

Outsourcing in the Banking Sector (The Polish Banking Sector Case)

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Abstract

The last few years have brought significant changes to the functioning of banks. One of the most important ways of adaptation to the changing economic environment that reduces operational costs is outsourcing. In this paper, we describe changes in the institutional shape of the Polish banking system after the Global Financial Crisis, and the role of outsourcing processes in it. We examine the literature concerning outsourcing; reasons for implementation of outsourcing, and the factors influencing the success of outsourcing will be defined and discussed. The paper also explains the most important risks and challenges of outsourcing. Furthermore, based on the objective data from reports, strategies and other documents of banking sector institutions, and on the results of a pilot study questionnaire for banking professionals, we discuss the role of outsourcing in Poland in several aspects, and from different perspectives. Finally, we assess the place of Poland in the web of global banking outsourcing, and postulate deeper analysis of ethics and morality in outsourcing processes.

Keywords: Banking, outsourcing, human resources

Introduction

The last few years have brought significant changes to the functioning of banks. Doctrinal concepts such as "too big to fail" have lost their crucial significance. Some internationally well-known banks failed, but the Polish banking sector has avoided bankruptcies. As a result of the global economic crisis, many foreign customers have lost their mortgages and residencies. Mortgage-based loans are the best payoff credits in Poland. Banks have adapted to changes in the environment, quickly cutting the costs of their activities. Since staff costs are a very important part of the operating costs of banks, during the crisis, these reductions were popular. Another way to reduce operational costs is outsourcing. For some banks, outsourcing has become a means to reduce costs, whereas for others it was used to improve management. The first mention of outsourcing dates back to the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, but its actual popularity occurred in the first 90 years of the twentieth century - especially in the Polish economy, which was a centrally planned economy up to 1990. Interestingly, in contrast to many other management tools coming from the West, the growth of outsourcing was simultaneously popular in Poland and in the West. This reflects the relatively short history of outsourcing used in practice.

This article examines the literature concerning outsourcing. Reasons for implementation of outsourcing, and factors influencing the success of outsourcing will be defined. Furthermore, the methodology of research presented and final empirical research results will be analyzed.

The need for outsourcing and factors of success – a literature review

Outsourcing, most often, is understood as the contracting out of a business process to a third-party, with participation in a separate organizational unit, or without participation. There have been many reasons for outsourcing selected in the literature, but the first position extends to striving to reduce operating costs. When a range of activities are outsourced, organizational problems can be gotten rid, and the core business can be concentrated on. It is significant that, at least in some jurisdictions, like in Poland, when business is outsourced, the vendor is commissioned, and also the legal services, and there is no interest in social issues in the outsourced spheres. Using outsourcing, additional labor costs can be reduced, such as social services. Cost savings are made in some cases by reducing both direct and indirect remuneration of persons who ultimately perform outsourced tasks. Furthermore, the vendor assumes much of the risk associated with the ongoing maintenance and management of employees. The principal act of payment and possible consequences of problems with the staff, etc. focus on the vendor. Sometimes an outsourcing vendor is a big player with special equipment or experience that cannot be afforded by a small client, possessing a technological advantage. A. A. Gokhale assesses that: "...offshore providers, who are at work while U.S. workers are sleeping, enable faster turnarounds during crunch time, quicker than most firms can deliver internally" [A. A. Gokhale, p. 11]. It can be concluded that the main reasons for outsourcing are: cost reduction, risk reduction, striving for elasticity of resources, growing of the quality of resources, and access to resources.

According to A. M. Porter's studies, the tasks assigned to outsourcing concentrated on three areas: information technology (30%), human resources (16%), and marketing & sales (14%) [A. M. Porter, p. 47]. Many factors influence using outsourcing – encouragement, or dealing with some trouble. Outsourcing can be contracted-out to

entities operating in the same country, or entities operating in another country. India is one of the most notable countries that has established vendors of outsourcing. The increased interest in Indian outsourcing services results not only from the lower cost of providing such services, but also from satisfactory quality of services, which is directly related to the increasing level of education in the local society. Another, perhaps less well-known, but still growing, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) center is Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. Polish scholar ratios are one of the highest in the world, and Polish people, especially the young, are generally well educated (although the quality of education is influenced by demographic depression – a reduction in the population growth rate).

Table 1. The reasons for implementation of outsourcing ¹

No.	Author	Reasons
1.	S. Chatterjee, R. Chaudhuri	Internal organizational stability and flexibility in obtaining improved satisfaction and better service with the outsourcing project
2.	J. Harasim	Willingness to get rid of burdensome administrative tasks
3.	Z. Shi et al.	Assemble knowledge from suppliers
4.	J. T. C. Teng et al.	Lack of resources
		Resource gaps
		Acquiring resources from outside the firm boundaries by sourcing arrangement
5.	A. Vashista, A. Vashista	Lower labour costs
		Technological advances

Table 2. Factors influencing success of outsourcing ²

No.	Author	Factors
1.	P. Babcock	Growth of education in the developing

¹ Source: S. Chatterjee, R. Chaudhuri, A System Theoretic Analysis of IT/IS Outsourcing: A Case Based Approach, *Journal of Modelling and Simulation of Systems* (Vol. 1-2010, Issue 2), p. 132; J. Harasim, *Bankowość detaliczna w Polsce*, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2005, p. 264; Z. Shi, A. S. Kunnathurb, T. S. Ragu-Nathan, Is outsourcing management competence dimensions: Instrument development and relationship exploration. *Information & Management* 42, 2005, p. 901-919; J. T. C. Teng, M. J. Cheon, V. Grover, Decisions to outsourcing information system function: Testing a strategy-theoretic discrepancy model. *Decision Science*, 26(1), 1995, p. 75-103; A. Vashista, A. Vashista, *The Offshore Nation*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2006, from S. Kumar, E. C. Aquino, E. Anderson, Application of a process methodology and a strategic decision model for business process outsourcing, *Information Knowledge Systems Management* 6 (2007), p. 325.

² Source: P. Babcock, America's newest export: white-collar jobs. *HR Magazine*, 49(4), 2004, p. 6; S. Chatterjee, R. Chaudhuri, A System Theoretic Analysis of IT/IS Outsourcing: A Case Based Approach, *Journal of Modelling and Simulation of Systems*, Vol. 1-2010, Issue 2, p. 142; A. Gurung, E. Prater, A Research Framework for the Impact of Cultural Differences on IT Outsourcing, *Impact of Culture on IT Outsourcing*, *Journal of Global Information Technology Management*, 2006, Vol. 9, Issue 1, p. 24; J. N. Lee, The impact of knowledge sharing, organizational capability and partnership quality on is outsourcing success. *Information & Management*, 38(5), 2001, p. 323-335.

		countries
2.	S. Chatterjee, R. Chaudhuri	Flexibility
3.	A. Gurung, E. Prater	Cultural factors
4.	J. N. Lee	Knowledge sharing by client and supplier

However, while the history of outsourcing is short, this management tool is still changing. As mentioned by A. Gurung, E. Prater, "...managing outsourcing relationships is becoming increasingly complex. Contracts have moved from a focus on cost savings to include value-based outsourcing, equity-based outsourcing, and business process outsourcing" [A. Gurung, E. Prater, p. 29]. Both outsourcing vendors and commissioners learn how to cooperate. The length of term of cooperation is at a high level, dependent on the quality of that relationship [T. Kem].

The same characteristics, mentioned as an advantage of outsourcing, could be a disadvantage, if they are not satisfactory. For example, growing educational levels in the developing countries conducive to outsourcing implementation can be an advantage, but when the same outsourcing vendor is not ready to anticipate new technological changes, it can be a reason for a collapse in vendor and principal cooperation. The same problems can occur in the field of language, with communication barriers [T. Nolle]. All of them are connected to risk.

Table 3. Risks and challenges in outsourcing³

No.	Author	Risk
1.	R. Aron, E. Clemons, S. Reddi	Long-term intrinsic risks of atrophy
2.	B. A. Aubert, M. Patry, S. Rivard	Cultural dissimilarity
		Delayed delivery of data
		Slow implementation
3.	R. Click, T. Duening	Human capital risk
4.	M. J. Earl	Not enough edge expertise of providers
5.	T. Herath, R. Kishore	Knowledge hoarding
		Loss of core group
		Loss of core capability
		Disparity between what it negotiated and what is delivered
		Cost escalation
		Vendors providing legacy technology
		Operational risks due to vendor locations
		Risks due to environmental, cultural, legal differences
		Deliberate underperformance by vendor
		Reverse engineering of critical business processes, stealing and/or using proprietary information for secondary purposes
		Lock-in situations
		Loss of bargaining power leading to disputes and litigations
		Antiquated communication infrastructure
		Complexity in codes
		Conflicting standards
		Poorly articulated requirements
		Incompatible development tools
		Forgoing the development of the knowledge base
6.	N. Kakabadse, A. Kakabadse	Underestimation of the time and skills

³ Source: R. Aron, E. Clemons, S. Reddi, Just right outsourcing: Understanding and managing risk. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference of System Sciences (HICSS), January 3-6, 2005, Hawaii; B. A. Aubert, M. Patry, S. Rivard, Assessing the Risk of IT Outsourcing, IEEE Proceedings 31st Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 6, 1998, p. 685-692; R. Click, T. Duening, Business Process Outsourcing, The Competitive Advantage, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005; M. J. Earl, The risks of outsourcing it. Sloan Management Review, 37(3), 1996, p. 26-32; T. Herath, R. Kishore, Offshore Outsourcing: Risks, Challenges, and Potential Solutions, Information Systems Management, 26, p. 316; N. Kakabadse, A. Kakabadse, Critical Review-Outsourcing: A Paradigm Shift, The Journal of Management Development 19(8), 2000, p. 670-728; N. V. Oza, T. Hall, A. Rainer, S. Grey, Trust in software outsourcing relationships: An empirical investigation of Indian software companies, Information and Software Technology, 48(5), 2006, p. 345-354; W. E. Sullivan, O. K. Ngwenyama, How are public sector organizations managing is outsourcing risks? An analysis of outsourcing guidelines from three jurisdictions, Journal of Computer Information Systems, Spring 2005, p. 74; A. Vashista, A. Vashista, The Offshore Nation, New York, McGraw-Hill 2006.

7.	N. V. Oza, T. Hall, A. Rainer, S. Grey	The degradation of service
8.	W. E. Sullivan, O. K. Ngwenyama	Opportunistic behaviour by the vendor
		Vendor's lack of experience
		Vendor's financial instability
		Vendor performance monitoring
		Contract horizon and technology discontinuity
9.	A. Vashista, A. Vashista	Loss of proprietary information
		Country risk
		Intellectual property protection

Outsourcing risk factors may be classified into four groups: vendor attitude problems, vendor competence problems, vendor coordination problems, and in-house competence problems [N. Gorla, M. B. Lau, p. 91]. It seems, however, that division does not cover all types of risk, with lack of reference to the employee. Benefits and costs of outsourcing implementation appear on both on the employers' side - the entity that has decided to outsource some of the tasks outside the organization, as well as on the staff side. Employees who expect their employer intends to subcontract parts of tasks beyond the organization, often expect that it will cause a reduction in employees. As with any other redundancies, it can cause a series of negative consequences. Employees are likely to increase competition among themselves; they will use more or less ethical moves designed to keep their jobs. Some of them (including those more productive) will decide to anticipate the movement of the employer and they may begin to look for another job. Certainly, a reduction period is also characterized by increased stress and anxiety about the future, which is not conducive to building a culture of trust and cooperation.

Methodology

The article uses objective data from reports, strategies, prospectuses and other documents of banks, the Polish central bank, the Polish banking supervisor (KNF – *Komisja Nadzoru Finansowego* – Financial Supervision Commission) and near-bank institutions from Poland. All publicly available documents were analyzed regarding outsourcing. Other methods were also used: a questionnaire survey of employees in banks in the Wielkopolska region, and the results of in-depth standardized interviews with seven randomly selected HR managers and staff members of the boards of banks operating in the Wielkopolska region⁴. Interviews conducted in 2010 were used to interpret the results of the survey.

The 2010 survey examined the opinions of bank employees on employment in the sector. Each survey question was analyzed using several criteria. The questionnaire consisted of three essential parts, relating respectively to the economic, social and technological determinants of employment. A pilot study (130 questioned) was conducted among the employees of the banks. It was not possible to determine the total number of employees in banks in the Wielkopolska region, and the structure of employment in the banking sector in Wielkopolska. In view of the above problems,

⁴ Additional results of research on determinants of employment in the banks were presented in: J. Kaźmierczyk, *Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce*, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011.

the author decided finally to use a non-random sample selection. A 'snowball' technique was used in the main study – participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire, and to ask other bank employees to take part in the questionnaire. A very effective source for obtaining respondents turned out to be the goldenline.pl portal, bringing together staff economists. Among those registered on the portal, which were proposed to take part in the survey, 8.79% expressed their willingness to fulfill the survey. Two different questionnaires - for managerial employees and non-managerial employees, were used. More than 9,000 inquiries were sent to banking employees in the Wielkopolska region (using goldenline.pl, e-mails, etc.). Two series of reminders about the study via e-mail were organized. Responses were received from 342 employees of banks (of which 17 questionnaires were rejected, due to their low accuracy and reliability). It should be noted that the banks which were surveyed control more than 90% of the assets of the entire banking sector in Poland, and employ more than 74% of all employees in the Polish banking sector [The report about the banking system situation in 2009, p. 20-23]. The analysis excludes the central bank – the National Bank of Poland, because of its superior character in comparison to other banks, and its specific functions.

Outsourcing in the Polish banking sector

Outsourcing is commonly used by many Polish banks (see Table 4). The vast majority of managerial employees (77.97%) and non-managerial employees (76.32%) recognized that outsourcing is used in their bank. There were no significant differences between responses of the managerial and non-managerial employees. The same applied generally to all the survey questions concerning outsourcing. Answers confirming the use of outsourcing were dominated by almost all of the analyzed criteria. It was often the result of the engagement of foreign capital, which was transferring know-how to Polish banks.

Table 4. Using outsourcing in banks ⁵

All respondents	A. Yes, outsourcing is used		B. No, outsourcing is not used		C. It is difficult to state		No response	
Managerial employees								
266	203	76.32%	36	13.53%	26	9.77%	1	0.38%
Non-managerial employees								
59	46	77.97%	12	20.34%	1	1.69%	0	

From the foundations of the literature analysis, it can be concluded that areas such as: security, safety, transport, legal services, and social and technical IT issues were often transferred beyond the organization [W. Baka, p. 250]. What we should emphasize is that every Polish bank must obtain permission from the Polish Financial Supervision Authority for outsourcing business [W. Wielanek, p. 17]. Employees who had been 'kicked-out' of the organization were then often at the beginning of the outsourcing process implementation employed in so-called 'near-bank' companies, usually owned

⁵ Source: J. Kaźmierczyk, Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011, p. 150.

by that bank [A. Janc, *Współczesny...*, p. 16-17; A. Janc, *Bank...*, p. 79-90]. In some cases, banks legally and organizationally separated a narrow range of tasks (e.g. security), in order to sell the separated company. Moreover, as noted by J. Harasim, e-banks outsource some part of their activities to reduce costs [J. Harasim, p. 148, 152].

Sometimes, outsourcing is a result of a merger or acquisition of banks. For example, closing the transaction between PKO BP SA and Nordea was dependent on the closing terms and conditions specified in the agreement; these included providing IT services by the Nordea Group under an outsourcing agreement, so as to ensure the safe operation of Nordea Bank Polska SA in the period preceding migration to IT systems of PKO Bank Polski SA. The same bank used outsourcing to limit its exposure to operational risk [The PKO Bank Polski SA Group Directors' Report for the Year 2013, p. 77]. Outsourcing also plays the important role in organizations of risk management within banks. As we can read from a report of the PKO – the biggest Polish bank – "The first line of defence is being performed particularly in the organizational units of the Bank, the organizational units of the Head Office and the external entities to which the Bank outsourced other banking activities and concerns the activities of those units', cells and entities which may generate risk. The units and entities are responsible for identifying risks, designing and implementing appropriate controls, including in the external entities, unless controls have been implemented as part of the measures taken in the second line of defence" [Financial Statements of PKO Bank Polski SA for the Year Ended 31 December 2013 (In PLN Thousand), p. 96].

The same applies to Bank Handlowy:

"The Group intends to use the possibility of outsourcing activities relating to banking activity, particularly in areas of information technology and in cases where outsourcing is justified by business needs and at the same time does not endanger secure operation of the Group. As outsourcing involves not only benefits but also increased risk, which the Group can be exposed to in its operation, the Group takes measures aimed at mitigating that type of risk, particularly by ensuring compliance with legal requirements and internal regulations, operating an effective system of internal control, and monitoring co-operation with third parties, security of processed information and privileged banking information" [Annual Consolidated Financial Statements of the Capital Group of Bank Handlowy w Warszawie S.A., for the financial year ended 31 December 2013, p. 98].

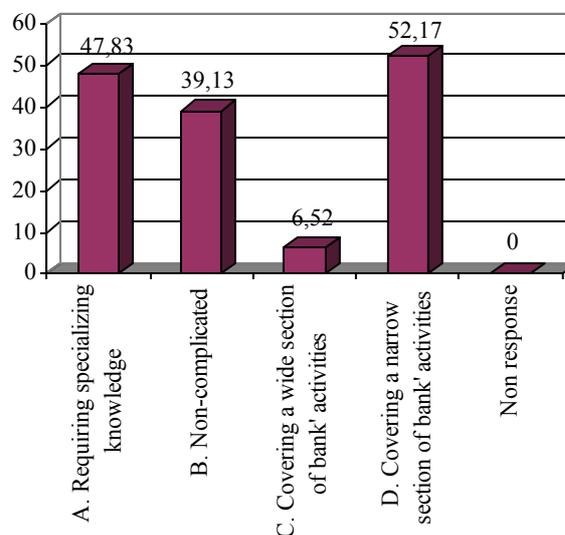
While some banks are part of a bigger international group, such as the case of BPH (GE Capital Group), one of the fundamental rules claims that: "the Bank does not outsource any risk management processes" [Annual Consolidated Financial Statements of the Bank BPH SA Capital Group for 2013, p. 88]. WBK has outsourced call centers, contact centers, and HR management to Holicon Group SA [Consolidated financial statements of BZ WBK Group for 2012, p. 65]. WBK expanded outsourcing of IT services, and application development raised IT usage costs. One of the features of the target telephone banking model of the Bank Zachodni WBK will be outsourcing of the selective executive structures [Management Board Report on Bank Zachodni WBK Performance in 2012, p. 48, 60]. ING pinpointed that one of the main areas of interest of corporate banking operations within ING in 2014

will be extending relationships with international entities acting as business process outsources [Management Board Report on Operations in 2013, ING Bank Śląski S.A., p. 64].

Reorganization of outsourcing services was an important part of overall gains from investment security in mBank. Demand from outsourcing centers for office space in Poland drives growth in smaller cities such as Olsztyn and Bydgoszcz, and leads to changes in the property market. The office space market remains a tenant's market, while the retail space market shows symptoms of saturation in the segment of large-format properties [IFRS Consolidated Financial Statements 2013, mBank S.A. Group, p. 13, 97]. Postal Bank has entered into an agency agreement with the Polish Post SA, and a number of outsourcing contracts with subsidiaries of the Bank; ie Operations Center Ltd., and Postbank Distribution Company Ltd. [Sprawozdanie finansowe za rok zakończony 31 grudnia 2013 roku, Bank Pocztowy S.A., p. 134].

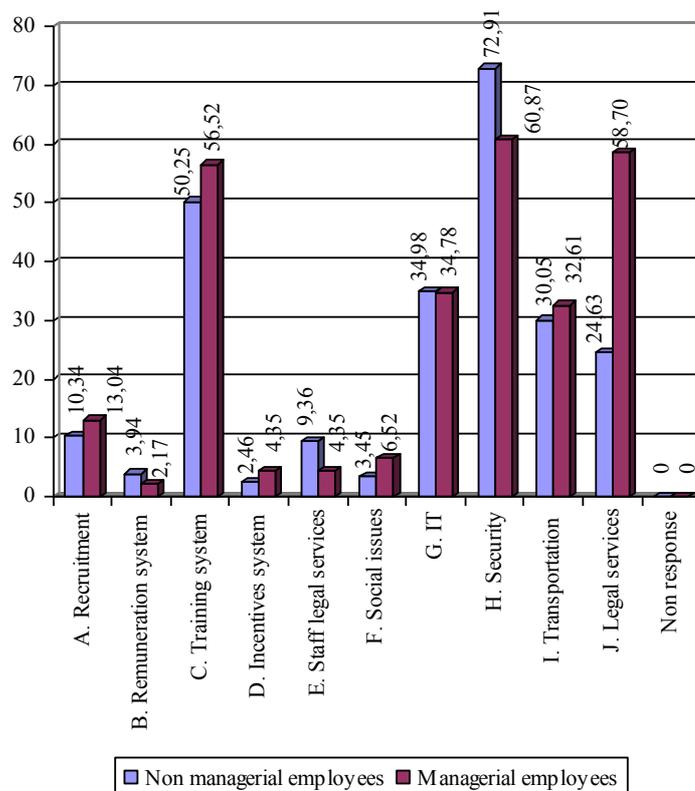
These surveyed managerial employees, who recognized outsourcing in their bank, mostly indicated that their bank outsources a narrow range of activities (52.17%), and activity requiring technical knowledge (47.83%). Simultaneously, the difference between answers 'A' and 'B' was not significant (Diagram 1). Security, legal services, and training systems were indicated as the most outsourced functions (Diagram 2).

Diagram 1. The spheres outsourced by banks (according to the opinion of managerial employees, in %) ⁶



⁶ Note: 46 managerial employees answered the question.

Source: J. Kaźmierczyk, Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011, p. 151.

Diagram 2. The functions outsourced by banks (in %) ⁷

In the theoretical part of the article, we raised the aspect of incentives which determine the use of outsourcing in banks. Some researchers have pointed out that there is a fundamental importance in striving to increase quality of services. However, surveys and interviews with bank recruiters shows that the main factor of outsourcing in Poland is still striving to reduce costs (82.61%; Table 5). This applies to most of the analyzed criteria. Only higher level managerial employees, and the managers of cooperative banks pointed out that the most important factor was striving to increase of the quality of services (respectively 88.89% and 60%). As previously stated, some banks separated certain operational areas (function, range of tasks), to allow to operate as a separate company in the future (e.g. security). This process was more popular in banks with a predominance of foreign capital (54.05%) than national capital (6.67%) (Table 6).

⁷ Note: 203 non-managerial employees and 46 managerial employees answered the question.
Source: J. Kaźmierczyk, Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011, p. 152.

Table 5. Factors of using outsourcing in banks (according to the opinions of managerial employees) ⁸

Criterion	All respondents	A. Striving to reduce costs		B. Striving to increase of the quality of services		No response	
All banks	46	38	82.61%	16	34.78%	1	2.17%
Commercial banks	37	34	91.89%	11	29.73%	0	0
Cooperative banks	5	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%
Higher level managerial employees	9	4	44.44%	8	88.89%	0	0

Table 6. Separation of the operations area from a bank (in the opinion of managerial employees) ⁹

Criterion	All respondents	A. Yes, an area was separated		B. No		No response	
All banks	59	23	38.98%	29	49.15%	7	11.86%
Banks with domestic capital	15	1	6.67%	13	86.67%	1	6.67%
Banks with foreign capital	37	20	54.05%	11	29.73%	6	16.22%

Summary

The results should be considered a starting point for further in-depth analyses. Due to the reluctance of banks to provide information about their activities, and also because of current Polish law, one problem is how to implement the research, as representative for all the Polish banking sector. Moreover, there is not enough official data concerning the structure of employment in the Polish banking sector.

Analysis shows that the main reason for the application of outsourcing by Polish banks was striving to reduce operational costs. The first phase of outsourcing in Poland was to reduce employment, and outsource some tasks beyond the organization. That is why outsourcing is associated by employees with dismissal. The demand for outsourcing in banks in Poland has been influenced by many factors. Apart from the focus on cost reduction, there was a significant increase in the level of education among employees, which allowed for the employment by vendors of new staff with the right skills.

⁸ Source: J. Kaźmierczyk, Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011, p. 152.

⁹ Source: J. Kaźmierczyk, Technologiczne i społeczno-ekonomiczne determinanty zatrudnienia w sektorze bankowym w Polsce, CeDeWu, Warszawa 2011, p. 153.

We also see potential growth in the significance of Poland in the web of global banking outsourcing. This assumption is based on the analysis of comparative advantage of the country, often mentioned in World Bank reports, such as: well-qualified workers (high level of schooling, high learning ability, easy access to capital from European Union funds on entrepreneurship-supporting programs); political stability; benefits for foreign investors (i.e. Special Economic Zones); the developing of infrastructure; and overall development of the banking sector. This was done on a secure and sound basis, accurately supervised by the Polish Financial Supervision Authority. However, there is still much to do in cases like: easing the taxation system, running business procedures, and getting access to building permits.

Another issue that very clearly appears when we consider outsourcing, is the ethics and morality of its customers and outsourcing vendors. Many questioned bank employees pointed out that the theoretical reasons for outsourcing implementation were different from the outsourcing they have seen in their banking branches. It requires further analysis in the future. The differences between the responses of the managerial and non-managerial employees were not significant. The question about the differences between the above-mentioned groups need additional study.

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