CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT: CURRENT REALITIES AND TRENDS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Kristina Samašonok [1], Eimantas Kamienas [2], Vilma Gegužienė [3], Rūta Valentukevičiūtė [4], Agnė Šimkienė [5]

[1,2, 3,4,5] *Vilniaus kolegija/Higher Education Institution, Saltoniškių Str. 58, Vilnius, Lithuania*

E-mails: [1]k.samasonok@vvf.viko.lt (Corresponding authors); [2] e.kamienas@vvf.viko.lt, [3]v.geguziene@vvf.viko.lt, [2] [4]r.valentukeviciute@vvf.viko.lt; [5] a.simkiene@vvf.viko.lt*

Abstract. Openness to different groups of people, including people of different social classes, ethnic groups, age, gender, disability, sexual orientation, political opinion, and their inclusion in society, as well as in the labour market, becomes of particular importance. This article concretises the following questions: how do we build an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market? What are the opportunities for diversity processes and inclusion in today's labour market? Taking into account the importance of the equal inclusion of different groups in society in the context of the scientific literature, this study examines the situation of building an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market, and identifies the possibilities for promoting diversity and inclusion in today's labour market. The survey covered 202 Lithuanian residents participating in the labour market. Analytical, descriptive, quantitative and statistical research methods were used. Using a quantitative research strategy, it identifies the situation of building an inclusive community in today's labour market, and identifies opportunities for realising an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market. The results show that in most cases there is a positive view and attitude towards the diversity of employees/colleagues. Nevertheless, some of the participants in the study perceive the recognition of differences in the work environment as unnecessary. The study also revealed cases of being uncomfortable around, avoiding or even initiating bullying, or even gossiping unjustifiably, and refusing to help or work together with people of different age, gender, disability, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and other characteristics, as well as a lack of regular surveys of staff, discussions with supervisors or colleagues to improve the working environment with a focus on implementing inclusion and diversity, as well as organized trainings or seminars and mentoring programmes aimed at fostering positive attitudes towards employees of different ages, genders, working styles, disabilities, etc. as well as other colleagues having individual features. The results of the study will have a lasting value in the academic debate on the importance of equal inclusion of different groups in society in today's labour market, and their practical implications for identifying possible ways to shape society's openness to diversity and inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for all groups, including people with disabilities, different ethnicities, sexual orientation, etc., to successfully integrate into the labour market and participate in it on equal terms and with equal opportunities.

Keywords: inclusion and diversity; labour market; an inclusive community
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1. Introduction

Today's society is concerned with the success of its members, their effective participation in social interactions and their self-fulfilment in the workplace, which is why the implementation of the principles of inclusiveness and diversity becomes of paramount importance. This has also been influenced by the social, political, value and legal changes that have taken place around the world over the last few decades, which have led to a shift in attitudes towards people with individual differences. The evolving approach to inclusion and diversity is reflected in the initiatives implemented, and in the legal documents, laws and resolutions adopted on an ongoing basis. With the principles of inclusion and diversity as one of the European Union's core values, and today's communities becoming increasingly diverse in many respects, there is a need for to increase orientation towards diversity and to build an inclusive and sustainable society in Europe. The European Commission has a number of initiatives to implement policies based on diversity and inclusion (*EU Platform of Diversity Charters by Country, the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, the European Diversity Month),* and the principles of diversity and inclusion are being implemented at various levels through strategic documents such as the *European Union's Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 and the Strategy on Disability Rights for 2021-2030*, The *2021-2027 "Erasmus+ programme* in partnership with SALTO's Education and Training Resource Centres for Inclusion and Diversity to remove barriers and increase opportunities in the areas of education, training and youth work. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) should also be noted, as it stresses the need to protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities in society. The dominant paradigm of social integration in relation to the diversity of individuals has led to the development of inclusion and diversity policies, not only at the level of strategic EU institutions, but also at the level of various public sector organisations and private capital companies. The implementation of inclusion and diversity policies is underpinned by the European Court of Auditors' *Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025, and the European Network of Agencies and Joint Undertakings' Inclusion and Diversity Report (2022)*, which brings together as many as 34 EU agencies. The high correlation of equality, diversity and inclusion with increased innovation, productivity and performance, talent recruitment and retention, and workforce well-being is supported by a report from the International Labour Organisation (Transforming enterprises through diversity and inclusion, 2022).

The increasing number of decrees and laws in the context of achieving the goals of building an inclusive and diverse community provides more and more opportunities to address many of the pressing issues in relation to the diversity of individuals. The examinations of the problems related to the implementation of the principles of inclusion and diversity in today's labour market is not an exception, when considering how to create conditions for the inclusion of all groups in the working environment, which make the physical space, the psychological atmosphere and the microclimate in the workplace suitable and adaptable for all groups and for employees with different characteristics, eliminating prejudice and discrimination in recruitment, professional development and career advancement. A number of research studies have confirmed the positive impact of inclusion and diversity on an organisation. According to Bourke et al. (2017) diversity affects all business dynamics, so companies and organisations need to take a stance and put it into practice that supports and embraces all individual personal differences. On the other hand, the recognition and non-discrimination of each employee leads to higher employee satisfaction, which is crucial for the effectiveness of the organisation and the successful implementation of the organisation's strategies (Croitoru, Florea et al., 2022), and as Tobbell, Burton, Gaynor, Golding, Greenhough, Rhodes and White (2021) point out, social inclusion also enables the experience of positive emotions at work. Panicker, Agrawal, Khandelwal (2018) found in their research that organisations with a supportive climate for inclusion, high quality inclusion practices and strong leadership commitment lead to high organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

However, it should be acknowledged that the modern labour market is facing challenges in terms of ensuring equality of treatment and inclusion of employees in the organisation (Panicker, Agrawal, Khandelwal, 2018;

Fujimoto and Uddin, 2020; Guillaume, Loufrani-Fedida, 2023). Therefore, the issue of inclusion and diversity remains relevant and prompts the analysis of inclusion and diversity processes in the labour market to look for a change in attitudes in today's labour market towards people working in organisations with differences such as, according to Torrico, Jiménez-Millán and Hinojosa-Pareja (2021), covering: different social classes, ethnic groups, different ages, genders, disabilities, educational backgrounds, religions.

Considering the importance of the equal inclusion of different groups of society in the labour market and the relevance of the topic, the research problem is defined by the following *questions:* how is an inclusive and diverse community being built in today's labour market? What are the opportunities for diversity processes and inclusion in today's labour market?

The aim of the study is to identify the situation of building an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market and to identify the possibilities for the realisation of diversity processes and inclusion principles in today's labour market.

Study objectives:
1. To find out respondents' views on the state of inclusion and diversity in today's labour market.
2. To investigate and compare the indicators and differences in the attitudes towards building an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market between those in management positions in the organisation and those in non-management positions.
3. To clarify and anticipate the preconditions for the realisation of diversity processes and inclusion principles in today's labour market.

The significance of this study lies in the development of an instrument based on theoretical arguments. It can be used to understand the situation of implementation of inclusion and diversity in an organisation and to identify the preconditions for the realisation of an inclusive community in today's labour market. In addition, the situation of creating and realising an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market has been addressed in a comprehensive way, including the recognition and valuing of individual differences, creation of equal opportunities for employment, development and career advancement, as well as aspects of social, emotional and physical well-being at work. On the basis of the results of the study and based on the highlighted aspects, this can be easily extrapolated to other contexts for optimally anticipating the realisation of an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market. The authors' research could be further developed in the future by applying methods of statistical comparative data analysis, qualitative research and forecasting methods, by examining in detail the problems of creating an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market and by providing solutions.

2. Theoretical background

In today's labour market, organisations and companies have a duty to represent the diversity of their workforce and to ensure the (self)creation of an inclusive community (Panicker, Agrawal, Khandelwal, 2018). It must be acknowledged that organisations are also encouraged to implement the principles of inclusion and diversity by the challenges of modern competition in the labour market, where, according to Croitoru, Florea et al. (2022), companies are encouraged to do whatever it takes to become and remain competitive, i.e., to gain competitive advantages, to motivate and thus engage all employees to maximize the company's performance (Pleasant, 2017, Gao et al., 2021). However, when considering the profiles of inclusive and diverse organisations, it is important to clarify the concepts of diversity and inclusion, which are often treated as indivisible phenomena, but which, according to the authors Jeronimo and Henriques (2022), cannot be considered equivalent or synonymous terms, since diversity focuses on the demographic, psychographic and social characteristics of the organisation, while

inclusion focuses mostly on removing barriers to diversity in the organisation by focusing on the achievement of shared and high-quality results. Diversity is more than just a person's gender or disability. This is also supported by authors Jeronimo and Henriques (2022), who argue that the growing need for an increasingly diverse workforce is not only due to the higher number of women in organisations, but also to the integration of minorities related to ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion, while Madera (2018) adds the additional dimension of social class and the personal skills available. As it can be seen, in modern organisations it is important to recognise the authenticity and uniqueness of employees, as diversity can be defined as the result of interactions between individuals with different identities living in the same social system (Mateescu, 2017) and Krithi and Pai (2021) define diversity in three levels: Primary dimension, highlighting race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability; Secondary dimension, highlighting religion, lifestyle, work, experience, economic status, culture, sexual orientation, marital status, political orientation, thinking style, geographic location, nationality, language, education; and Tertiary dimension, highlighting beliefs, assumptions, group norms, values, feelings. The latter levels reflect the diversity of people working in organisations and the breadth and depth of their labour market participation. This allows to suggest that it is not easy to manage diversity in an organisation, as it is not enough to adopt pragmatic business practices, but it is necessary to continuously develop them and to communicate within the organisation the diversity policy in the business (Croitoru, Florea et al., 2022), because diversity implementation is only successful if it correlates with the strategic goals and strategic guidelines of the organisation, if all employees feel a sense of inclusion, the phenomenon creates a close relationship with the team, the interests of employees are then taken into account, and individuals are integrated into the company (Madera et al, 2017; Ashikali, Groeneveld, Kuipers, 2021; Ferdman, 2017), even creating new business processes and linking them to the organisation's core objectives if necessary (Ferdman, 2017). At the same time, while Saqib and Khan (2022), acknowledge that modern organisations promote diversity and strive to create inclusive communities, they note that there is a lack of consensus on what makes an inclusive organisation, although it is stressed that the concept of an inclusive organisation cannot be standardised, as the authentic context in which each organisation operates is crucial. In this case, according to Shore and Chung (2021), the position of the leader is important in order to increase and improve the inclusive experience in the organisation, as the management and leadership style determines how the needs for engagement and uniqueness of the group members are fulfilled (Randel et al., 2018), by supporting the group members, their views, ensuring fairness, impartiality, shared decision-making and thus creating organisational norms (Ashikali, Groeneveld, Kuipers, 2021). Jeronimo, Henriques and Carvalho (2021) performed research that shows that inclusive leadership has a positive effect on employees' perceptions of inclusion (Lawson, Cruz, Knollman, 2017), which in turn has a positive effect on employees' perceptions of diversity. A leader must strive to build as diverse a team as possible, including different talents and balancing their different needs and dimensions of diversity; ethnically diverse teams experience a more inclusive climate, but this requires that leaders' management styles are as inclusive as possible (Shore et al., 2018; Ashikali, Groeneveld, Kuipers, 2021), and that employees are valued for the differences and the contribution they bring to the organisation (Ashikali, Groeneveld, Kuipers, 2021).

While diversity policies are generally positive, however authors Jeronimo and Henriques (2022) highlight the dual impact of organisational diversity - positive in terms of increased creativity, effective problem-solving, productivity, employee engagement and quality of results, but negative in terms of creating a negative environment that can lead to poor quality results, due to increased opportunities for interpersonal conflicts, declining social integration, rigidity in decision-making etc. The negative effects of organisational diversity, according to Bourke et al. (2017) and (Shore et al., 2018), may simply be due to the existence of a mismatch between a company's communication of its diversity policy and its actual practices, i.e., between the implementation and the results of the diversity policy, which in any case limits the potential for competitive advantage.

It is relevant to analyse and discuss the profile of inclusive working environments. Andrews and Ashworth (2014) argue that inclusivity, an inclusive climate, can be observed when the workplace is characterised by high diversity

(Saqib and Khan, 2022). This allows to suggest that the diversity of human capital is one of the factors that must be invested in and that conditions should be made for it being integrated, while the company uses the diversity of its workforce to achieve organisational results. This highlights the need for modern organisations to find ways of adapting existing and creating new conditions for people with individual differences. In support of this idea, Boehm et al. (2014) argue that HR inclusiveness guarantees an inclusive climate within the organisation. Bendick et al (2010) argue that inclusion is also fostered by fair policies and respect for diverse views. The problem of creating an enabling environment for inclusion is highlighted by the lack of understanding among employees of how each individual perceives inclusion and the conditions necessary for it (Saqib and Khan, 2022). This allows to suggest that successful inclusive workplaces require enabling the organisation's employees to understand what inclusion is and how they, with their individual differences, can contribute to and complement it through their presence and diversity, and thus enable the organisation to operate successfully in this context and in these conditions. According to Li et al. (2019), the view from the perspectives of both an organisation's management and its employees are crucial in analysing the importance of inclusion and the conditions and opportunities for it in the workplace. The role of the organisation's management is highlighted in the implementation of diversity and inclusion programmes, and according to Sparkman (2019), employees' attitudes become important in how they view the environment in which they work (Saqib and Khan, 2022). This suggests that while it is crucial to design and implement inclusive and diversity-friendly working conditions and workplaces, it is equally important to invest in human capital and its understanding of what is happening in the work environment, and how each employee can personally contribute with his or her individuality and potential. Similarly, organisations aiming to ensure equal inclusion and diversity of their workforce model conceptual frameworks for social entrepreneurial inclusion, which include the following normative themes: an organisational perspective to promote social equality, empowering relationships, a sense of inclusion, and organisational access to valuable resources (Fujimoto, Uddin, 2020). Scientific research also looks at the integration of socially vulnerable people into the labour market and inclusive employment management, where policies are promoted that favour an employability management system. The importance of managerial development and training in the recruitment of people with health problems is noted, however with the provisions for the potential for professional development of the recruited workers (Guillaume, Loufrani-Fedida, 2021).

3. Study methodology

The following systematic logic was followed in organising the study: 1) analysis, evaluation and generalization of scientific and methodological literature close to the topic of the work, as well as of the results of the research conducted on the topic. This has helped to clarify aspects of building an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market and to design the research instrument; 2) conducting a diagnostic study, which allowed to investigate the attitudes of the study participants towards the situation of building an inclusive community in the organisation, to identify the factors promoting the realisation of an inclusive community, and to envisage the possible ways of realising the equal inclusion of different groups of society in the current labour market. The method of questionnaire distribution used was an online survey; 3) formulation of conclusions based on the analysis of scientific literature and research data and provision of the possibilities of building an inclusive community in today's labour market.

Study performance procedure. A CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) survey method was used, where the respondent is sent a link to a survey which he or she completes at his or her convenient time. The link created by the MS Forms survey software is unique, i.e., the questionnaire cannot be completed multiple times. Without prejudice to the protection of personal data, the survey link was sent to publicly accessible email addresses of private and public sector companies and organisations and, after consent was received to send the survey link by private email, to specific working persons. 500 invitations to take part in the survey were sent to different companies and organisations, and the reminder and the request for completion were repeated twice. The return rate for answers is 45% (the average return rate for online surveys is 44% (Wu, Zhao, Fils-Aime, 2022)) - 223

completed surveys were returned. The survey followed the principle of quality control, i.e., an internal review of the completion of the survey took place (completeness of the questionnaire filling, consistency and duration of the survey). Incomplete or inattentively filled questionnaires (e.g., the same numbers in all check points, etc.) were excluded from further data analysis. For further data analysis, 202 questionnaires were used, which are considered suitable for statistical analysis. The duration of the survey - two weeks. The results were processed using SPSS/PC software, presented in a summarised form, and confidentiality of the data was guaranteed.

Sample of subjects. The survey was carried out among the Lithuanian labour market participants (n=202), of whom more than two-thirds were women (n=139 (68.8%)) and less than one-third were men (n=57 (28.2%)), and 6 (3%) did not indicate their gender. The survey revealed that the majority of respondents are in the age groups of 36-45 (n=54 (25.7%) and 46-55 (n=52 (25.7%)), with only a small minority of respondents aged under 21 and over 55 (n=8 (4%) and n=12 (5.9%) respectively). Analysis of the distribution of respondents by length work experience shows that a quarter of respondents have 10 years or more of experience in the organisation (n=51 (25.4%)), and a smaller proportion have up to a year (n=44 (21.9%)) and 2 to 5 years of experience in the organisation (n=43 (21.4%)). The analysis of the survey data also revealed that the majority of respondents work for a private sector organisation (n=142 (70.6%)), while only almost a third of the respondents are employees of public/municipal sector organisations (n=59 (29.4%)).

The survey was conducted using an electronic system, which is likely to have led to a more passive involvement of Lithuanian labour market participants, despite the efforts of the researchers. Therefore, this study is small in size and the results may not be fully representative of the population as a whole, and are more likely to be a pilot study version. However, the results of these types of studies can be reliable without being transformed outside the treatment group. However, in the perspective of further research, in order to be more representative, to formulate statistically significant conclusions with regard to the phenomenon under study, and to be able to draw conclusions about the general population from the results obtained, it would be advisable to go deeper into the subject by expanding the sample and controlling the selection of the subjects.

Research methods. Analysis of scientific literature. The scientific literature related to the topic is analysed, the results of research carried out in Lithuania and abroad are discussed and summarised. *Quantitative approach.* A quantitative research method (questionnaire survey) was used to assess the situation of the creation and realisation of an open and inclusive community in today's labour market. In the light of the phenomenon under study, the indicators that best reflect and measure the opinions of the participants in the study on the state of inclusion and diversity in today's labour market were identified. The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of theoretical findings, an analysis of the factors of inclusion and diversity identified in the scientific literature, and the identified components. In the view of most scientists Ashikali, Groeneveld, Kuipers, (2021), the *recognition and appreciation of each person regardless of their individual differences, a positive attitude towards the diversity of employees and fair and just treatment for the work they do*, are among the conditions for the inclusion of all groups of people in the work environment. Therefore, the questionnaire paid particular attention to the recognition of ***individual differences (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, work style, etc.)***. The group of questions/statements on ***equal opportunities for employment, professional development and career advancement*** draws on the works of Chen and Tang (2018), which highlights the importance of *providing equal opportunities for professional development for all employees, regardless of their individual differences, eliminating prejudice and discrimination in both recruitment and professional development and career advancement*. According to Pleasant (2017), a *work environment that has conditions to be inclusive of all groups, and having an equitable work environment where both the physical spaces and the psychological atmosphere created are appropriate and adapted to the diversity of the workforce*, are some of the aspects of creating and realising an open and inclusive community in today's labour market. Based on this fact, a set of questions/statements ***on social, emotional and physical well-being in the workplace*** has been identified. Based on works by Jeronimo, Henriques, Carvalho (2021), the *role of education in building an inclusive community is of*

particular importance and can be one of the ways in which society can develop positive attitudes towards the diversity of individuals. Based on this provision, the questionnaire included a set of questions on **building an inclusive and diverse community**, the statements of which allowed to assess the state of *the training, workshops, mentoring programmes, regular surveys and discussions to assess the current situation.* Thus, the aspects identified in the scientific literature as some of the preconditions for the realisation of equal inclusion of different groups of society in today's labour market have led to the identification of key groups of questions/statements that are relevant for the assessment of the situation of an inclusive community in the labour market today. Based on the theoretical insights and criteria identified in the scientific literature, a questionnaire was constructed. The questionnaire consists of 4 groups of questions with 29 statements. After checking the internal consistency degree (*Cronbach's alpha*), the results of the statistical analysis of the data show that the overall degree of internal consistency of the statements (number of variables = 29) is high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.9682) and ranges from 0.9657 to 0.9709. The internal consistency of the variables was also tested separately for a question (16 statements) with five levels of response options, ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Cronbach's alpha values were calculated equal to 0.9722, ranging from 0.9706 to 0.9724. Based on the fact that internal consistency should be between 0 and 1 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.60 is considered appropriate for research (Pakalniškienė, 2012), the Cronbach's alphas calculated in this study indicate that the groups of questions are consistent with each other, and that the variables included in the constructed questionnaire are reflective of the part being studied and are oriented to the same subject. *Statistical method*. Statistical analysis methods were used to process the data collected during the study: statistical means, Student's *t* criterion (to compare the means of two independent samples). Quantitative data analysis was also carried out by calculating the percentage distribution (frequency) and applying the Chi - Square (χ^2) test. The results are considered statistically significant when they meet the significance level p. Statistical analysis of the data was performed using SPSS/PC software version 17.

4. Analysis of the study results

Globalisation has changed the structure of the world's workforce, both domestically and internationally, and this is leading to a reassessment and a different realisation of the processes of diversity and inclusiveness in the labour market, both nationally and globally. Given that the promotion of human diversity and the realisation of inclusion is becoming an integral feature of modern society, one of the key objectives of today's labour market is to be open to diverse groups of people, encompassing different social classes, ethnic groups, age, gender, disability, disability, sexual orientation and political opinion.

In order to explore the situation of creating and realising an open and inclusive community in today's labour market, the study first sought to find out the respondents' attitudes towards the diversity of the employees (colleagues) working in their organisation. The analysis of the data shows (see Figure 1) that the vast majority of the respondents, i.e., more than two-thirds of the respondents (73.8%), recognise and respect every employee/colleague regardless of their individual differences, such as their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, working style, job title or other characteristics. The latter result reflects the positive attitude of the participants towards the importance of inclusion for everyone. The results also revealed that a proportion (22.8%) of respondents identify the implementation of inclusion and diversity in the organisation with the success of the organisation, i.e., almost a quarter of the respondents' perception reveals that the recognition of every employee/colleague, regardless of their individual differences, is a key to the success of the organisation. Thus, some of the participants in the study associate the implementation of inclusion and diversity in the organisation with competitive advantage in the market and the creation of a positive image and reputation of the organisation in society, where the implementation of the principle of inclusion and diversity in the organisation is ensured without exception for all employees, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, attitudes or beliefs and other individual differences.

On the other hand, the latter result reveals a still prevalent societal attitude, often associated with inclusive practices, where the latter are oriented towards the company's or organisation's own self-gain, through reputational improvement, diversity image building, etc. Only a small minority of respondents recognise that they have to work with colleagues regardless of their individual differences (2.5%), while 1% of respondents believe that it is unnecessary to recognise every employee/colleague in the organisation, regardless of their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other differences.
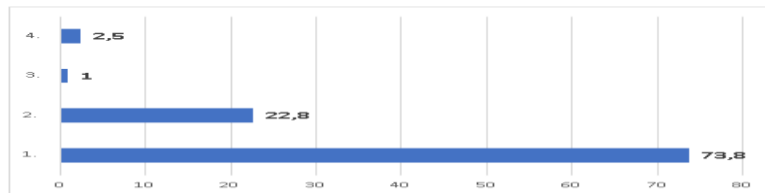

Figure 1. Survey participants' assessment of attitudes towards employee/colleague diversity (n=202; %)

Note:

1. I recognise and respect every employee/colleague regardless of differences in age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, working style, job title, etc.

2. I understand that recognising each employee/colleague, regardless of their individual differences, is key to the success of the organisation.

3. Recognition of every employee/colleague in the organisation, regardless of differences in age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, work style, job title, and other differences, is unnecessary.

4. I am compelled to work with colleagues regardless of differences in age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, work style, job title, etc.

The latter results are also supported by the fact (see Figure 2) that despite the fact that the vast majority, i.e., more than two thirds (72.8%) of the participants in the study usually observe colleagues' and managers' usual behaviour towards people of different age, gender, disability, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and other characteristics in the work environment, and (13.4%) of participants observe the wish and interest of their colleagues and managers to work with colleagues indiscriminately from their individual differences, however, there are also cases of being uncomfortable around colleagues (18.8%), avoidance (9.4%) or even initiating bullying or unjustified gossiping (7.4%), and refusal to help or work together (6.9%) in the work environment.

The recent results therefore confirm the need to look for opportunities to implement diversity processes and inclusion principles.
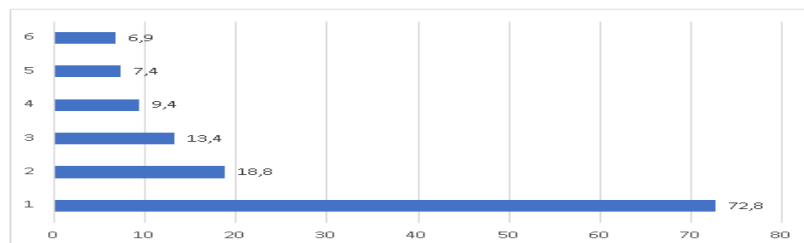

Figure 2. Assessment of colleagues' and managers' behaviour towards diversity (n=202; %)

Note:
1. Normal behaviour
2. Uncomfortable feeling while being around
3. Willingness/interest in working together
4. Avoidance
5. Initiating bullying or unfounded gossip
6. Refusing to help/work togethe

In summary, the findings of the survey show that in most cases there is a positive view and attitude towards the differences between employees/colleagues. Nevertheless, some of the participants in the study perceive the recognition of differences in the work environment as unnecessary and, for subjective or objective reasons, are reluctant or unable to, or avoid, recognising diversity. Therefore, in order to ensure equal opportunities for all groups, including people with disabilities, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc., to successfully integrate and participate in the labour market with equal rights and opportunities, it is necessary to find ways to develop a societal openness to the diversity of individuals and to the implementation of inclusion.

In order to build an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market, and to ensure the successful realisation of inclusiveness, it is important to find out how individuals behave towards their colleagues in a way that takes into account their individual differences. Perhaps the most common aspects of diversity are gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, external characteristics, religion, beliefs, health conditions, etc. These can be identified as characteristics that can lead to devaluation or discrimination. All of these can lead to poor wellbeing in the workplace, limiting and hindering creative potential and self-expression, reducing motivation, productivity and quality of work.

When looking at respondents' views on their behaviour towards colleagues, taking into account their individual differences, the analysis of the data in the overall sample revealed a majority of respondents with a positive attitude towards the diversity of colleagues, with more than two-thirds of the respondents describing their behaviour towards colleagues as normal, regardless of their individual differences (see Table 1), i.e., when assessing their behaviour in terms of political views, appearance, religion, gender, age, nationality, unusual style of dress, health status, the prevalence ranged from 73.8% to 55%, except for the assessment of their behaviour towards a colleague with HIV/AIDS, where more than two-thirds (66.3%) of the respondents indicated that they had no experience of working with such people.

Table 1. Evaluation of the behaviour of the participants towards the diversity of colleagues (n=202; %)

	I avoid communication	I feel uncomfortable being around	I refuse to help him / work together	I initiate bullying / unfounded gossip	I behave normally	I like working together	I have no such experience
Older colleague (55+ years)	1.5	2	0.5	0	65.8	22.8	6.9
Young colleague (up to 29 years)	0	0.5	0.5	0	60.9	35.6	1.5
Colleague of the opposite sex	0	1.5	0.5	0	61.4	31.2	4
Colleague with a physical or other disability	0	4	0.5	0.5	55.9	8.9	29.2
A colleague of a nationality other than mine	0	1	0.5	0	64.4	20.8	12.4
A colleague with a different faith from me	0.5	1	0	0	65.8	13.9	17.3
A colleague with different political views	4.5	2	0.5	1.5	73.8	9.9	6.9
Colleague with a different sexual orientation	0	3	0	0	55	13.4	27.7
A colleague with a different appearance (e.g., massive body tattoos, coloured hair, strange hairstyle, large number of earrings, etc.)	0	2	0	1	66.8	15.3	13.9
A colleague with an unusual style of dress (e.g., goth, etc.)	0	2.5	0	0.5	61.4	12.4	22.3
A colleague with HIV/AIDS	0.5	5.4	0	0.5	19.8	5	66.3

However, despite this rather positive tendency for employees to behave normally in the work environment, ignoring possible differences between colleagues, the study found some, albeit not significant, differences in behavioural expressions in terms of how differently they reacted to the differences between colleagues (see table 1). The age of employees is perhaps the most common aspect that still poses challenges in today's organisations, and the difference in age groups is identified as one of the key elements that can create difficulties in the work environment, which can be linked to: a) the retention and keeping at work of older workers, who are experienced and highly qualified, but who, because of their older age, often have difficulties integrating into modernised workplaces and are slower to accept and apply technological change in the work environment; b) the retention of the motivation of middle-aged workers; and c) the recruitment of younger workers who do not have enough work experience. This is confirmed by the data, where a statistically significant difference (Chi-Square (χ^2) test p=0.03) suggests that younger participants in the study (aged 29 and under) tend to have a less positive attitude towards working with a colleague aged 55+, i.e., they tend to avoid socialising (5.6%) and feel uncomfortable around an older (55+ years of age) colleague (5.6%). This result confirms that promoting age diversity is one of the more important elements of the overall organisational climate and working atmosphere. On the other hand, the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market and the creation of adapted jobs for them are of particular importance for building inclusive communities. However, it should be acknowledged that the stereotypical perception that people with physical or mental disabilities are under-qualified, have health problems, and lack the necessary competences and work skills to perform certain activities is not changing as fast as we would like. In order to find out how the participants of the study perceive their behaviour towards a colleague with a disability, the data analysis revealed that although slightly more than half of the respondents (55.9%) perceived that they behave normally towards colleagues with disabilities, one third of the respondents (29.2% of respondents indicate that they have no experience of working with a colleague with a disability, and a small proportion (4%) of respondents say they feel uncomfortable around a colleague with a disability (see Table 1). These results highlight the need to change the attitudes of society, employers and employees towards people with disabilities, to create an open, safe and responsive working environment, and to enable people with disabilities to successfully integrate into the labour market. Despite the fact that gender roles are undergoing a clear transformation in both theoretical and practical terms, and that laws, regulations and workplace documents clearly define a non-discriminatory approach to gender, it should nevertheless be acknowledged that gender inequalities in the workplace are still a possible phenomenon, despite the measures taken. When examining the views of the participants on their behaviour towards colleagues of the opposite sex, the majority of respondents have a predominantly non-discriminatory attitude towards colleagues of the opposite sex. The survey found that two-thirds of both men and women reported that they behave normally when working with the opposite sex, and one-third of respondents reported that they like working with the opposite sex (see Table 1). Furthermore, the results of the survey revealed that both men and women had similar experiences of working with colleagues of a different sexual orientation, with only 1.5% of all respondents reporting that working with a colleague of a different sexual orientation made them feel uncomfortable, i.e. only a small proportion of the participants admitted to feeling uncomfortable when working with a colleague of a different sexual orientation, and 27.7% of the respondents admitted to not having had any experience of working with such people.

Recognising each individual, treating them fairly and justly and valuing their efforts, providing them with working conditions that are appropriate to their needs, capabilities and individual differences, and developing attitudes towards the diversity of workers are not in doubt. Creating an inclusive work environment can have a direct impact on employee motivation, work performance, can condition job satisfaction, strengthen commitment to the organisation's overall goals, increases loyalty, efficiency and productivity, and is an essential component of psychological well-being. Therefore, creating a level playing field for all employees without singling them out on the basis of individual differences, involving all employees in decision-making, and pursuing an inclusive strategy while maintaining the individual identity of the employee, are among the key directions in shaping and creating an inclusive work environment. On the other hand, inclusion and diversity are perceived as integral parts of an organisation's success in today's competitive labour market. Given the importance of inclusion and diversity in

today's labour market, it is therefore appropriate to look for ways to enable all groups of people to integrate successfully into the labour market, irrespective of their individual differences. It is therefore important to analyse: the extent to which the organisation makes efforts to involve all employees in common activities, taking into account their individual abilities and skills, and the competences they possess; whether employees' personal qualities are recognised and utilised in the working environment; whether all employees are encouraged to take part in the organisational processes, irrespective of individual differences; and whether the working environment and atmosphere are free from any negative prejudices against the diversity of employees, and is an environment where no member of the organisation is favoured or discriminated against.

In order to explore the possibilities of creating an inclusive and diverse community in the labour market, it is useful to analyse how the participants in the study perceive the situation of the employees in the organisation where they work, taking into account their individual differences. The average estimates found in the overall sample of participants in the survey showed (see Figure 3) that respondents perceived that the organisation recognises and respects every employee, regardless of their individual differences (M=4.41). On the other hand, according to the respondents' assessment, the organisation has a climate free of negative prejudices towards diversity of employees (M=4.4). Thus, the prevailing positive stance towards differences between workers is evident, without prejudice to the dignity of the individual, his or her rights and freedoms and equal opportunities. A mindset that focuses on the perception and recognition of the individual's abilities, the appreciation of the individual's efforts, and the opportunity to express opinions without prejudice and to act and make decisions independently, thus contributing to the achievement of the organisation's objectives, can be one of the preconditions for the realisation of inclusion. On the other hand, empirical results from other researchers suggest that employees who feel valued regardless of their individual differences are more loyal and committed to the organisation.

According to the Law on Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania (adopted in 2003 and updated in 2017), recruitment must be based on the same selection criteria for all people, provide equal opportunities for all employees to improve their qualifications and professional development, and provide equal opportunities for professional career development. It is recognised that an orientation towards empowering employees' personal growth and development, and providing opportunities to develop skills and abilities, are among the factors that increase employee satisfaction in their work activities. In order to find out the participants' perception of the professional development opportunities presented by their organisations regardless of individual differences, the participants' assessment showed that their organisation provides equal opportunities for professional development (M=4.39) and hires people with the most relevant qualifications regardless of individual differences (M=4.35). It is therefore clear that an organisation's inclusive and diverse policy is a prerequisite for attracting new employees whose qualifications and competences are relevant to the activities they perform. It also creates an image of the organisation as "desirable", which attracts talented professionals and improves the organisation's competitive advantage.

On the other hand, building an inclusive and diverse community requires taking into account the existence of different groups within it, recognising the individual characteristics of each member and acknowledging their differences. These groups may have specific needs or interests, so it is important to recognise them and be able to meet them through facilitating working conditions, tools, measures, etc. However, the relatively low estimate score (M=3.76) based on the respondents' assessment indicates that there is a lack of a workplace that is tailored to the different needs and abilities of employees. Meanwhile, the importance of creating a working environment, adapting physical spaces and aids, and facilitating the interests, needs and individual characteristics of different groups of people in order to achieve inclusion was identified by most researchers.

The slightly lower estimate scores also indicate that the survey participants do not feel that the creation and building of an inclusive and diverse community is sufficiently implemented in their organisation. According to

the survey data, it can be seen that there is a lack of effort geared and attention paid towards organizing trainings, seminars and using mentorship programs, oriented at forming a positive attitude of employees towards colleagues of different sex, work style, disability and other individual specifics (M=3.41). The low estimate scores also suggest that organisations lack regular employee surveys, discussions with managers or colleagues to improve the work environment oriented towards achieving inclusion and diversity (M=3.32). These results suggest that the lack of information on the individual differences and needs of different groups may be one of the obstacles to the development and implementation of employee inclusion in the labour market. The results also revealed the importance of regular surveys to build an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market, for example through reliable and valid methodologies for measuring and evaluating inclusion.

Figure 3. Assessment of the situation of employees in the organisation, taking into account their individual differences (n=202, average values, max=5)

1. Every employee is recognised and respected, regardless of their individual differences

2. An environment is created free from negative prejudices against diversity

3. Fair and equitable recognition is granted to all employees for the work they do, regardless of their individual differences

4. Equal opportunities are made for all people to apply for a job, regardless of their individual differences

5. Employees with the most appropriate qualifications are recruited, regardless of their individual differences

6. All employees are given equal opportunities for professional development, regardless of their individual differences

7. All employees have the same career opportunities

8. Action is taken against and preventive measures are in place to combat cases of discrimination and abuse based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, values, work style, job title, etc.

9. Equal rights (workload, working conditions, etc.) are guaranteed for all employees, regardless of their individual differences

10. Jobs are designed around the different needs and capabilities of workers

11. Training, seminars, mentoring programmes to promote positive employee attitudes towards colleagues of different age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, values, work style, job title, and other colleagues are performed.

12. Employees are helped to overcome professional difficulties (in acquiring the skills and knowledge they lack) regardless of their individual differences

13. The organisation provides opportunities for employees to express their views, suggestions and ideas freely and openly on matters relating to the organisation's activities and responds to them regardless of individual differences between employees

14. An equitable working environment is created in which each employee does not feel superior or inferior to others, regardless of their individual differences

15. Regular employee surveys, discussions with managers or colleagues, etc. to improve the working environment (microclimate) are being held

16. Informal communication and communality are encouraged

After generalizing the collected data, we can observe a clear trend with the highest average estimate scores awarded for the factors associated with personal recognition, creating an environment free from preliminary negative bias towards employee differences, fair recognition of employees' efforts, and equal opportunities created for professional development for all employees, regardless of their individual differences. Meanwhile, according to the assessment of the survey participants, the following aspects of building an inclusive and diverse community in the organisation were identified as areas intended for improvement: lack of training, seminars, mentoring programmes to encourage employees to develop a positive attitude towards diversity, as well as a lack of surveys and discussions on the topic of inclusiveness and diversity. On the other hand, participants acknowledge that the different needs and abilities of workers are not always taken into account when designing the workplace. There is no doubt that the factors identified above make it difficult to implement an inclusive community in an organisation. Therefore, the importance of training and seminars to educate members of the community about diversity and its manifestations, to provide them with knowledge about individual differences and to build practical skills, in order to build a more successful relationship with people with individual specifics and to create preconditions for an inclusive environment that is more open to diversity in the organisation, is highlighted in the context of the creation of an inclusive and diverse community in the current labour market. In addition, identifying and addressing the problems associated with negative diversity attitudes, monitoring employees and regularly conducting surveys and discussions to identify negative trends are likely to not only guarantee inclusion and diversity, but also ensure an inclusive environment for everyone, it would also make it possible to achieve the organisation's or company's objectives more effectively, to anticipate the specific steps that should be taken in the future to build an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market, and to design, modify and develop the organisation's processes, contributing to change at both the organisational and the social levels.

Considering that the realisation of an inclusive and diverse community in today's labour market depends to a large extent on the manager's views, attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as on the actions and efforts taken to implement diversity processes and inclusion principles in the organisation, this study aimed to investigate the differences in the attitudes of managerial and non-managerial respondents in their perception of the situation of employees in the organisation, taking into account their individual differences.

Using *Student's t* criteria, statistically significant differences in average assessments were found in the group statements regarding the evaluation of equal employment opportunities, opportunities to develop and to climb corporate ladder (see Table 2). The study results showed that the group of participants in managerial positions had presented significantly higher average assessment scores for equal opportunities to apply for a job (M=4.41, SD=0.72) and to take part in professional development (M=4.56, SD=0.74) for all individuals, regardless of their individual differences, compared to the non-managerial group (M=4.1, SD=1.02 and M=4.28, SD=0.98 respectively). The calculation of the *t-test* also revealed significantly higher estimates for the perception of those in managerial positions that the most qualified employees are hired regardless of their individual differences (M=4.5, SD=0.68) and that all employees are given the same career opportunities (M=4.48, SD=0.83), compared to the assessments of the non-managerial participants, who had significantly lower scores (M=4.25, SD=0.89 and M=4.04, SD=1.09, respectively), which suggests that the latter assess the situation of their employees/colleagues in the organisation where they work, taking into account their individual differences such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc., see instances of prejudice against individuals in relation to their differences when assessing situations of recruitment and career opportunities within the organisation. On the other hand, the statistically significant differences in the average responses recorded in the survey (see Table 2) show that respondents in managerial positions, in terms of their perception of the treatment of people with differences in the work environment, acknowledge that employees are helped to overcome professional difficulties (in acquiring the skills and knowledge they lack), regardless of their individual differences (M=4.28, SD=0.98) and that their organisation provides opportunities for employees to freely and openly express their opinions, suggestions and ideas on issues related to the organisation's activities, and responds to them irrespective of their

individual differences (M=4.31, SD=0.86), compared to the assessments of the non-managerial participants in the study, whose significantly lower indicators (M=3.92, SD=1.14 and M=4.0, SD=1.14, respectively) indicate the latter's perceived bias towards differences between employees in terms of the situations of assistance provided to help them overcome their professional difficulties and the opportunities provided to freely and openly express their opinions or make suggestions on issues of ongoing activities, despite individual differences. These results confirm other studies showing the importance of the role of the manager in contributing to the realisation of openness to and inclusion of diverse groups of people in the labour market processes, including different social classes, ethnic groups, age, gender, disability, disability, sexual orientation and political opinion. When analysing the situational assessment indicators for the treatment of employees with differences (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) within the organisation, no statistically significant differences (p > 0.05) were found in relation to other aspects (see Table 2). The statistically insignificant differences in the averages indicate that, in these respects, employees' situations in the organisation are assessed at a similar level, regardless of their individual differences in terms of job position.

Table 2. Average indicators of assessments (M), standard deviations (SD) and difference significance level (p) of the differences in the situation of employees in relation to their individual differences (age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) between respondents in managerial (n=78) and non-managerial (n=124) groups

Statements	Group of respondents in managerial positions		Group of respondents in non-managerial positions		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Every employee is recognised and respected, regardless of their individual differences	4.47	0.79	4.37	0.81	0.83	0.408
An environment is created free from negative prejudices against diversity	4.47	0.8	4.36	0.86	0.893	0.373
Fair and equitable recognition is granted to all employees for the work they do, regardless of their individual differences	4.37	0.87	4.15	0.96	1.624	0.106
Equal opportunities are made for all people to apply for a job, regardless of their individual differences	4.41	0.72	4.1	1.02	2.293	**0.023**
Employees with the most appropriate qualifications are recruited, regardless of their individual differences	4.5	0.68	4.25	0.89	2.064	**0.04**
All employees are given equal opportunities for professional development, regardless of their individual differences	4.56	0.74	4.28	0.98	2.124	**0.035**
All employees have the same career opportunities	4.48	0.83	4.04	1.09	2.96	**0.003**
Action is taken against and preventive measures are in place to combat cases of discrimination and abuse based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, values, work style, job title, etc.	4.06	1.15	3.95	1.2	0.587	0.558
Equal rights (workload, working conditions, etc.) are guaranteed for all employees, regardless of their individual differences	4.36	0.9	4.12	1.14	1.558	0.121
Jobs are designed around the different needs and capabilities of workers	3.94	1.04	3.64	1.25	1.647	0.101
Training, seminars, mentoring programmes to promote positive employee attitudes towards colleagues of different age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, values, work style, job title, and other colleagues are performed.	3.61	1.48	3.28	1.58	1.364	0.174
Employees are helped to overcome professional difficulties (in acquiring the skills and knowledge they lack) regardless of their individual differences	4.28	0.98	3.92	1.14	2.198	**0.029**
The organisation provides opportunities for employees to express their views, suggestions and ideas freely and	4.31	0.86	4.0	1.14	2.053	**0.041**

openly on matters relating to the organisation's activities and responds to them regardless of individual differences between employees						
An equitable working environment is created in which each employee does not feel superior or inferior to others, regardless of their individual differences	4.24	0.92	4.03	1.05	1.382	0.168
Regular employee surveys, discussions with managers or colleagues, etc. to improve the working environment (microclimate) are being held	3.39	1.47	3.27	1.38	0.533	0.595
Informal communication and the feel of communality are encouraged	4.08	1.05	3.91	1.22	0.966	0.335

In summary, the results show that the group of participants in management positions provides higher scores in the assessment of the treatment of employees with differences in the organisation in situations where they have equal opportunities for employment, development and career advancement, this group also provides higher average scores than the non-managerial employees in the field of recognition and appreciation of individual differences in the work environment, whose group has showed significantly lower indicators, showing that they perceive cases of bias towards diversity of employees in their organizations.

Conclusions

1. The study explores the situation of inclusion and diversity in today's labour market:
1.1. the results of the study showed a predominantly positive stance towards employee/colleague diversity. More than two-thirds of respondents recognise and respect every employee/colleague regardless of their individual differences, and in the work environment, colleagues and managers are most likely to observe colleagues' and managers' normal behaviour or even willingness and interest in working with people of different age, gender, disability, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and other specifics, while almost a quarter of respondents equate the implementation of inclusiveness and diversity in the organisation with the success of the organisation. However, some of the participants in the study acknowledge that they have to force colleagues to work together regardless of their individual differences, and see the recognition of every employee/colleague in the organisation regardless of their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other differences as unnecessary. The study also revealed cases of being uncomfortable around, avoiding or even initiating bullying or unjustified gossip, and refusing to help or work together with people of different age, gender, disability, nationality, religion, sexual orientation and other characteristics.
1.2. recorded highest estimate averages show, that the organizations also recognise and respect every employee, regardless of individual differences, and create a climate free from prejudice against differences between employees, as well as provides equal opportunities for professional development and recruiting the most qualified people, regardless of individual differences. However, the low average estimate averages identified highlighted areas for improvement: there is a lack of regular employee surveys, discussions with managers or colleagues to improve the working environment for inclusiveness and diversity, and little focus on training or seminars and mentoring programmes aimed at building positive attitudes towards colleagues of different age, sex, working styles, disabilities and other individual differences.

2. The completion of a comparative statistical analysis of the data showed that participants in management positions had given higher scores for the treatment of employees with differences in the organisation, in terms of equal opportunities for employment, development and career progression, as well as the recognition and appreciation of individual differences in the work environment, than the non-managerial participants in the study, whose given lower scores reflect the latter's perceived cases of bias towards diversity of the employees.

3. Training and seminars to promote positive attitudes towards people of different age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion or other individual differences, regular surveys and discussions on inclusion and diversity are likely to create positive attitudes towards the diversity of persons, and would likely help to ensure the smooth application and implementation of the principles of inclusion and diversity in all activities and areas related to the functions of the organisation.

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Kristina SAMAŠONOK, Doctor of Social Sciences (Educology), Docent of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilniaus kolegija, Higher Education Institution, Didlaukio Str., 49, Vilnius, e-mail: administracija[eta]vvf.viko.lt; research interest areas: social exclusion risk for adolescence adaptation, institutional development and adaptive behaviour modelling, the first year students' adaptation to the study process, motivation factors for choosing studies, developing students' creative thinking in a higher school. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8985-6942

Eimantas KAMIENAS, Lecturer of Social Sciences (Business Management), Lecturer of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilniaus kolegija, Higher Education Institution, Didlaukio Str., 49, Vilnius, e-mail: administracija[eta]vvf.viko.lt; research interest areas: business management, business simulation, business process management, study process, creativity in the studies, etc. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0676-6053

Vilma GEGUŽIENĖ, Lecturer of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilnius University of Applied Sciences, Didlaukio Str., 49, Vilnius, e-mail: administracija[eta]vvf.viko.lt; research interest areas: sociology of education, research methodology, public speaking theory and practice, development of creative thinking in higher education.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9568-020X

Rūta VALENTUKEVIČIŪTĖ, Lecturer of Social Sciences (Business Management), Lecturer of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilniaus kolegija, Higher Education Institution, Didlaukio Str., 49, Vilnius, e-mail: administracija[eta]vvf.viko.lt; research interest areas: public speaking theory and practice, personal expression, organizational behavior, study process, creativity in the studies, etc. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0331-2859

Agnė ŠIMKIENĖ, Doctor of Social Sciences (Educology), Docent of the Faculty of Business Management of Vilniaus kolegija, Higher Education Institution, Didlaukio Str., 49, Vilnius, e-mail: administracija[eta]vvf.viko.lt.; research interest areas: inclusive, multicultural education in higher and general education school, acquisition and development of general and subject competencies, formation of identity in adolescence. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9732-8616