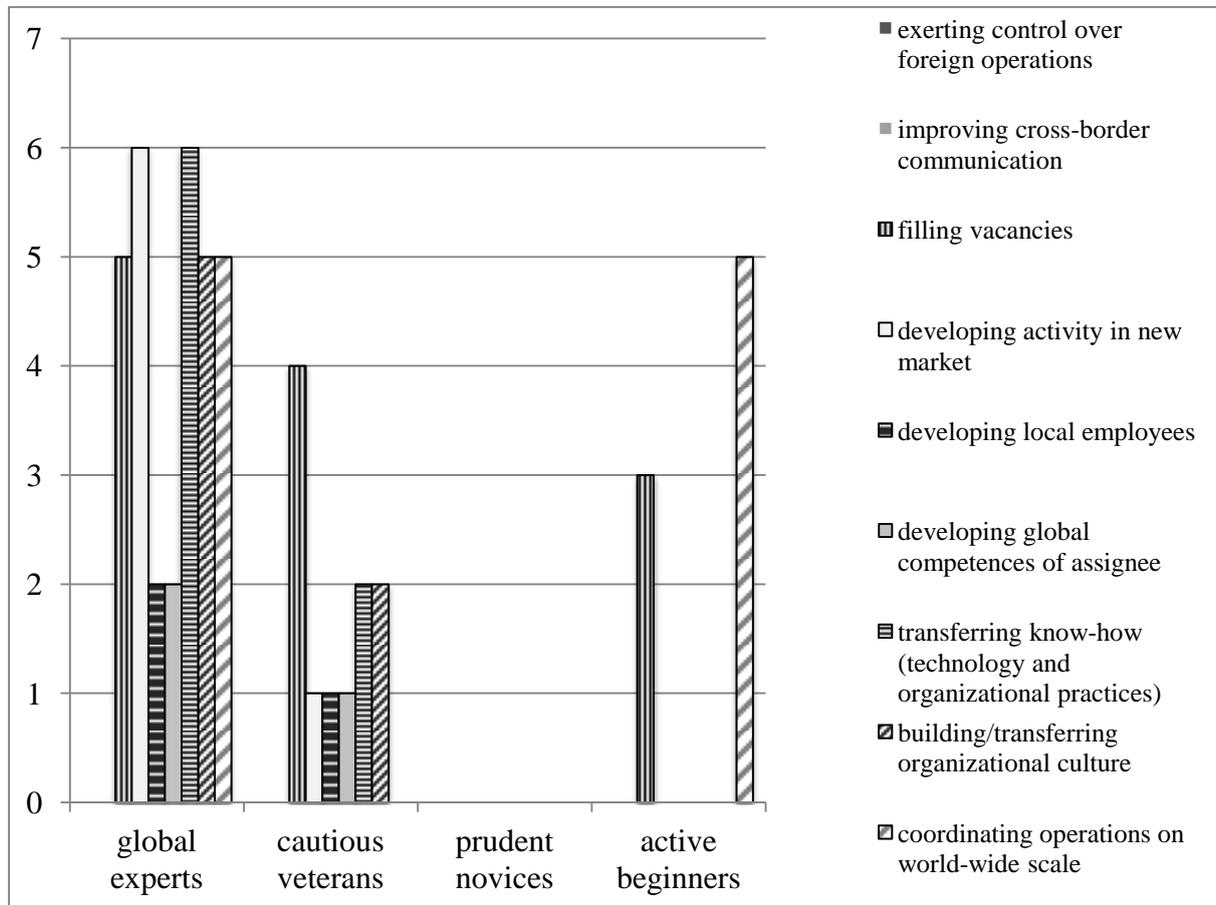
Figure 6: Goals of short-time IAs in chosen categories of Polish companies



In general, long-term assignments are perceived as the most costly and problematic. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that so few companies made use of these forms of IAs. They most often aimed at filling vacancies abroad (12 firms, 26.1%) or coordinating international activities (10 firms, 21.7%). It is very diffi-

cult, however, to assess tendencies in this area as 9 companies refused to answer a question about the aim of their IAs (Figure 7).

*Figure 7: Goals of IAs lasting a year or longer in chosen categories of Polish companies*



Note: In several companies belonging to: prudent novices (1 company) and global experts their representatives refuse to answer.

(5 times in case of “exerting control (...)”, and 3 times in case of the rest of IAs' goals)

### 4.3 Are managerial practices concerning IAs changing in the course of internationalization?

While combining the aims of delegating staff with the type of the company's international experience it is worth considering them jointly, that is to refer to all types of IAs. Such synthesis leads to several observations:

- global experts most commonly use IAs to create an organizational culture, fill local vacancies, improve intra-firm communication, and develop activities in new markets;
- cautious veterans use IAs mainly to develop activities in new markets and transfer knowledge therein; exercising control was mentioned slightly less often;

- prudent novices delegate employees abroad mostly to exercise control and less often to develop activities in new markets or transfer know-how;
- active beginners undertake IAs mainly to transfer know-how, but also to improve communication, fill vacancies, develop activities in new markets and coordinate these activities internationally.

Summing up, the aims of IAs associated within the early stages of internationalization, such as knowledge transfer from the head office and exercising control tend to prevail in companies which are less engaged in international activities (cautious veterans and prudent novices), and relatively “new” (prudent novices and active beginners). Reinforcing organizational culture and improving communication representing needs of high importance, in the case of dispersion and complexity of activities, seem to be priorities among global experts. The presence of “developing activities in new markets” among IAs’ goals in all groups reflects the common intention to pursue international expansion.

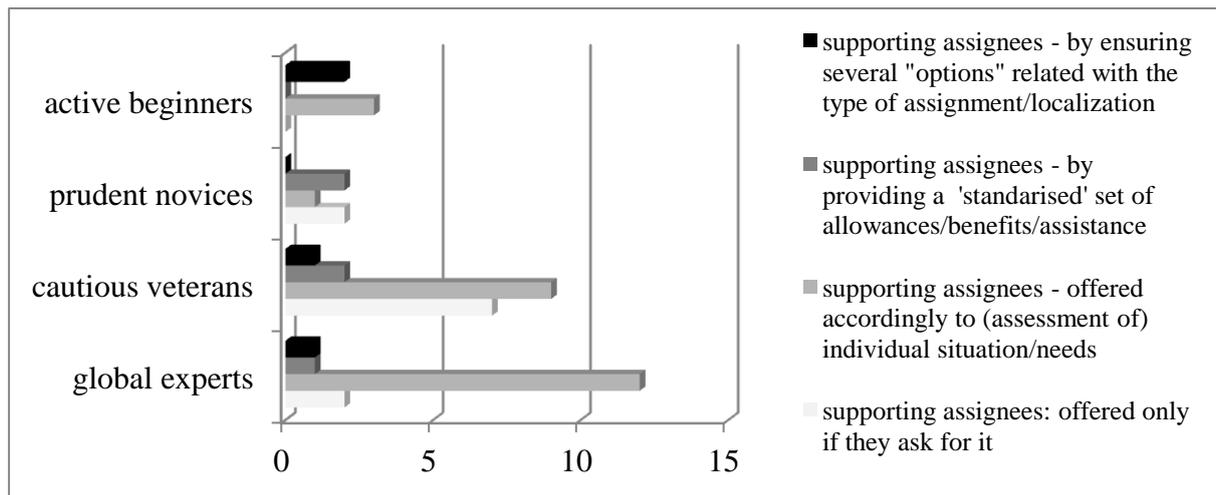
IAs are normally assisted by various activities which facilitate carrying out tasks and dealing with unfamiliar situations. At times, they take up the form of support packages which are mostly present in corporations with high staff flow to other countries. In certain circumstances, part of these activities are carried out by specialized external entities which may for example, organize relocation, advise on taxes and regulations or working opportunities in a given location, and provide cross-cultural trainings.

The policy of supporting IAs carried out independently by Polish enterprises<sup>15</sup> comes in different forms: (1) leaving initiative to assignees and assisting them merely upon request, (2) situational approach – adjusting the scope and form of assistance to individual circumstances, (3) providing a standardized set of allowances/benefits, (4) applying a few support variants depending on the character/location of assignment (Figure 8). The most popular practice among global experts, active beginners, and cautious veterans was option (2), however cautious veterans often chose the reactive approach (option 1) as well. Few companies offered their assignees any specific benefits or support packages. It should be noticed that in light of this research, the frequency of the above practices is far from reflecting the length or the range of Polish enterprises’ international experience.

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<sup>15</sup> Only 6 companies made use of external services; this was exclusively done in specific circumstances (e.g. a specific situation of an assignee or new “difficult” location).

*Figure 8: Policy of supporting assignees sent to other (foreign) localizations in chosen categories of Polish companies*



A set of activities which accompany IAs varied slightly in individual groups of companies (Table 2). For example, most global experts offered their assignees relocation allowances and language courses, and remained in contact with these employees by means of ICT-based tools facilitating distant cooperation. Cautious veterans usually offered assignees help in moving to a new site and solved their day-to-day problems, communicated with them regularly, and (like the previous group) provided them with relocation allowances.

Contrary to expectations, a range of activities was much wider in enterprises with less "international experience"<sup>16</sup>. For instance, most prudent novices offered such forms of support as helping in day-to-day problems, language courses, relocation allowances, international career development plans, and monitoring costs and benefits of IAs. The latter two activities may be evidence of a more complex perception of IAs in the context of functioning and development of these entities. It can be also observed that the majority of active beginners provided assignees with a local "counsellor" and every second company offered (apart from language courses, relocation allowances and assistance in everyday matters) support in job searching for assignees' spouses as well as individual coaching, and an international career development plan. To sum up, the approach of active beginners was the most complex and it accommodated personal (family) determinants as well as assignee's development opportunities.

<sup>16</sup> Probably, the need to use IAs might have been stronger in companies in the phase of dynamic development in new foreign market. However, this issue has not been taken into account in the study.

*Table 2: Forms of organizational support for assignees offered by Polish companies [in numbers and % for each category]*

| Forms of support   | GLOBAL EXPERTS |       | CAUTIOUS VETERANS |       | PRUDENT NOVICES |       | ACTIVE BEGINNERS |       |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|------------------|-------|
|  | Number         | %     | Number            | %     | Number          | %     | Number           | %     |
| assistance in everyday problems  | 7              | 43.8% | 10                | 52.6% | 4               | 80.0% | 3                | 50.0% |
| ensuring children's education  | 2              | 12.5% | 4                 | 21.1% | 0               | 0.0%  | 0                | 0.0%  |
| providing information on employment opportunities, assisting in searching for a job (for a spouse)                                       | 2              | 12.5% | 2                 | 10.5% | 0               | 0.0%  | 3                | 50.0% |
| language courses for assignees   | 9              | 56.3% | 5                 | 26.3% | 3               | 60.0% | 3                | 50.0% |
| language courses for family members  | 3              | 18.8% | 3                 | 15.8% | 0               | 0.0%  | 0                | 0.0%  |
| assistance from "a local mentor"   | 3              | 18.8% | 2                 | 10.5% | 0               | 0.0%  | 4                | 66.7% |
| cross-cultural trainings   | 7              | 43.8% | 7                 | 36.8% | 0               | 0.0%  | 2                | 33.3% |
| trainings on country specific work requirements  | 4              | 25.0% | 8                 | 42.1% | 2               | 40.0% | 1                | 16.7% |
| individual coaching during assignment  | 3              | 18.8% | 5                 | 26.3% | 0               | 0.0%  | 3                | 50.0% |
| relocation allowances  | 11             | 68.8% | 13                | 68.4% | 3               | 60.0% | 3                | 50.0% |
| permanent contact with the assignees by their parent (sending) units/entities  | 7              | 43.8% | 11                | 57.9% | 2               | 40.0% | 2                | 33.3% |
| using ICT-based tools in order to share/exchange information with assignees and/or to coordinate their activities in other localizations | 12             | 75.0% | 8                 | 42.1% | 0               | 0.0%  | 2                | 33.3% |
| cooperation with external expat communities/organizations  | 4              | 25.0% | 3                 | 15.8% | 1               | 20.0% | 3                | 50.0% |
| trainings supporting repatriation  | 1              | 6.3%  | 5                 | 26.3% | 0               | 0.0%  | 0                | 0.0%  |
| individual career development plans  | 2              | 12.5% | 3                 | 15.8% | 3               | 60.0% | 3                | 50.0% |
| obligatory sharing/codifying country specific knowledge (acquired during assignment) after coming back                                   | 4              | 25.0% | 8                 | 42.1% | 2               | 40.0% | 1                | 16.7% |
| monitoring costs/profits made by IAs   | 3              | 18.8% | 4                 | 21.1% | 4               | 80.0% | 1                | 16.7% |

## 5. Conclusions

Despite growing activity of Polish companies in international markets, the issue of managing IAs in these entities has not been sufficiently explored. This study allows to reduce the abovementioned gap. However, the manner of sampling, the small scale research (including very restricted participation of enterprises which are in their early stages of internationalization), and relying solely on HR managers (as informers) constitute serious constraints in formulating a more general interpretation of the research outcomes. In spite of these obstacles, it is worth emphasizing that the obtained results confirm the advisability of wider conceptualization of international assignments, not restricted to multinational corporations.

In view of the above-presented research, Polish companies vary in terms of the length and form of international activities, which allows to distinguish four categories of enterprises. A certain differentiation of IAs and associated activities can be observed in individual groups. These intergroup differences can be partly justified by the increase of experience in the international market in terms of time and scope of involvement. The congruity between “international maturity” and managing IAs can be observed in cases of: strategic orientation of management, purposes of delegating workers (partly), and use of diverse IA forms. Nonetheless, this study could evoke certain doubts concerning such issues as formalization of managing IAs and the range of support offered to assignees. An interesting challenge in the context of the above practices may be in-depth analysis of such forms of international activity as managerial contracts, carrying out complex investments abroad, and participation in international strategic alliances, since they generate specific problems for managers in charge of IAs policy.

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