



REPORT



# DIVERSITY MATTERS

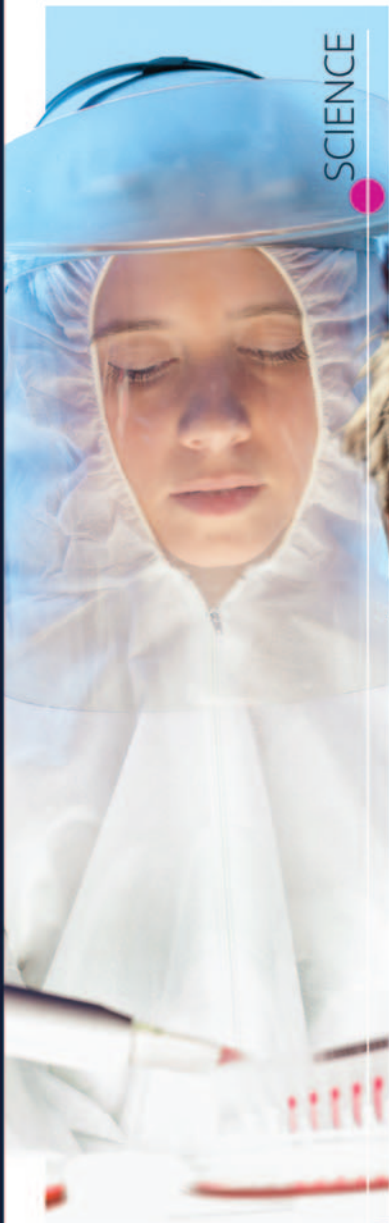
YOUNG **S** **T** **E** **M** WOMEN LEADERS  
CREATE CHANGE

SCIENCE

TECHNOLOGY

ENGINEERING

MATHEMATICS



Shesnnovation  
ACADEMY



shesnnovation.pl



Fundacja Kronenberga  
citi handlowy

inspiracja  
do działania

Funded by funds  
Citi Foundation

# Perspektywy

Citi Foundation



Fundacja Kronenberga



**Authors:**

Agnieszka Młodzińska-Granek, PhD, Patrycja Radek, MEng

**Research team comprising:**

Bianka Siwińska, PhD (author of the research concept)

Agnieszka Młodzińska-Granek, PhD

Patrycja Radek, MEng

Kazimierz Bilanow, PhD

Anna Gayer, PhD

**Graphic design:** Artur Żebrowski

**Typesetting:**

Artur Żebrowski

Karolina Sitnicka

**Translation:** Anna Kamińska



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
<b>Abstract</b> .....	6
<b>Chapter 1.</b> DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS IN THE WORLD – WOMEN AT WORK .....	8
<b>Chapter 2.</b> RESEARCH – DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVENESS, AND LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE EYES OF FEMALE STARTUP FOUNDERS .....	22
<b>Chapter 3.</b> WE NEED MORE DIVERSITY IN TEAMS AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP. KEY CONCLUSIONS FROM THE RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	56
<b>Source materials</b> .....	64



## BIANKA SIWIŃSKA, PHD

CEO of the Perspektywy Education Foundation

*„Programmes such as Shesnnovation allow us to support women in their struggle to shape reality, to change the world for the better and towards informed leadership.*

*Today, we really need gender-balanced teams in company and organisation management. The disproportions are large enough that our women-supporting activities are necessary on the road towards balance, female engineers would like to have impact and to increase it – globally, for example”*



## KATARZYNA MAJEWSKA

Member of the Management Board  
Citi Handlowy, O&T

*„Citi has been supporting the Shesnnovation Academy for years – a programme developing entrepreneurship, providing a possibility to understand new technologies and the options of their utilisation better. Women manage excellently in the STEM areas (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), they know how to utilise their knowledge, and Citi creates possibilities for that knowledge and skills to be presented to a wider audience. We really want women to develop in the areas where their potential will be best used, to choose the kind of education that interests them, to implement innovation on a world-wide scale”*

Fundacja Kronenberga



## INTRODUCTION

The research was conducted in order to identify **how female leaders – founders of startups – define diversity and what significance (if any) it has in building their** companies. In addition, topics related to the issue of workplace discrimination were examined, the respondents answered questions relating to, among other things, their personal experiences in this area. Another research **goal was to analyse leadership among women startup founders**. The final part of the report defines **recommendations** to be used in the process of improving the scope of projects such as Shesnovation Academy – developing the competences of female leaders of technological startups.

The data for research was collected using the CAWI technique – on-line surveys using Google Forms software. The respondents were the Shesnovation Academy alumnae (2019–2023) – only those who founded startups and keep developing them. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with five founders from Shesnovation Academy 2022/2023. The total research was conducted from January to June 2023.





# DIVERSITY MATTERS

Young STEM Leaders create change

# ABSTRACT

The research presented in this report has been conducted by the **Perspektywy Education Foundation and the Citi Handlowy Leopold Kronenberg Foundation** and financed from the Citi Foundation resources. The research and conclusions form a part of activities related to the **Shesnovation Academy** – a six-months startup programme for women in new technologies, conducted for the fourth time.

The Report comprises an introduction and three chapters. **In the first chapter the issues of diversity and inclusiveness** in the world are analysed – the analysis covered the areas related to these issues in the context of women’s professional fulfilment. **In the second chapter** the research results have been presented – **how female technology startup founders perceive diversity and leadership**. **The third chapter** includes key research conclusions – **how to support diversity in organisations (startups included), as well as women’s leadership, better by development programmes addressing the improvement of competencies of women in STEM**.

The goal of the research conducted between January and June 2023 by the Perspektywy Women in Tech Summit Foundation Research Team was to identify how leaders – technology startup founders – define and perceive the meaning of diversity in their organisations and environment. In the second part the research focused on what do these startup founders understand by leadership, especially women’s leadership. The conclusions were used to create recommendations and tips concerning the development and improvement of programmes dedicated to female tech leaders, such as Shesnovation Academy, in order to increase the participation of women on the managerial level in startups and companies developing technological innovations.

**The quantitative research** was conducted among female startup founders – **graduates (2019–2022) and participants of the Shesnovation Academy 2023**. The research tool used was a questionnaire, sent online using Google Forms. Additionally, there were five **in-depth interviews** conducted with five founders.

For the great majority of the research subjects, **diversity is important on the strategic level in building their organisations**. To them, diversity means „building teams, communities, and the world based in acceptance of a person’s individual possibilities, preferences, and limitations.” Only by noticing and appreciating diversity in a careful and empathic way, we can assure inclusiveness, we can create a complete copy of the social structures – this must be today’s normal – this is what our startupper respondents said.

We can conclude that their openness to diversity is a result of their own experience with discriminatory behaviour, experienced by most respondents in their own lives, especially in connection with their appearance, gender, worldview, national/ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs/denomination.

**The founders surveyed want to be leaders who will change the world**. To them, being a leader means „being an authentic, thoughtful person taking care about the relationship with oneself and with others, focusing on development and **improvement of the world situation**.”

The majority of the respondents (65%) think that **women’s leadership will have meaning for the development of the world** because it will be more empathetic and balanced.

Key words: **diversity, inclusiveness, equal rights, STEM, technologies, startups, leadership, women leaders**

# CHAPTER 1.<sup>1</sup>

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS IN THE WORLD

### – professional barriers for women

THE PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN AT THE INTERSECTION OF WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE, AND WE ARE TALKING ABOUT AN INEXHAUSTIBLE LIST HERE, ANALYSED IN THIS PART OF THE REPORT, HAVE BEEN DIVIDED INTO 7 THEMATIC AREAS:

1. What the Gender Social Norms Index represents?
2. What reinforces gender inequalities in the workplace?
3. Why do women disagree with the idea that men are their allies at work?
4. Consequences of unpaid tasks in the workplace – why women are the ones to bear them?
5. How to divide parental leave and why does it matter?
6. How to strengthen inclusive behaviour in teams?
7. What is the situation of women in startups?

1. Diversity in terms of organisation and governance is the difference in values, attitudes, cultural perspective, beliefs, ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender identity, skills, knowledge and life experiences of each individual in any group of people (European Institute for Gender Equality, [https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1085?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1085?language_content_entity=en))



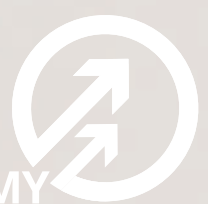


# DIVERSITY MATTERS

Young STEM Leaders create change



Shesnovation  
ACADEMY





# 1. GENDER SOCIAL NORMS INDEX

The Gender Social Norms Index quantifies<sup>2</sup> prejudice against women along four basic dimensions: political, economic, educational, and physical integrity. Gender-biased social norms – underestimation of women’s capabilities and rights in society – limit women’s choices and opportunities, regulating behaviour and setting boundaries for what is expected of women and who they are. **Biased social norms related to gender are a major obstacle to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.**<sup>3</sup>

The index, covering 85 percent of the world’s population, reveals that almost 9 out of 10 men and women have fundamental prejudices against women.<sup>4</sup> What does it mean, exactly? Nearly half of the world’s population believe that men are better political leaders than women, and two out of five people believe that men are better business managers than women. **Gender bias is evident in both low and high Human Development Index (HDI) countries.** These prejudices appear in various regions, incomes, levels of development, and cultures, making them a global problem.<sup>5</sup> How is the situation in Poland?

2. Gender Social Norms Index

3. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>, 12.06.2023

4. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>, 12.06.2023

5. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>, 12.06.2023

Figure 1.  
**GENDER SOCIAL NORMS INDEX, GSNI, PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE**

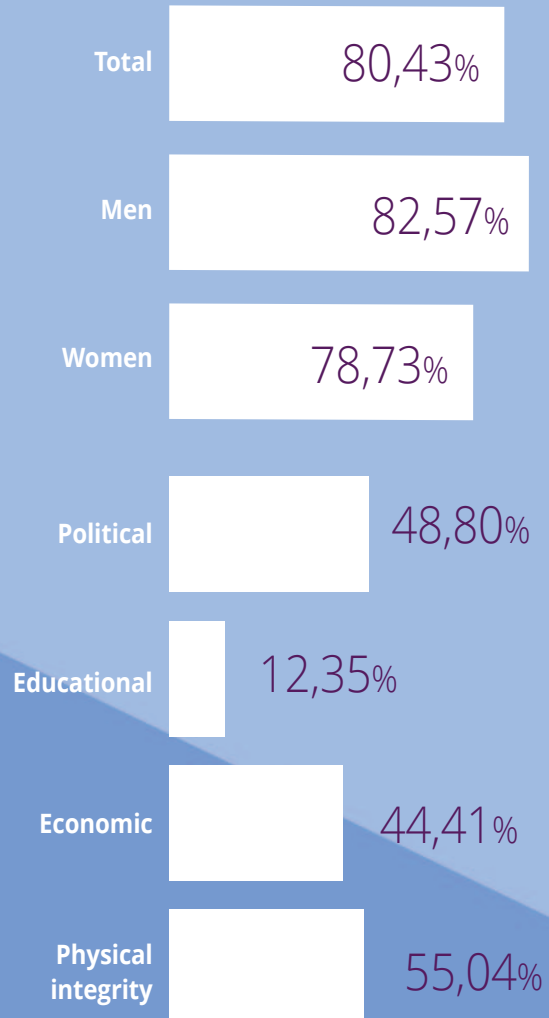


Figure 1.

Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) (percentage of people)  
Note: The GSNI covers four dimensions – political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. It is constructed on the basis of answers to seven questions from the World Values Survey, which are used to create seven indicators. The base index value measures the proportion of people with at least one bias, and lower value indicates less bias. For Poland – on the chart: percentage of people with gender bias; percentage of people with prejudice by gender and indicated index dimensions.

Source: <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

**Figure 2.**  
**THE AREAS OF GENDER BIAS RESEARCHED, ACCORDING TO GLOBAL SOCIAL NORM INDEX (GSNI)**

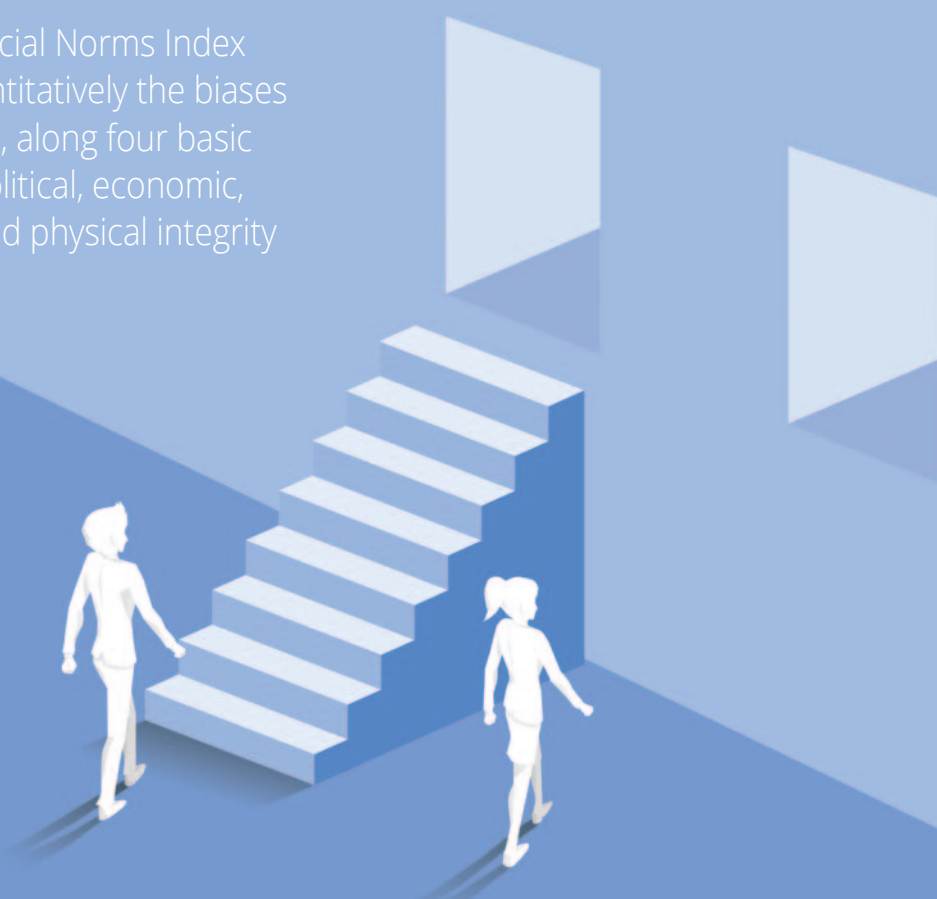
DIMENSIONS			
Political	Educational	Economic	Physical integrity
INDICATORS			
women having the same rights as men is essential for democracy	university is more important for man than for women	men should have more right to a job than women	proxy for intimate partner violence
men make better political leaders than women do		men make better business executives than women do	proxy for reproductive rights

**Figure 2.**

The areas of gender bias researched, according to GSNI, dimensions: political – men are better political leaders than women; educational – the university is more important for men than for women; economic – men should have greater labour rights than women, men are better leaders than women; physical integrity – consent to violence against the female partner, decision-making in the area of reproductive rights.

Source: <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

The Gender Social Norms Index quantifies quantitatively the biases against women, along four basic dimensions: political, economic, educational, and physical integrity



## 2. What does REINFORCE gender inequality?

In one of the studies published in Fast Company,<sup>6</sup> in which 913 women respondents answered open-ended questions, researchers found 30 common personality and identity-based traits that respondents said were used against them at work.

### The questions asked in the survey:

- What additional identity factors have influenced your work experience, in your opinion?
- What types of prejudice, other than gender bias, have you encountered at work?

"The bottom line we arrived at was that it did not matter what the women were like, they were never right," Amy Diehl, a researcher on the report together with Leanne Dzubinski and Amber Stephenson, told CNBC Make It.

**The characteristics that the women surveyed said were used against them in the workplace were: accent, age, attractiveness, body size, social class, skin colour, communication style, cultural identity, dietary restrictions, education, employment history, ethnicity, gender compatibility, health, intellectual ability, marital status, nationality, occupation, job title, parental status, character traits, physical ability, political preferences, pregnancy, religion, residential location, seniority, and sexual orientation.**<sup>7</sup>

How to deal with that? One of the "simple and powerful tools" is using the "reverse it to test it" method, Stephenson says. "Have you ever imagined this could be said about a man?" Using over 900 comments by women in the study, "the answer was always no."<sup>8</sup>



6. <https://www.cNBC.com/2023/06/07/women-criticized-at-work-on-30-characteristics-study-of-female-leaders-.html>

7. <https://www.cNBC.com/2023/06/07/women-criticized-at-work-on-30-characteristics-study-of-female-leaders-.html>

8. <https://www.cNBC.com/2023/06/07/women-criticized-at-work-on-30-characteristics-study-of-female-leaders-.html>



## The characteristics that the women surveyed said were used against them in the workplace were:

- age
- accent
- marital status
- attractiveness
- body size
- social class
- skin colour
- communication style
- cultural identity
- dietary restrictions
- education
- employment history
- ethnicity
- gender compatibility
- health
- intellectual ability
- residential location
- job title
- religion
- status rodzicielski
- sexual orientation
- pregnancy
- character traits



**DIVERSITY MATTERS**  
Young STEM Leaders create change

acteristics-  
acteristics-  
acteristics-

### 3. WHY do women disagree with the idea that men are their allies at work?

Despite the widespread belief that gender bias is not really a problem, or that supporting women in their workplaces is against men's own interests, more and more men are beginning to express an interest in being allies. In one survey of a group of men and women, 76 percent, i.e., 1,342 out of 1,751 participants, said they wanted to be allies for the under-represented and marginalised people in their organisation. In that study, 101 women in male-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics were asked to name a male colleague they regularly work with.<sup>9</sup>

What was the result of this study? Men and women thought differently about whether men were allies and whether men's actions were an expression of alliance, and this difference in perception affected women's well-being. It is therefore necessary to look for clues in how men describe their own alliances and how women describe them.

When women and men rated male alliances similarly – which was the case in 25 percent of the couples surveyed – women reported higher levels of energy and integration than others. In such cases, male colleagues often used multiple ally strategies, standing up for their female colleague in hostile situations, but also checking on her well-being afterwards. These men gave time and energy to help their colleagues develop strategies to grow and improve the workplace.

**It turns out that workplace dynamics are often not favourable to women, and creating a culture of inclusion requires that men not only be allies who stand up for their female colleagues in clearly difficult moments, but also that they work towards equality every day.**<sup>10</sup>



**76%** research participants said they wanted to be allies for the under-represented and marginalised people in their organisation

It turns out that workplace dynamics are often not favourable to women, and creating a culture of inclusion requires that men not only be allies who stand up for their female colleagues in clearly difficult moments, but also that they work towards equality every day.



## 4. CONSEQUENCES of unpaid tasks in the workplace – why women are the ones to bear them

When asked about workload, Dr. Karlett J. Parra, Chair of the Department and Professor of the School of Medicine – Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, believes, drawing from her own experience, that specific groups do more work that cannot be promoted: **“I have seen a trend where women are taking more on themselves, especially a lot of foreign women. It is not that men and others are not doing the job, but this group seems to be doing more work that will not drastically change their careers.”**<sup>11</sup>

Another professor, Karen Ellen, head of the Department of Chemistry at Boston University, notes a similar trend: “Historically, there have been fewer women who have been able to take responsibility inside the university or outside of professional associations. In attempts to balance the composition, women are more likely to be asked to complete tasks at work that do not contribute to their professional development.”<sup>12</sup>

Geoffrey Kapler, professor and former chair of the Department of Molecular and Cellular Medicine at Texas A&M University, said there is a name for this phenomenon: “This type of extra work can become what has been defined as **‘unpromotable work’** when not recognised by department heads or review committees during the annual appraisals or promotion process.”<sup>13</sup>

These professors believe **that the direction of change can start with recognising that women and members of historically underrepresented groups are doing more of this unpaid and unpromoted work. This way fairer methods of task distribution can be created.**



9. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/men-think-they-are-strong-workplace-allies-women-disagree/>, Meg A. Warren 13.06.2023
10. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/men-think-they-are-strong-workplace-allies-women-disagree/>, Meg A. Warren 13.06.2023
11. <https://www.asbmb.org/asbmb-today/careers/060923/the-silent-toll-of-unpromotable-work>
12. <https://www.asbmb.org/asbmb-today/careers/060923/the-silent-toll-of-unpromotable-work>
13. <https://www.asbmb.org/asbmb-today/careers/060923/the-silent-toll-of-unpromotable-work>

## 5. How to divide PARENTAL LEAVE and why does it matter?

Attempts by European countries to persuade fathers to take longer paternity leave have had unintended consequences and sparked a debate about the fairest way to split the leave between mothers and fathers.<sup>14</sup>

In 2018, when the Norwegian government announced plans to extend paternity leave by five weeks, many Norwegians of all genders were delighted. In Norway, paid parental leave is divided into three parts: a part reserved for the mother, a part for the father and a third part which can be taken by either parent. Increasing the father's share meant reducing the joint share, effectively reducing the amount of leave available to mothers by more than a month. There was talk among some government officials about going further, getting rid of the third discretionary part altogether.

The aim is to promote "gender equality in the labour market by promoting gender equality in the distribution of housework," said Libertad González, associate professor of economics at Universitat Pompeu Fabra.<sup>15</sup>

**In regions around the world, mothers are more likely than fathers to drop out of work or reduce their hours after having children, significantly reducing their lifetime earnings.**

**The hope is that if more fathers take parental leave, employers will discriminate less against women in hiring and promotion, and men will do more housework, freeing up mothers to devote more time and energy to work.**

The Scandinavian region has become a gender equality model for the rest of Europe for good reasons. Ann-Zofie Duvander, a professor of demography at Stockholm University and an expert on the use of parental leave by fathers, points out that Norway, Sweden, and Iceland have very high rates of women's participation in the labour force, which was true even before the paternity quota was introduced. But parity has probably improved gender equality in the labour market in another, direct and indirect way. Determining the extent to which it is responsible for improving women's career advancement and earnings is difficult – its impact is likely to come incrementally and work in conjunction with other family policies – but from Duvander's point of view, the number of fathers has an undeniable effect.<sup>16</sup>

Elsewhere, however, the intended benefits of paternity leave were slow to materialise. Spain introduced a two-week paternity leave in 2007 and has since extended the period to ensure equal opportunities for mothers and fathers. From 2021, both fathers and mothers receive 16 weeks of fully paid

---

*The aim is to promote gender equality in the labour market by promoting gender equality in the distribution of housework*

- said **Libertad González**, associate professor of economics at Universitat Pompeu Fabra

14. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-15-feminism/674374/>, Stephanie H. Murray, 13.06.2023

15. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-feminism/674374/>, Stephanie H. Murray, 13.06.2023

16. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-feminism/674374/>, Stephanie H. Murray, 13.06.2023

17. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-feminism/674374/>, Stephanie H. Murray, 13.06.2023

18. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-feminism/674374/>, Stephanie H. Murray, 13.06.2023



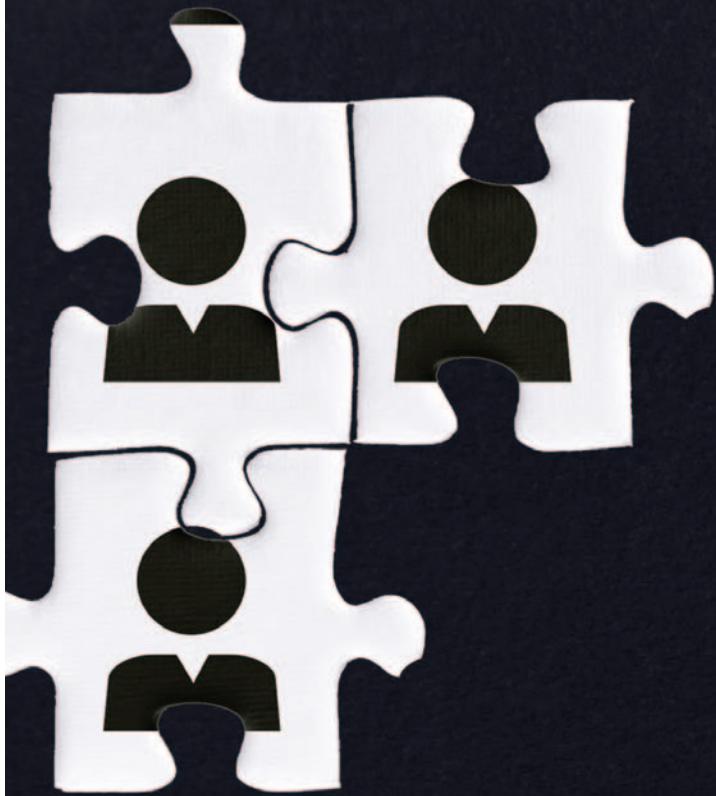
From **2021** in Spain, both fathers and mothers receive 16 weeks of **fully paid and non-transferable leave**

and non-transferable leave. The vast majority of fathers take the leave, and since parity was introduced, Spanish fathers are more likely to look after their children, both during and after the leave. Moreover, children whose fathers were entitled to longer paternity leave have a more egalitarian approach to family life organisation than children whose fathers had access to only very short leave. This had permanent impact on women's employment. Mothers are still much more likely to take unpaid leave or work part-time after the end of paid leave. Meanwhile, men take leaves and then return to work at the same rate as before.<sup>17</sup>

A 2021 survey to examine the increase in the number of Norwegian mothers taking unpaid leave found that, on average, fathers are satisfied with the amount of 15 weeks of leave – women say it should be reduced to 11 weeks. People seem to be mostly happy with the length of paternal leave in Sweden – on average, men there take more leave than allotted – but this may have something to do with the fact that leave is very generous there: even with three months reserved for fathers, mothers can take more than a year of leave if they wish. The longer the leave, the higher the possibility that women will want to share it.

**If spending more time outside formal work on childcare puts mothers at an economic disadvantage, then the government should focus on restructuring the economic system to better support childcare and therefore parents.**<sup>18</sup>





## 6. How to **STRENGTHEN** inclusive behaviour in teams?

Research by Kimberley Lewis Parsons and Shea O'Neil Adelson<sup>19</sup> shows that the implementation and ownership of inclusive practices is done by a team that interacts in real time and performs real work. What the authors<sup>20</sup> call Inclusive Teaming is not about having a diverse team. In fact, **there is evidence that diverse teams can perform even worse than homogeneous teams if there is no integration, which eventually becomes a habit.** The authors have identified a whole set of behavioural patterns that make it difficult to create inclusive teams, i.e., the so-called Detractor Patterns. It is not enough to identify these patterns, however, because the work consistent with Inclusive Teaming is based on correcting them with the appropriate Amplifier Patterns.

The position of these researchers is that the implementation and ownership of inclusive practices is done by a team where real-time interaction and real work is performed.

Based on 55,000 hours of work with teams and leaders, Kimberley Lewis Parsons and Shea O'Neil identified a set of behavioural patterns that make it difficult to create inclusive teams, such as:

The most effective starting point is becoming aware of the team's critic patterns and then discuss them honestly. With greater awareness, the team can deliberately select the appropriate so-called Amplifier Pattern to remedy the so-called Detractor Pattern.

---

The most effective starting point is becoming aware of the team's critic patterns and then discuss them honestly. With greater awareness, the team can deliberately select the appropriate so-called Amplifier Pattern to remedy the so-called Detractor Pattern.

---



---

19. *Make Inclusive Behaviors Habitual on Your Team*, Kimberley Lewis Parsons i Shea O'Neil Adelson, 9.05.2023.

20. *Make Inclusive Behaviors Habitual on Your Team*, Kimberley Lewis Parsons i Shea O'Neil Adelson, 9.05.2023.



## How to reinforce inclusive behavior in the team?

Źródło: <https://hbr.org/2023/05/make-inclusive-behaviors-habitual-on-your-team>

TEAM <b>DETRACTOR</b> PATTERN	TEAM <b>AMPLIFIER</b> PATTERN
Code-switching on behalf of another team member to "help" them to fit in or be understood by other team members	Team members notice their own assumption that others don't understand what's been said and resist the urge to explain in their own words
Ignoring or not acknowledging a person's talents, abilities, and contributions seemingly because of their identity or group membership	Team members intentionally acknowledge and confirm that messages are heard and received between one another
Gaslighting - doubting, denying, or questioning the experience of a team member such that they question their own reality	Empathetic mirroring: team members, especially the leader, mirror the experience of the gaslit person through empathy and constructive feedback, as needed
Boxing out - the physical placement of a team member's body and/or features that signals to another team member if they are included or not	Open body: team members establish agreements regarding exhibiting open bodies, and attention, to each other

## 7. The SITUATION of women in startups

– bariery zawodowe kobiet

**As much as 60 percent of women who consider starting their own business do not do so due to lack of self-confidence and insufficient faith in their knowledge and skills** – these are symptoms typical of the imposter syndrome. Doubts about one's competences and the conviction that one does not deserve success can appear in both women and men, but in the case of the former, the syndrome more often affects the professional sphere and prevents women from turning their idea into a business.<sup>21</sup>

Today, the gender balance rate among the Southern European population is extremely low. On the continent, the greatest discrepancies are observed in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe. Taking into account all of Europe, where 87% of the investment fund creators are men and only 13% women, the disproportion is still huge. According to the IDC European Women in Venture Capital Report,<sup>22</sup> in 2021 businesses founded by women received only 1.8% of total VC funding. For the last year (2022), this percentage is estimated at less than 3%, but the exact figure is not yet known.

**For the entire ecosystem, there is a need to build a diverse and inclusive community, considering gender balance, but not only that. This is why funds that believe in the added value of diversity should provide greater support to startups created by women.**<sup>23</sup>

Today, only 21% of startups have a team where women make up more than half. Women are underrepresented in the startup world. Although, as research shows, businesses founded by women bring a higher return on investment.<sup>24</sup> The recently published Polish Startups 2022 report indicates that the situation is similar on the Polish startup market, where there is still a deficit of women. In only 21% of entities, they constitute more than half of the team – including only 15% of startups where the female part of the team exceeds half of the workforce.

**The next chapter describes the results of research carried out for the purpose of this report – they concern the subject of diversity and inclusiveness as well as leadership seen from the perspective of women – tech startup founders.**

# 21%

startups have a team that is more than half made up of women

# 60%

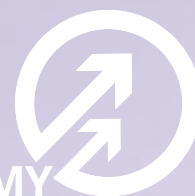
women who consider starting their own business do not do so due to lack of self-confidence and insufficient faith in their knowledge and skills



# 13%

of the investment fund creators in Europe are women

Shesnnovation  
**ACADEMY**



# 87%

of the investment fund creators in Europe are men



**DIVERSITY MATTERS**  
Young STEM leaders create change

21. <https://mycompanypolska.pl/artykul/swiat-vc-a-kobiety-dlaczego-startupy-zalozone-przez-kobiety-dostaja-mniej-pieniedzy-od-meskich/11437>
22. <https://europeanwomeninvc.idcinteractive.net/8/>
23. <https://mycompanypolska.pl/artykul/swiat-vc-a-kobiety-dlaczego-startupy-zalozone-przez-kobiety-dostaja-mniej-pieniedzy-od-meskich/11437>
24. Boston Consulting Group <https://mamstartup.pl/kobiety-w-polskich-startupach-sa-niedoreprezentowane/>,

# CHAPTER 2.

## RESEARCH

**- diversity, inclusiveness,  
and leadership through  
the eyes of female  
startup founders**



**DIVERSITY MATTERS**

Young STEM leaders create change



## 2.1. RESULTS of quantitative study

The study involved 20 founders of startups – companies that are still operating on the market today, at various stages of development. The participants are graduates of four editions of the Shesnnovation Academy 2019–2023 programme run by the Perspektyw Education Foundation and the Citi Handlowy Leopold Kronenberg Foundation and financed from the Citi Foundation resources.

**The study participants answered questions about two areas:**

1. Diversity and inclusiveness.
2. Leadership.

Most of the respondents are aged 26–39, all of them are startup founders and still run the business.

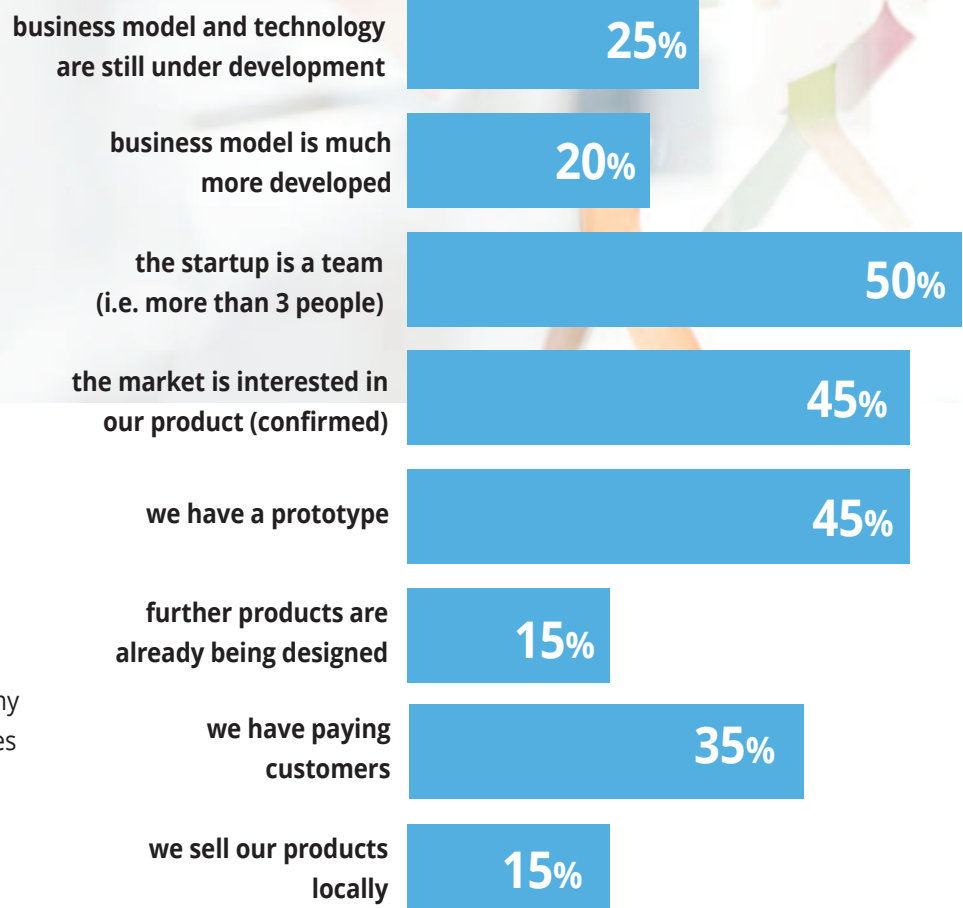


### Business development stage<sup>25</sup>

The businesses developed by the study participants are at various stages of development, with most being early-stage startups, which is due to the fact that the businesses founded are the result of a young (2019–2023) Shesnnovation Academy acceleration program – in most cases the respondents set up their businesses after completing the programme.

**Figure 3**

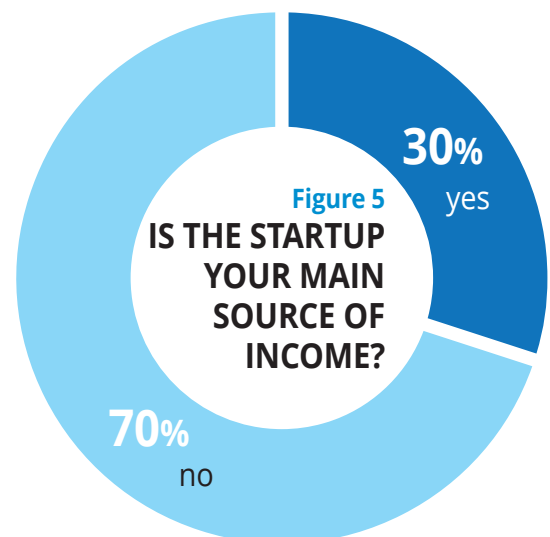
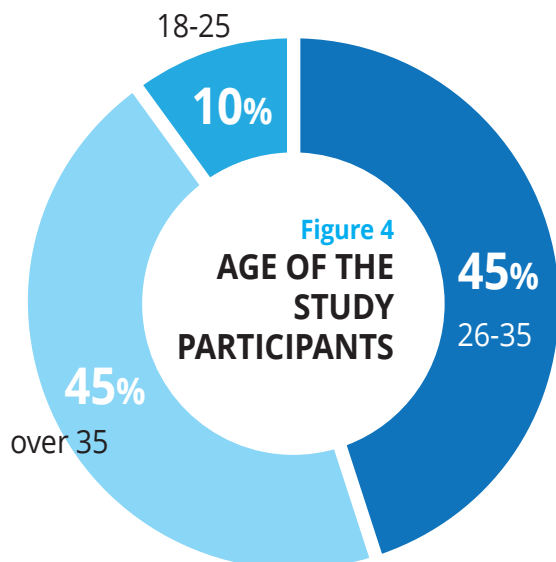
#### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT STAGE





25. Possible answers to choose from (multiple choice question):

- our business model and the technology (product) itself are still being developed
- we have a much more developed business model
- we have a team
- we confirmed market interest in our product
- there is an existing prototype of our product
- we tested the business model and the product – the challenge is to increase the scale of operations
- We are designing new products
- we are becoming active on other geographic markets
- we have paying customers (number 1–10)
- we have paying customers (number 10–20)
- we have paying customers (over 20)
- we sell our products locally (Poland)
- we sell our products globally (at least one foreign market)
- we have a business partnership (joint project, testing) and no paying customers
- we do not have business partnerships yet
- we do not have paying customers yet
- other: due to the crisis, we are pivoting our business model, we submitted an application for R&D under the smart path for the amount of about PLN 3.5 million





The main goals that startappers currently set for themselves in order to develop their businesses are:

- obtaining more projects in order to increase employment and expand further
- expansion abroad
- verification of new business models
- launching beta versions of products or new products
- MVP testing

Figure 6

## Have you done a pivot in your startup?<sup>26</sup>

Half of the startappers pivoted while developing the project:

Yes **50%**

No **50%**

Shesnnovation  
ACADEMY



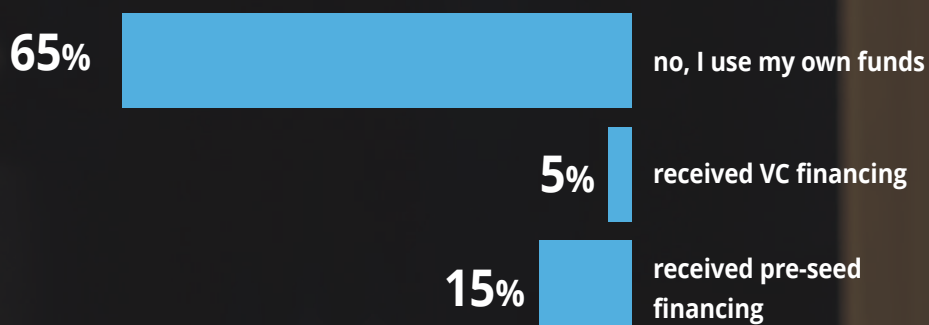
26. Possible answers to choose from (multiple choice question): no; yes, zoom-in pivot; yes, zoom-out pivot; yes, customer segment pivot; yes, customer-need pivot; yes, platform pivot; yes, business architecture pivot; yes, value-capture pivot; yes, engine of growth pivot; yes, channel pivot; yes, technology pivot; yes, all of them, multiple times.

27. Possible answers (multiple choice question): we received pre-seed funding; we received seed funding; we received VC funding round A; we received VC funding round B; we received VC funding round C; we received funding from EU funds; we rely on financing from our own savings (also family&friends support); other: we do not need it, we earn money, and we applied for EU funds for business development; plus own investment from the profits of another company; we have not yet received funding.

## Funding RECEIVED

65% of the businesses surveyed rely on financing from their own savings (or support from family and friends). Seven businesses received external financing (1 business - VC financing, 3 businesses - pre-seed financing, 3 businesses - EU funds).

Figure 7  
FUNDING RECEIVED



## DIFFICULTIES in obtaining funding

The respondents, when asked whether it is more difficult for them to obtain financing due to the fact that they are women, gave varied answers, which were grouped as follows:

- It is hard to say, I have not tried, I have not looked for financing, so far I am financing the project myself;
- yes, I feel that it is generally harder for a woman in a management position to be taken seriously;
- yes, especially when I sometimes have to compete with other women (I do not want to take away their already limited opportunities, most of them are taken by men anyway);
- yes, definitely;
- no, just the opposite.

In the first part of the study, the respondents answered questions related to the issue of diversity and inclusiveness. According to the strategic assumptions at the global (United Nations) and EU (European Commission) level, diversity and inclusiveness are one of the most important resources of every organisation. Therefore, the respondents were asked if these issues were important to them. Almost all of them answered affirmatively.

# Diversity and inclusiveness

In the first part of the study, the respondents answered questions related to the issue of diversity and inclusiveness.

According to the strategic assumptions at the global (United Nations) and EU (European Commission) level, diversity and inclusiveness are one of the most important resources of every organisation. Therefore, the respondents were asked if these issues were important to them. Almost all of them answered affirmatively.



Diversity and inclusiveness is one of the most important resources of any organization

Shesnnovation  
**ACADEMY**



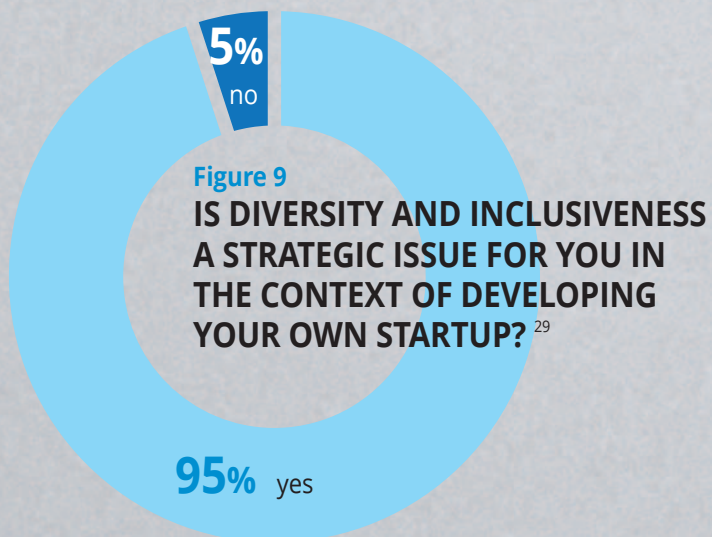
**28.** Remaining answers: It is most of all. Diversity is something that cannot be disputed. We are all different. The criteria by which we differ will be dependent on the viewpoint we are starting with. I believe that the awareness of diversity and the use of it is extremely important, because it allows us to build, explore, and notice new areas of thought. Including, providing a safe space for this diversity to flourish is crucial and good for overall social development and happiness.

**29.** *Inclusiveness is not problematic to me, I am open to building a diverse team, I am tolerant. But it is also not a strategic goal for me so that the company would look good in terms of marketing or apply for special subsidies because of, for example, employing a larger percentage of women.*



# Diversity and inclusiveness jako STARTEGIA

What is more, diversity has meaning for them on the strategic level, in the context of developing their own startup.



**DIVERSITY MATTERS**  
Young STEM leaders create change

In the next part, the founders had a chance to define how they actually understand diversity and inclusiveness.

## **DIVERSITY and INCLUSIVENESS mean for me:**



**Characteristics of an organisation or venture that does not exclude people who are “out of the norm.” It is acceptance of each person as they are.**

It is a set of individual features that distinguish each person. Inclusiveness is about providing equal opportunities while respecting differences.

**No exclusion for any reason, and even striving for diversity, because it is strength.**

Openness to different people, overcoming barriers, lack of prejudices and building teams consisting of people with different views, qualifications, genders, and experience.

**Adapting opportunities for all people in relation to their needs/capabilities. Treating people so that they have an equal start and equal prospects.**

Enabling access to the same values for everyone, regardless of gender, age or origin. Diversity in an organisation also positively affects cooperation, getting to know a broader point of view and building tolerance.

**An opportunity to work with a team with different resources and experience independent of education in the existing system. Recognising individual needs and abilities on both mental and social levels.**

It is a synonym of courage and openness to otherness. In a business context, it is also the foundation of transparency.

It is an untapped power for me today, an opportunity to express ourselves exactly as we feel, to take into account these different characteristics, perspectives, experiences and in such a way as to ensure equal opportunities. Discrimination and prejudice cause us to lose diverse people, and diversity, which is beautiful in my opinion and should be nurtured, makes us achieve better results at work, allows us to support each other and develop.

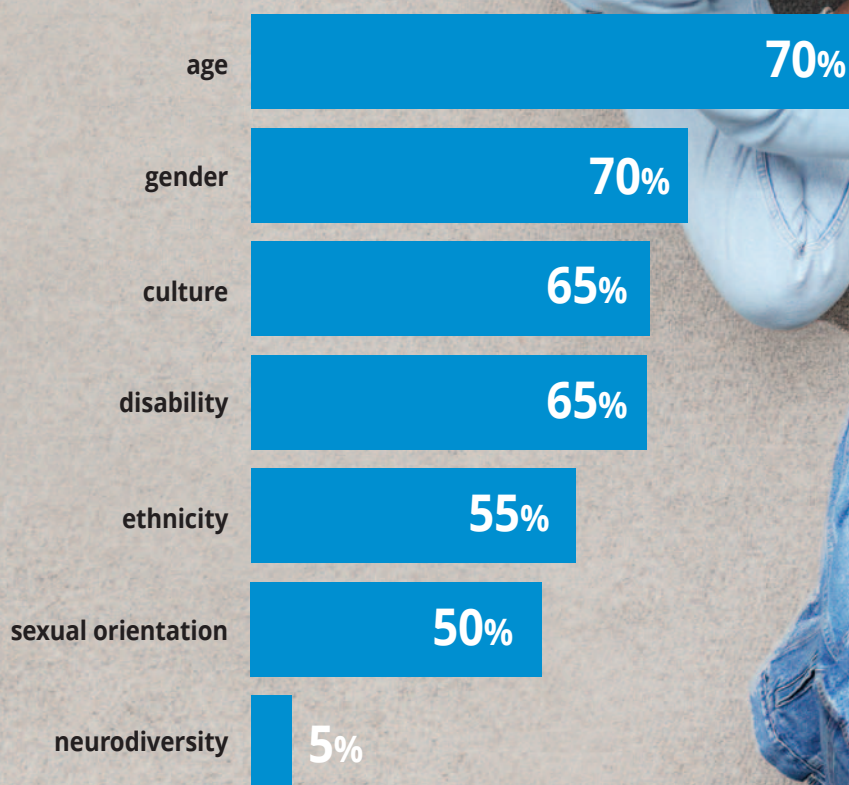
**Respecting, supporting and non-discriminating against people due to their beliefs, characteristics, preferences.**

It is recognising that everyone is different and respecting each other's differences.

# RÓŻNORODNOŚĆ w rozwijaniu swojego ZESPOŁU

Thinking about diversity in developing their team, the respondents take into account the following aspects related to diversity:

Figure 10  
**ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN DEVELOPING A TEAM** <sup>30</sup>



*They are important because they do not exclude.*

*A diverse team allows you to discover yourself and the world around you, which becomes more interesting from different perspectives.*

*I want the team to be diverse, which allows them to be more creative and open.*





## The respondents also justified why the listed aspects are important:

*They allow you to better understand the world and design a better product, manage risk better.*

*I believe that modern companies should take into account many aspects of diversity and focus on the employees' skills and knowledge rather than on aspects that distinguish them in society. In my opinion, if someone is talented, ambitious, and does their job well, I don't care about their background at all.*

*I see no reason to exclude anyone – diversity does not affect competence.*

*What is important is openness to another person (to their knowledge, experience, point of view, to their soft skills), because only then can the potential of a particular person be really used. The most important thing is real tolerance.*



# Changes in the area DIVERSITY and INCLUSION

After analysing the importance and issue of diversity, the respondents answered questions about the space to introduce possible changes where full inclusion of diversity in the organisation is still lacking.

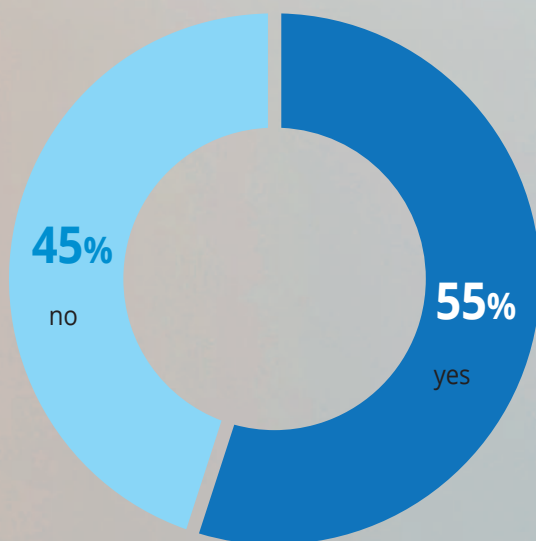


Figure 11  
**DO YOU SEE ROOM FOR CHANGE IN THE AREA OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN YOUR BUSINESS?** <sup>31</sup>

30. Possible answers to choose from (multiple choice question): culture, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, neurodiversity; other: Hmm, I don't know what "you include" is to mean, if I notice it - then yes, if it's that I think noticing diversity is important - then yes, if it means that the team should feel safe and feel that everyone can be themselves and that authenticity is supported, then of course. However, diversity is not the starting point, diversity just is. Considering the product and recipients, it is worth drawing on the knowledge of people representing these "differences." However, I am not in favour of a "quota" approach, it seems to me that it distorts what D&I is; I take these things into account, but for me they do not determine team building; Such things are neither thought nor spoken of when one is actually tolerant. A professional and tolerant entrepreneur will look for candidates for employment in terms of competence and experience. If a candidate meets the criteria and has character traits (e.g., positive, open-minded, tolerant, likes contact with people) that seem to fit the team, then they should be hired for the position. If you start from thinking in terms of what culture, ethnic group, gender, age, etc., it means lack of tolerance, because favouring one group discriminates against the others.

31. 5% (1 osoba) - nie poprzez zatrudnienie, ale przez np. wywiady indywidualne.



## Why is it possible or not possible to make these changes?

*We are only developing, and I definitely want my company to be inclusive.*

*There is always room for change, and we want to develop optimally – as best as possible, so every change that brings us closer to this is very important.*

*There is always space to improve interest in other people and openness to the perspectives of others.*

*We are only developing, and I definitely want my company to be inclusive.*

*Already during the employee recruitment, I willingly give a chance to novice women in IT, because I perfectly understand their situation and I know that the beginnings are difficult. If I notice potential and willingness to develop in them, I see no obstacles to diversify the team.*

Shesnovation  
ACADEMY



# Activities in the implementation of the DIVERSITY and INCLUSIVENESS

– statements by respondents

Paying attention to the needs of others, respect for each other and responsibility for decisions made.

*Taking differences into account when planning employee development, ensuring accessibility, inclusive language, building a diverse team.*

*Między innymi szkolenia i rozmowy z pracownikami, o tym jak ważna jest tolerancja. Dzięki temu przy zwiększaniu różnorodności w firmie, pracownicy będą bardziej przygotowani i zmniejszy ryzyko przykrych sytuacji lub nieodpowiednich rozmów.*

*Cooperation with diverse people, talking about our diversity strategy in the company, taking part in activities showing support.*

*Activities based on Diversity and Inclusion. Let the whole team know that inclusiveness is good.*

*The principle that there must be an appropriate ratio of women to men in a team, people with different qualifications and experience.*

*Jasne komunikaty np. w ofertach pracy – a raczej brak komunikatów, które wskazywałyby, że „zatrudniamy wszystkich, ale....”.*

*Clear message from managers, building culture and awareness – showing benefits to other members; action, i.e., simply hiring such people or inviting them to cooperate.*

*Training about unconscious bias in recruitment, training emphasising various aspects of diversity and benefits to the company (not everywhere the profit from diversity is the same, you need to know what to focus on), appropriate recruitment process and employee review process, open salaries or at least pay gap analysis, community – if the startup is already big enough, conscious team building based on values.*

*Taking differences into account when planning employee development, ensuring accessibility, inclusive language, building a diverse team.*



*Promoting job offers in groups for specific communities, age groups, ethnic groups, etc.*

*A top-down example and strategy, supporting diversity through various activities, collecting information, e.g., at the recruitment stage, so as to really select the best from a diverse group of representatives, supporting bottom-up initiatives.*



# Activities in the implementation of the DIVERSITY and INCLUSIVENESS

– statements of the respondents

Paying attention to the needs of others, respecting each other and taking responsibility for decisions.

*In my opinion, it is important that the HR policy and the organisational culture match its participants and be natural for them, therefore, already at the recruitment stage, it is worth considering whether people are open, friendly, and will be able to cooperate in a diverse team, whether they have no prejudices, do they treat other with respect.*

***Offering cooperation to minorities / those with less access in the first place before “privileged” people. Controlling the company’s internal culture to reduce the risk of discrimination.***



*Paying attention to the needs of others, respecting each other and taking responsibility for decisions.*

***Employment, external consultations, surveys with users, implementation of good practices, joining umbrella organisations.***

*I think that, above all, it is about building a culture that promotes authenticity, encouraging people to express their own opinion, and listening! It is worth it to consider activities such as: regular employee surveys/interviews; collecting anonymous feedback; introducing and promoting a company value system that supports diversity; being active in the public sphere (e.g. social media, industry media) and implementing initiatives, voices promoting D&I; research of potential or current customer groups, so as to understand the customers to whom we address the product/service; introducing information on non-discrimination and respect for diversity into internal and external policies; cooperation with business partners who care about D&I.*

**DIVERSITY MATTERS**

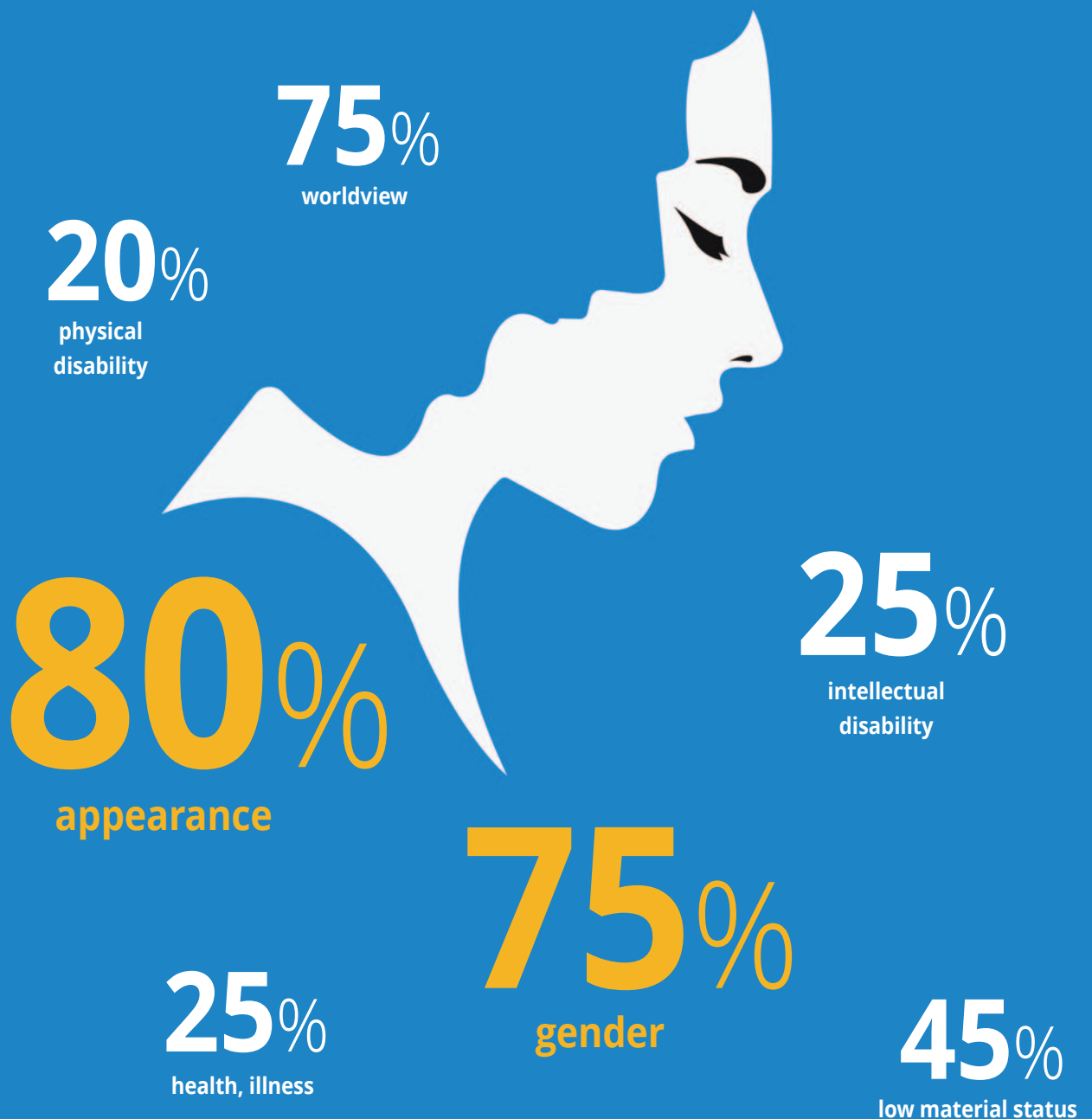
YOUNG STEM LEADERS CREATE CHANGE

Shesnovation  
ACADEMY





# Experiences in relation to **DISCRIMINATION**





The next part of the research concerned the experiences of the participants in relation to discrimination. The study participants were asked if they personally experienced or witnessed discrimination on the basis of:

- **national/ethnic origin** – 65% positive answers
- **skin colour** – 30% positive answers
- **physical disability** – 20% positive answers
- **intellectual disability** – 25% positive answers
- **health, illness** – 25% positive answers
- **appearance** – 80% of positive answers
- **religious beliefs, denomination** – 55% positive answers
- **lack of religion** – 25% positive answers
- **worldview** – 75% positive answers
- **gender** – 75% positive answers
- **sexual orientation** – 60% positive answers
- **low material status** – 45% positive answers
- **family situation** – 50% positive answers

**55%**

religious beliefs,  
denomination

**25%**

lack of religion

**50%**

family situation

**65%**

national/ethnic  
origin

**60%**

sexual  
orientation

**30%**

skin colour

## DISCRIMINATORY situations

According to the results, the majority of discriminatory situations experienced or observed by the respondents were connected with:

- appearance
- gender
- worldview
- nationality/ethnicity
- sexual orientation
- religious beliefs/denomination

## Active support for LGBT+ people

Also, half of the respondents work actively in support of the LGBT+ people:

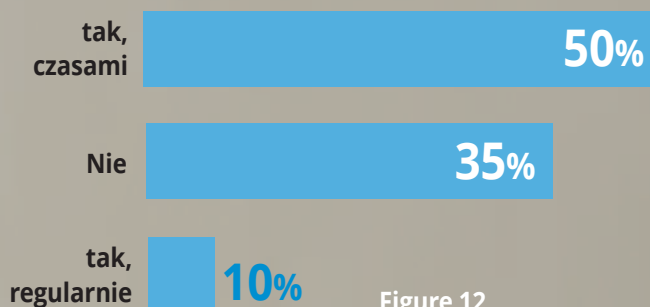
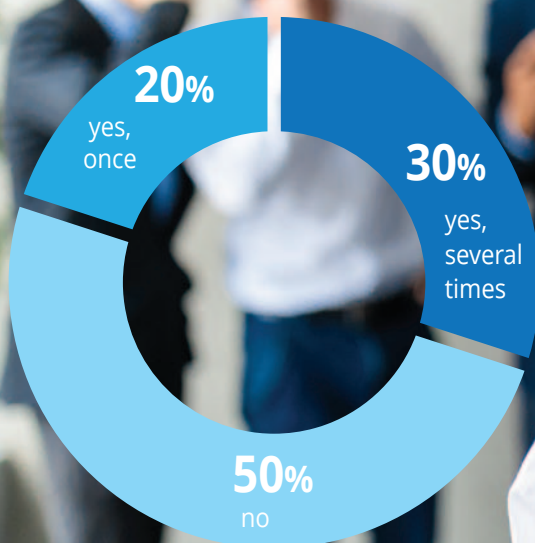


Figure 12  
**ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR LGBT+ PEOPLE** <sup>32</sup>

## Participated in WORKSHOPS

Half of the respondents participated in workshops on equality and/or counteracting discrimination:

Figure 13  
**PARTICIPATION IN CLASSES ON EQUALITY AND/OR COUNTERACTING DISCRIMINATION.**



32. Answers: 50% yes, sometimes; 25% no, never; 10% yes, regularly; 5% I do not engage in social activism (this is not related to my professional activities), although I cooperate with LGBT+ organisations in my private and scientific life; 5% I did support initiatives in my former company, I believe these actions are important and great, and there are more and more of them; 5% no response.



# FOR WHAT REASON have you experienced discrimination?

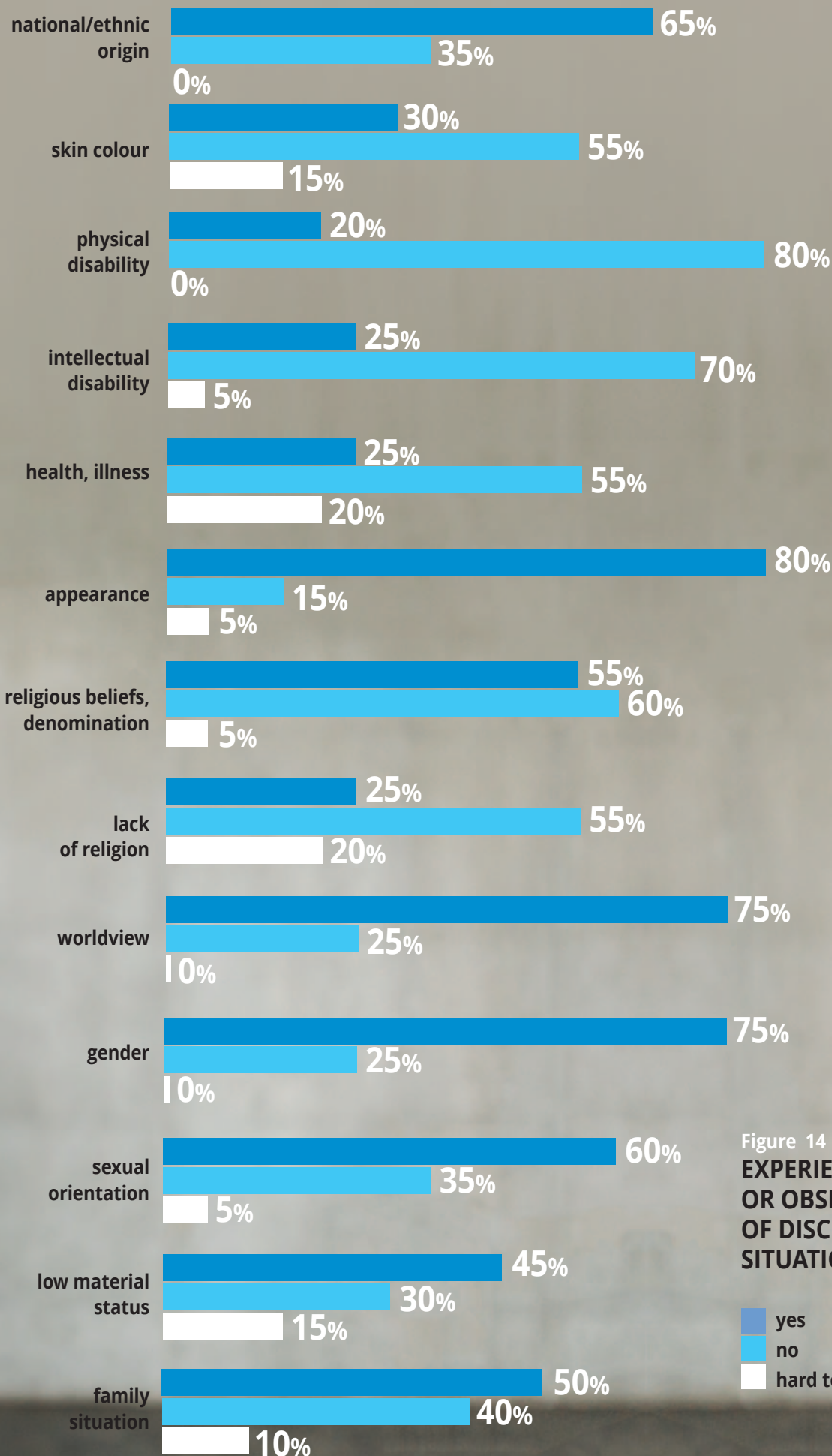


Figure 14  
EXPERIENCE  
OR OBSERVATION  
OF DISCRIMINATORY  
SITUATIONS

yes  
no  
hard to say

DIVERSITY MATTERS  
Young STEM Leaders create change

# LEADERSHIP

**Ostatnia część badań związana była z przywództwem, a w szczególności:**

- To how it is understood?
- Is it an acquired talent?
- Which leadership styles do they know and implement?
- Whether they would like to take on a leader role?
- Whether and how men's and women's leadership differs and what are these differences?
- What is the importance of women's leadership to the world?
- Whether they have taken leadership training?
- Would they call themselves a leader?



## LEADERSHIP UNDERSTOOD

According to the respondents' answers, leadership is understood as:



*Setting a vision, a direction of actions and arousing interest in the subject and thus commitment in co-workers.*

*Being an inspiring person who helps others to develop and achieve their goals.*

***Strengthening the talents of others around you.***

*Caring, guiding, nurturing, charisma, responsibility.*

*A leader is a person people want to follow when they don't have to. Such a person is a role model and others want to achieve their set goals together with them.*

**Being an authentic, thoughtful person taking care about the relationship with oneself and with others, focusing on development and improvement of the world situation.**

*For me, leadership is managing group of people using their predispositions to perform particular tasks, with special emphasis on their unique characteristics and motivation to act. A leader is a person who can bring out the best in a team through appreciation. A leader is a mentor people want to work with.*

*Ability to cooperate with other people while coordinating and optimising teamwork, motivating team members, working to improve the atmosphere in the team, solving interpersonal conflicts.*

*Inspiring and leading the team by supporting strengths and working together on weaker elements. It is also about propagating the example, putting out fires together and delegating tasks tailored to the team's skills in such a way that team members feel appreciated.*



**Wyznaczanie i podążanie w danym kierunku i inspirowanie innych do wspólnej drogi.**

*Showing the direction, connecting the dots, strategic team cooperation, openness to others.*

# Preferred LEADERSHIP STYLES



## In the case of LEADERSHIP STYLES, the respondents feel closest to:

- participatory style (45%)
- charismatic style (15%)
- paternalistic style (15%)

**45%**

participatory style

**15%**

paternalistic style

**15%**

charismatic style

**5%**

authoritarian style

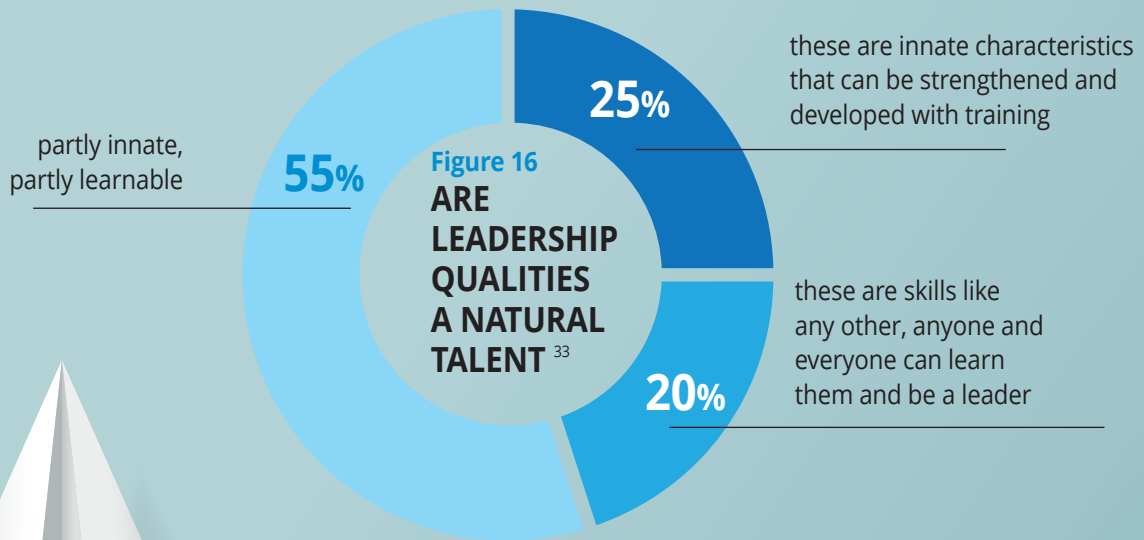
**5%**

empathic style



# LEADERSHIP qualities

Most of the respondents believe that leadership qualities can be partly innate, partly learned.



**33.** Answers: 25% - these are innate characteristics that can be strengthened and developed with training; 20% - these are skills like any other, anyone and everyone can learn them and be a leader; 55% - partly innate, partly learnable.

**34.** Answers: 45% Participatory style - the leader, together with people, defines goals important to the world and organises their joint achievement; 15% Paternalistic style - the leader efficiently reads the needs of other people and helps them to meet them; 15% Charismatic style - the leader leads people with them to the goals they set; 5% authoritarian style - the leader is able to organise the activities of many people in order to achieve previously set goals; 5% empathic style - the leader supports the team empathically, balance is an important goal; 10% - hard to say; 5% - during the IMD course I learned about the "Secure Base Leadership" and that best defines me..



# Who wants to be A LEADER?

According to the conducted research, 35% of respondents would like to manage a group and know that they would be able to do it, and 15% are afraid that they do not have the talent for it. 10% of them would like to manage a group and therefore are planning leadership training. 50% of them participated in leadership workshops. 70% of them would call themselves leaders today.

# 70%

Tak, nazwałabym  
się liderką

# 35%

badanych chciałoby  
zarządzać grupą

35. 35% I am one; 5% it is not for me, I am no interested in such activity; 15% I would like to, but I am afraid I have no talent for it; 10% I would like to manage a group/company, therefore I am planning to take leadership training; 10% hard to say; 5% I have been one for years, at present I am a corporate manager, 5% I think I already am a leader in my startup, and also in a small research group; 5% I would like to, but it is a difficult task, partly you need to have innate predisposition for it, knowledge and training in people management would be useful on top of that.



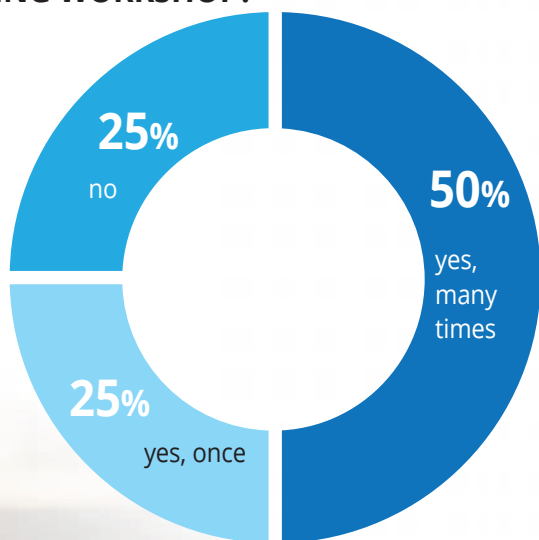




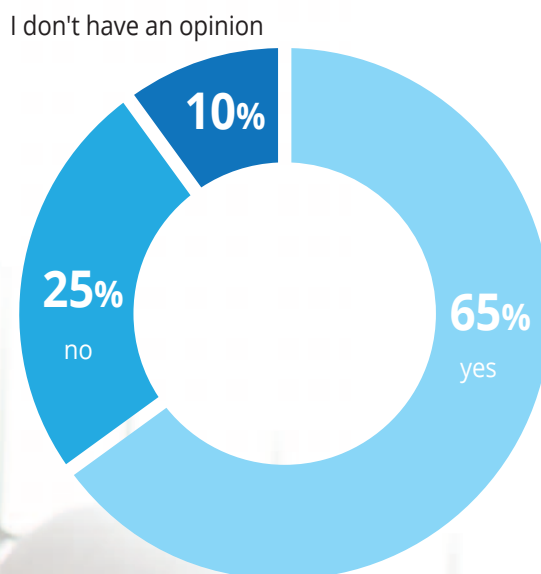
**Figure 18**  
**WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A LEADER<sup>35</sup>**



**Figure 19**  
**HAVE YOU EVER ATTENDED A LEADERSHIP TRAINING WORKSHOP?**



**Figure 20**  
**IS FEMALE AND MALE LEADERSHIP DIFFERENT IN NATURE?**



# Leadership different in nature

# WOMEN and MEN

Responses from respondents regarding differences or lack thereof in the leadership of women and men

*Men are more focused on goals and the benefits that follow them. Women, however, focus on the team and the joint pursuit of the goal – they focus more on the satisfaction of the achieved goal than on the benefits.*

***This is a character trait, regardless of gender.***

*It seems to me that the leadership of women and men is different, but my personal experience contradicts this – my previous male director had the characteristics most often attributed to women, and the female director – to men. Therefore, I think that it is individual, it comes from our character, experiences, circumstances, the team we manage and other factors.*

***Women have more empathy.***

*It seems to me that women are more empathetic in their leadership, and men pursue their goals, often without reflection.*



*An unequivocal 'yes' seems to me guided by stereotypes, so I am marking 'no.' I'd like to believe that leadership varies by person, not by gender. At the same time, due to social roles, it is often more difficult for women to show these leadership qualities on a larger scale.*

**Women (generalising) take more aspects into account when making a decision, especially soft aspects.**

*The previous question seems quite tricky to me, because in my opinion a lot depends on the background regardless of gender, but I expect that the way women and men are socialised can affect what kind of leaders they are.*

**Women look at resources, men look at goals.**

*I met (recently) several men working in a soft leadership style, so I know that one cannot generalise, but statistically: women focus more on making teams feel included in the decision-making process and on making everyone heard, men (statistically) derive more satisfaction from winning (achieving the goal, not the way to the goal).*



# WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP for the development of the world

The majority of the respondents (65%) think that women's leadership will have meaning for the development of the world because it will be more empathetic and balanced. Some of them (35%) indicate that with the development of women's leadership, there will be fewer wars and more respect for human rights. 20% of them believe that women have a chance to solve the problem of the climate catastrophe, because thanks to them the world will finally get along.

**65%**

respondents believe women's  
leadership will be more  
empathetic and balanced



Figure 21

## WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORLD <sup>36</sup>

20%

**Kobiety mają szansę rozwiązać problem katastrofy klimatycznej – dzięki nim świat się w końcu dogada**

10%

**the type of leadership does not matter**

65%

**female leadership will be more empathetic and balanced**

35%

**in a world with more women in decision-making, there will be no wars and more respect for human rights**

30%

**other**



36. Possible answers (multiple choice question): Women have a chance to solve the problem of the climate catastrophe – thanks to them, the world will finally get along; the type of leadership does not matter; women's leadership will increase conflict in the world; female leadership will be more empathetic and balanced; female leadership will be less empathetic and balanced; in a world with more women in decision-making, there will be no wars and more respect for human rights; female leadership will be less effective and chaos will reign; other: women are great leaders and can change the world in many areas, their participation brings a different perspective that can influence better decisions made in various strategic areas; women's leadership is strong and constructive leadership; I think it is important for the world to create the conditions where this female leadership can resonate – and what can it affect? – everything, I think – business development, politics, ecology and economy, social discourse; women's leadership will allow you to analyse problems at their root; nothing by force, there are industries where female leadership is advisable.



## 2.1. RESULTS of qualitative study

As part of the planned research process, qualitative research was conducted in the form of in-depth interviews among 5 Shesnovation Academy participants who are at the initial stage of developing their startups. The interviews were conducted during pre-arranged videoconferences, at a time convenient for a particular respondent.

**Each person was asked the following 7 questions:**

1. What is the source of a company development?
2. What, in your opinion, are the pillars of a company's success?
3. What does a strong team mean? What does it consist of?
4. What does diversity in an organisation mean for you? What is most important in this context?
5. How to care for diversity? Do you implement a diversity strategy in your organisation? If so – how, what worked, what is working?
6. In your life, have you ever felt discriminated against in the workplace?
7. What role do leaders like you play in creating diverse organisations?  
What does leadership mean to you?

The topic of diversity, its definition and the possibility of developing it in a startup using specific strategies or activities was difficult and ambiguous for the respondents. There were answers saying they would prefer this topic not to be the subject of analyses and necessary to manage: "I would like not to be the one to have to think about it," "I would like equality parades not to be necessary, so that it would be natural, not forced," "if you are among your people, you don't have to talk about it, but one person can spoil the whole atmosphere, which is why the recruitment stage is so important – so it's not just competences, but behaviour that counts," "everyone should know their role and task." The very opening question – how to care for the diversity of the team – was difficult and there were answers like I don't know, and the ideas for solutions did not stem from a well-thought-out strategy, but rather from established beliefs. There were noticeable references to their own experiences, each person had negative experiences related to discrimination and the feeling of being out of place, mostly it was discrimination based on age, gender, and also disability.

Figure 22

## HOW TO ENSURE DIVERSITY – selected answers of the qualitative study respondents

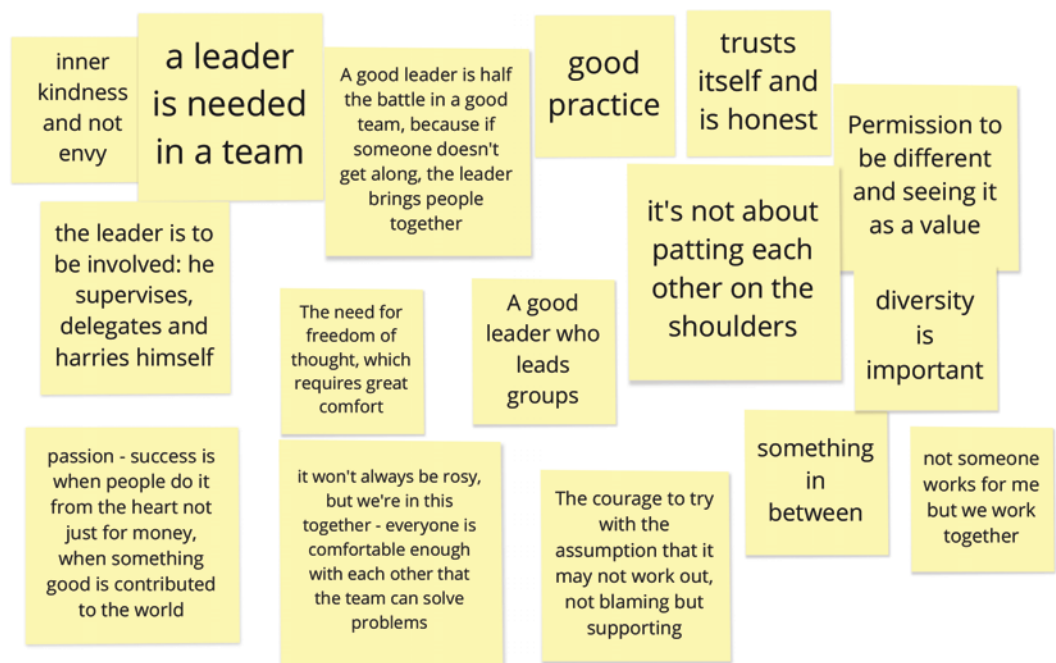


### Strong team mean

Respondents emphasized the roles of the leader in building a good team. Here, the respondents used grammatically masculine terms, and the grammatically feminine term leader ("liderka") was mentioned only few times throughout all the interviews. In the statements, there appeared issues related to the importance of creating a team atmosphere, kindness, that something between words, trust and cooperation.

Figure 22

## WHAT DOES A STRONG TEAM MEAN – SELECTED ANSWERS OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY RESPONDENTS



## CHAPTER 3.

# WE NEED MORE DIVERSITY IN TEAMS AND FEMALE LEADERSHIP.

## **Key conclusions from the research**

The key conclusions from the research conducted and recommendations for future actions are presented below.

The questionnaire research provided a large amount of information, and the respondents were quite willing to shared qualitative comments that expanded the meaning of answers resulting from closed questions planned in the survey.





# DIVERSITY MATTERS

Young STEM Leaders create change



## The analysis of the responses leads to 4 main conclusions:

**1** The respondents – especially those who already are experienced entrepreneurs, are aware of diversity and want to ensure diversity and inclusiveness – this is a natural thing for them.

**2** Emerging leaders do not prioritise diversity but at the same time they know that it matters – they know it is the domain of modern companies.

**3** The experience of discrimination is a common element in the respondents' statements, they have experienced various types of discrimination and the memory of it shapes their identity and thinking about their own actions in the future. The universality of this phenomenon is also confirmed by scientific research.<sup>37</sup>

**4** The respondents declare that they want to be leaders, they want to develop and educate themselves in this direction.

37. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>

38. Schoellhammer, S., Gibb, S. (2020). Collectively innovating: modelling responsible exposure in heterarchical organisations. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, 12(1), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJIS-03-2019-0023>

39. Miron-Spector, E., Erez, M., Naveh, E. (2011). The effect of conformist and attentive to-detail members on team innovation: Reconciling the innovation paradox. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(4), 740–760.



In order to create an innovative environment, a high self-awareness of the leader is needed as well as the team's ability to work independently. This requires a wide range of leadership skills to shape the team and work environment around a high level of trust. The challenge is to ensure freedom, initiative, and accountability, and to develop a supportive culture.<sup>38</sup> **Innovation processes consist of alternating phases of exploitation and exploration, which requires a variety of behaviours, ways of acting and reacting, and even switching flexibly between different phases.** All because the reality of innovation development is paradoxical and requires utilisation of different work styles in order to cope with mutually contradictory activities that are commonly necessary to implement in a startup. It is said about contemporary technological projects leaders that they need to be ambidextrous in order to be able to react to the opposing requirements of the innovative decision-making reality at the same time.<sup>39</sup>



**DIVERSITY MATTERS**  
Young STEM Leaders create change



**Bearing in mind the results of the quantitative research and broadening the perspective with the context resulting from the interviews, recommendations were presented that are worth deepening in the context of thinking about improving development projects for leaders of innovative teams such as Shesnovation Academy**

**1** **Broadening the understanding of the topic of leadership and distinguishing leadership from the context of exercising power and managing teams. Support in practical building of vision, mission, goals, and key policies, such as diversity policy, in order to help aspiring leaders define strategic assumptions in the future.**

Most of the Shesnovation programme participants in the fourth edition were engineers, doctors, lawyers, and the issues in covered in their education rarely include the context of leadership, team development or supporting diversity. This is knowledge that, although crucial, is scarce and it is worth devoting time to these issues in the workshop formula.

**2** In the everyday life of companies that want to create diverse work environments, their weakness is the ability to explain the benefits, including financial ones, the importance of working in diverse teams and of balanced participation of women and men at all levels of the organisation. This is a topic that can strengthen awareness and motivation to implement diversity strategies in innovative teams.



# 3

In the respondents' statements, a male leader mostly exists as a persona, not a female leader. In addition, the interviews were dominated by statements about the experiences and relationships of interview participants with leaders from the past, and there were no references to the respondents themselves – me as a leader. Therefore, the statements lacked reference to their own identity, a plan of action and team development, or perceptible self-awareness as a leader. **This is another potentially important element at the stage of building effective startup teams that is worth strengthening.** Since many studies suggest that the leader's main tool is the vision,<sup>40</sup> mainly – communicating the vision,<sup>41</sup> then work on the leader's identity and formulation of the vision is very important. **As demonstrated by Linda Hill in Creative Genius,<sup>42</sup> the task of an innovation leader is to build an environment in which people on the innovation team will be willing to give a part of their genius and join forces to create what the scientist called collective genius, necessary for creating breakthrough innovative solutions.** In addition, the awareness of what female leadership is and what advantages it has can be part of the strength of female leaders. During the fourth edition of the Shesnovation Academy, the summary of one of the training days was devoted to the context of grammatically feminine terms and the identity of experts. The topic met with lively discussion and very different levels of awareness, mainly based on traditional beliefs. The participants underestimated what an asset for them as founders of technological startups their gender and approach to solving complex problems can be. **Meanwhile, scientific research emphasises the role of women in the leadership and strategic development of organisations. Greater diversity and presence of women on the boards of companies translates into higher revenues.<sup>43</sup>** Additionally, diversity at work results in greater profits, higher innovation, better decision-making, greater creativity and improves the level of employee involvement.<sup>44</sup> **The solution, as part of strengthening competences, may be meetings with female experts – leaders and facilitated discussions, in order to build the know-how around leadership activities, build the professional identity of female leaders, as well as make them aware of leadership tools and responsibilities on the way to the development of innovative companies.** It is worth emphasising here that leadership in innovation has its undeniable specificity and in this particular context it is worth the effort to expand the knowledge of participants of development programs such as the Shesnovation Academy.



40. Rosing, K., Frese, M., Bausch, A. (2011). Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22 (5), 956–974. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.014>

41. Lynn, G. S., Akgun, A. E. (2001). Project visioning: Its components and impact on new product success. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 18, 374–387., Reid, S. E., Roberts, D. L. (2011). *Technology Vision: A scale development*. *R&D Management*, 41 (5), 427–442

42. Lynn, G. S., Kalay, F. (2016). The effect of vision and role clarity on team performance. *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari İncelemeler Dergisi*, 179–196.

43. Hill, L. A. (2014). *Collective genius: The art and practice of leading innovation*. Harvard Business Review Press.

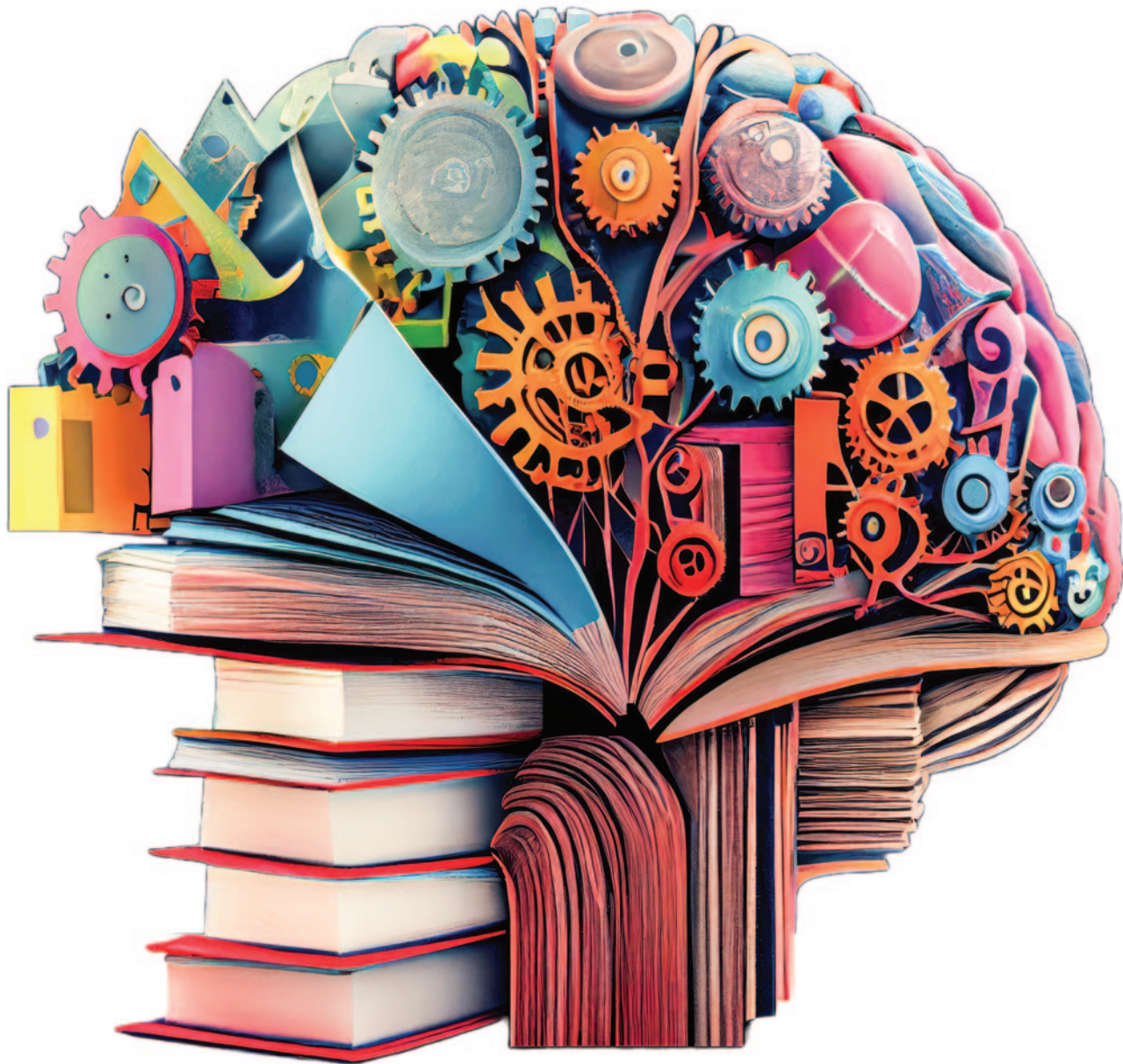
44. Dixon-Fyle S. et al, 2020, McKinsey



# 4

During the qualitative interviews, **the respondents noticed the sources of the company's success in the leader's internal imperative and willingness to implement the assumed mission, as well as in the team of people with different skills.** The respondents devoted a lot of time to the role of diversity, complementarity, the importance of otherness, differences in perceiving various points of view. They also emphasised the role of knowledge, experience, skills, and the need for development. **It was obvious that while they perceive the subject of diversity as very important, they do not know how to implement it and take care of it. This knowledge is scarce and at the same time very complex. It requires a strategic approach and work on assumptions from the very beginning.** At the same time, in the quantitative study, they were much more aware of this topic. Apart from traditional forms of development (at workshops, discussions, lectures), **it is important to integrate groups of participants, build mutual trust and lasting relationships, exchange knowledge and experience. To be able to support leaders in shaping various organisations, we recommend conducting project classes, during which leaders will be able to create the foundations of visions, missions, strategic goals, values, as well as the foundations of key policies, including the diversity policy.** Such support will allow them to systematically develop their strategic approach. **Equally important is the internationalisation of programs such as Shesnnovation, which is conducive to broadening perspectives, environments, cultures, and points of view. It also strengthens awareness of the need to build scalable business models and to cross comfort zones in order to experiment and build new solutions.**





**DIVERSITY MATTERS**  
Young STEM leaders create change

## Innovation

**Innovation requires maintaining a high level of uncertainty, non-routine activities and diversity within the organisation.** The innovation development environment is a project and collaboration environment across the organisation within the matrix structures, which allows creation of complex systems that adapt more easily to changing conditions of innovation development thanks to advanced collaboration and diversity.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup>. Bersin by Deloitte 2015 High-Impact Talent Management research; IMF 2018



## Dr Agnieszka Młodzińska-Granek,

assistant professor at SWPS University, researcher in social sciences, for 15 years working on the topic of cooperation between science and business, impact innovation, as part of her studies and doctorate in Poland, Germany and the USA. For 8 years she has been involved in assessing the potential and supporting the development of high-tech startups, including those from the area of social sciences and humanities (social impact startups) - in Polish and international gas pedal programs (MIT Enterprise Forum Central and Eastern Europe, SmartUp Accelerator, Innovation Incubator 4.0). He conducts research on innovation design, including ways to measure the social impact of innovative solutions. She is the coordinator and mentor of Shesnnovation Academy 2023 of the Educational Perspectives Foundation - an accelerator program for women startup founders, co-founder and coordinator of Change It. Impactful Innovation Challenge - a competition for the best startup projects created by multidisciplinary teams (sciences and social sciences and humanities), mentor in the SWPS University mentoring program. She teaches classes on designing innovative products and services, entrepreneurship (implementation processes), fundraising, project management, conducting social research.

## Source materials:

- Bersin by Deloitte 2015 High-Impact Talent Management research; IMF 2018.
- Blanchard, K.H., Salbut, B., Ken Blanchard Companies. (2018). Przywództwo wyższego stopnia: Blanchard o przywództwie i tworzeniu efektywnych organizacji. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Breaking down gender biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality (2023) GENDER SOCIAL NORMS INDEX (GSNI). <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>
- Chandler C. (2023). Extra commitments are everywhere in academia. Many take time and effort but do not advance a faculty member's career. ASBMBTODAY. <https://www.asbmb.org/asbmb-today/careers/060923/the-silent-toll-of-unpromotable-work>
- Chenhall, R.H., Moers, F. (2015). The role of innovation in the evolution of management accounting and its integration into management control. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 47, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2015.10.002>
- Elder B. (2023) Looking like a million dollars. *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/bff62e63-6a77-433e-b51f-3c7ce188c684>
- Fath S. (2023). When Blind Hiring Advances DEI — and When It Doesn't. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2023/06/when-blind-hiring-advances-dei-and-when-it-doesnt?ab=hero-subleft-3>
- Hill, L.A. (2014). Collective genius: The art and practice of leading innovation. *Harvard Business Review Press*.
- Lewis Parsons K., O'neil Adelson S. (2023). Make Inclusive Behaviors Habitual on Your Team. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2023/05/make-inclusive-behaviors-habitual-on-your-team>
- Liu J (2023). Women are held back at work due to 30 biases out of their control, says new study: 'They were never quite right'. make it. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/07/women-criticized-at-work-on-30-characteristics-says-study-of-female-leaders.html>
- Lynn, G.S., Akgun, A.E. (2001). Project visioning: its components and impact on new product success. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 18, 374–387. 53.
- Lynn, G.S., Kalay, F. (2016). The effect of vision and role clarity on team performance. *Uluslararası İktisadi ve İdari İncelemeler Dergisi*, 179–196.
- Michels D., Murphy K., Vankataraman K. (2023). How Investing in DEI Helps Companies Become More Adaptable.





## Patrycja Radek

strategic leader, for 15 years associated with the development of deep tech innovation, facilitator of design thinking processes with 10 years of experience in leading projects for the implementation of new products and services, with teaching in this area at many universities and training for companies and institutions throughout Poland. She is a graduate of an internship on transferring innovative technologies to business at the University of California, Berkeley. She is an innovation broker at the University of

SWPS, a graduate of 2 faculties of Wrocław University of Technology (Faculty of Chemistry and Faculty of Computer Science and Management). She conducts research on leadership in research and development teams. She is a certified project manager (IPMA), a certified business trainer (SET school), a mentor supporting the development of women in STEM fields associated for years with the Perspektywy Foundation, and a lecturer at many universities. She is the coordinator and mentor of Shesnnovation Academy 2023 of the Perspektywy Educational Foundation - an acceleration program for women startup founders, co-founder and coordinator of Change It. Impactful Innovation Challenge - a competition for the best startup projects created by multidisciplinary teams (sciences as well as social sciences and humanities), mentor in the SWPS University mentoring program.

Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2023/05/how-investing-in-dei-helps-companies-become-more-adaptable>

- Miron-Spector, E., Erez, M., Naveh, E. (2011). The effect of conformist and attentive to-detail members on team innovation: Reconciling the innovation paradox. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(4), 740–760.
- Murray S.H. (2023). The Problem With Splitting Parental Leave Down the Middle. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2023/06/parental-leave-europe-father-quota-feminism/674374/>
- Paliszkiwicz, J.O. (2019). Przywództwo, zaufanie i zarządzanie wiedzą w innowacyjnych przedsiębiorstwach. CeDeWu.

- Reid, S.E., Roberts, D.L. (2011). Technology Vision: A scale development. *R&D Management*, 41(5), 427–442.
- Rosing, K., Frese, M., Bausch, A. (2011). Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(5), 956–974. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.014>
- Schoellhammer, S., Gibb, S. (2020). Collectively innovating; modelling responsible exposure in heterarchical organisations. *International Journal of Innovation Science*, 12(1), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJIS-03-2019-0023>
- Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle, Kevin Dolan, Dame Vivian Hunt, and Sara Prince, 2020. Diversity wins: How inclusion matters, McKinsey.
- Van de Ven, A.H. (1986). Central problems in the management of innovation. *Central*

*Problems in the Management of Innovation*, Vol. 25(5), 590–607.

- Warren M.A. (2023). Men Think They Are Strong Workplace Allies. Women Disagree. *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/men-think-they-are-strong-workplace-allies-women-disagree/>
- Whalen I.M. (2023). Amplifying inequalities: Gendered perceptions of work flexibility and the division of household labor during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Wiley Online Library*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/gwao.13026>
- Yavorsky J., Thebaud S. (2023). Ultrawealthy heterosexual couples are living like the 1950s never ended, according to research of 30 years of data. *FORTUNE*. <https://fortune.com/2023/06/06/do-married-women-ultrawealthy-superrich-work-research-federal-reserve-data/>



The **Shesnovation Academy** is an acceleration programme for women-founded STEM startups implemented by the **Perspektywy Education Foundation** with the substantive support from the **Citi Handlowy Leopold Kronenberg Foundation**. The project is financed from the **Citi Foundation** resources.

**[www.shesnovation.pl](http://www.shesnovation.pl)**  
**[www.womenintech.perspektywy.org](http://www.womenintech.perspektywy.org)**