

# Ageing Workforce – a Challenge for Organizations

## Senėjanti darbo jėga – iššūkiai organizacijoms

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Ageing and its consequences are most frequently analysed in macroscale. If the analyses apply to enterprises, they usually cover working conditions or motivations of the seniors' choice between continuing employment and retirement.

The article discusses slightly different themes, namely the awareness of demographic changes, their consequences for the organization and the new professional role of older people in the new demographic situation of the organization.

The article is based on the results of a survey conducted among nearly 900 employees of the organizations participating in the 'Best Agers Lighthouses – Strategic Age Management for SME in the Baltic Sea Region' international project. The aim of the study was to determine whether the level of awareness of the demographic changes and their impact on the organization and situation of seniors in the new socio-demographic conditions depends on the age of the respondents and their position in the hierarchy of the organization.

The conducted analysis made it possible to confirm the hypothesis of the positive correlation between the level of demographic awareness and age or the position occupied in the hierarchy of the organization.

**KEYWORDS:** ageing workforce, ageing society, ageing awareness.

In recent years, the ageing of population and its socio-economic consequences have been one of the most often analysed topics in public debate and research. Among the implications of the ageing of population, special attention is paid to changes in the level and pace of economic growth, consumption structure and the distribution of income and savings (Bloom et al., 2001; Bloom et al., 2000; Kelley and Schmidt, 1995), solutions in the area of pension systems (Blondal and Scarpetta, 1997; Blundell et al., 2000; Góra, 2003, p. 481; Pleśniak, 2014), changes in the structure of households (Gonnot et al., 1995; Phillipson et al., 1998; Laurent, 2013), the ageing of the labour force and changes in the labour market (Venne, 2002; Patrickson and Ranzijn, 2005) and the problems of health and social care (Brayer et al., 2010; Zweifel et al., 1999).

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### Abstract

### Introduction



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Most of the discussions on this topic are conducted in macroscale. On the other hand, the ageing population directly affects individuals entering the phase of old age<sup>1</sup> and their families<sup>2</sup>. It also applies to organizations and enterprises that have to count with the prospect of a shortage of skilled workers (Liwński and Sztanderska, 2010).

According to the European Commission (*Europejczycy przygotowani*, 2012) in 2011, 71% of Europeans were aware of the ageing of the European population, but only 42% were concerned about this phenomenon. This attitude was by far different from the point of view of politicians, who saw ageing as one of the main challenges.

In the case of entrepreneurs and business managers, the level of awareness of ageing and its consequences for the organizations they manage is growing steadily (Ferry and Baker, 2006). However, this does not change the fact that in addition to entrepreneurs and managers who realize that the professional and social skills gained by older workers represent a unique resource of human capital, absent in the case of the younger personnel and the newly recruited employees, as well as that the departure of older workers from the company will cause losses (Liwński and Sztanderska, 2010), there are also those who expect their older workers to withdraw from work as soon as possible and perceive them only as cost burden of the enterprise (Perek-Bialas and Turek, 2012).

The results of national and international research show that the simultaneous occurrence of demographic changes, social evolution and globalization, as well as the intensification of corporate actions will be intensifying the problem of shortages in the availability of qualified personnel (Sweet et al., 2010; Jorgensen, 2004; *Niedobór talentów*, 2008; Górniak, 2012). The problems will mainly affect enterprises operating in the industrial sector (Sweet et al., 2010), health care (*The looming crisis in the health workforce*, 2008; Golinowska et al., 2013) and the basic services sector (*Skill needs in Europe*, 2008, p. 16). As a result, using the potential of older workers becomes a necessity — a means of preserving the efficiency and effectiveness of the enterprise. It is due to the fact that older workers have attributes that can be considered relevant in shaping the competitiveness of enterprises: knowledge, experience, commitment to work, loyalty, communication and relationships established during the entire working life (Richert-Kaźmierska, 2013). According to Wormach (2012), 'only organisations that respond appropriately to the challenges of an ageing workforce will gain a significant competitive edge, both in terms of recruiting and retaining talent'.

The results of research carried out on 30 thousand entrepreneurs in 28 countries published in the report *Nowe spojrzenie na pracowników 50+* (2008) confirm that only 13% have a strategy to recruit older workers and 20% have a strategy for retaining these employees. By far most of them (82% and 74%) do not have such a strategy. In Poland, out of 750 surveyed enterprises, only 3% said that they have developed a programme to facilitate the employment of

1 The social and psychological consequences of human ageing are discussed by Steverink et al. (2001, p. 364–373), Błędowski et al. (2012) or Mossakowska et al. (2012). Keller et al. (1989, p. 67–82) also defines the five ways of ageing of individuals: 1. Ageing as a natural and systematic process, occurring without any specific interferences; 2. Ageing as a period of summarizing previous performance, the period of philosophical reflection, increasing knowledge and maturity; 3. Ageing as a period of 'recovered' freedom and independence, developing new interests; 4. Ageing as a period of declining health and increasing concerns about the future; 5. Ageing as a period of feeling of loss – both of the past time and the opportunities, including those related to professional development

2 As Szarota writes (2010, p. 109), the Polish families in general opinion still remain the main source of help and care for the elderly. This view is shared by Szatur-Jaworska et al. (2006, p. 107–108). Providing care for older people and supporting young people in the care of their children generates the so-called sandwich generation – a generation of quinquagenarians burdened with the duty of care for the elderly (their parents and grandparents) and grandchildren. The consequences of living in such a family structure are described by Pierret (2006) and Taylor (2013).

people over 50 years of age (95% did not prepare such a programme), and 5% admitted that they encourage the employees of retirement age to remain employed (93% of respondents from Polish enterprises do not have formal procedures of retaining workers approaching the retirement age). The results of the *Older workers survey* research (Collinson, 2003, p. 25) show, however, that pre-emptive actions aimed against shrinking labour resources due to population ageing are more likely to be taken by large enterprises (about 40%) than by the small (14%) and medium (24%) ones. Almost half of the small enterprises (45%) participating in the study failed to take action in connection with the possibility of running out of work caused by the retirement of *baby boomers* generation — they also do not have any plans to undertake such activities in the future.

The reasons for the inadequate response to demographic threats which the entrepreneurs will have to face in coming years include:

- \_ insufficient knowledge of the direction and intensity of demographic changes in the world (Walker & Taylor, 1993; McNair et al., 2007),
- \_ the current situation in the labour market, causing the employers' conviction of easy access to labour resources (Brown, 2002, p. 7),
- \_ short-sightedness of many entrepreneurs who are reluctant to take into account the long-term socio-economic forecasts in their current decisions, (Orlowski et al., 2010, p. 47),
- \_ insufficient knowledge of the potential held by older workers employed in the enterprise and their actual role in the staff (Fryca and Maciejewska, 2010),
- \_ insufficient knowledge of the methods and tools that can be used by the enterprise to optimize usage of the potential of older workers (Fryca and Maciejewska, 2010),
- \_ stereotypes related to older workers and their low productivity, low skills, high wage expectations etc. (Zawadzki, 2009, p. 11).

The level of employees and employers awareness of the consequences of demographic changes and their commitment to take action to fully use the potential of older people in organizations is diversified due to the size of the organizations and their countries of origin.

As mentioned earlier, large enterprises are more likely than SMEs to introduce programmes aimed at ensuring the efficient use of the knowledge and experience of older workers or to use age-management instruments (Collinson, 2003; Naegele and Walker, 2006).

A higher level of awareness of demographic changes and their consequences is shown by the inhabitants of wealthy countries, experiencing the ageing of their populations. In less affluent and developing countries that will be benefitting from the so-called demographic dividend for several more years, the levels of such awareness and willingness to take remedial actions are significantly lower. At the level of the European Union, a clear distinction can be seen between fifteen first countries (Taylor, 2006), and the member states which accessed EU in 2004 or later (Mandl et al., 2006). The EU15 countries, as opposed to the other EU Member States, have a significantly more developed policy for active ageing and diverse practices aimed at the economic and social activation of older people, creating a working environment friendly for elderly people etc.

The research problem of the article is the awareness of demographic changes, their consequences for the organization and the new professional role of older people in the new demographic situation of the organization, among members of small and medium sized organizations. The research results provided the answers on the questions about the level of this awareness and how far it depends on the age of the respondents or their position in the hierarchy of the organization.

## Research methodology

The results presented below were obtained on the basis of research carried out among employees and managers of organizations — the participants of the **Best Agers Lighthouses – Strategic Age Management for SME in the Baltic Sea Region** international project<sup>3</sup>. The main objective of the project was to increase the awareness of the demographic changes and the challenges that they present among the employees and managers of SME sector organizations, as well as to develop practical solutions in the field of age management.

One of the key stages of the project was conducting research diagnosing the current knowledge and attitude of the workers and management towards demographic changes occurring in the environment, ageing workforce, cooperation in teams of different age, knowledge transfer and the broadly understood concept of age management. This research resulted from the following reasons:

- \_ growing number and share of older people in populations of the Baltic Sea Region, with particular emphasis on the new Member States (Kronenberg and Kuckshinrichs, 2011; Tivig and Korb, 2012),
- \_ insufficient level of awareness and knowledge among SMEs entrepreneurs and employers of the consequences of demographic change (McNair et al., 2007; Barnes et al., 2009),
- \_ inadequate level of knowledge about the practices in age management among SMEs employers and employees (Ball, 2007; Descamps, 2011),
- \_ previous studies have focused mainly on age management issues mainly in large companies (*Increasing the value of age*, 2015),
- \_ selectivity in research on aging management – previous studies have covered mainly on the companies samples (not embracing them non-profit organizations), have been conducted according to national criteria (dominate national studies, there is little comparative research) (*Population aging in Europe*, 2014; van Soest, 2010; Seitmaso et al., 2014, p. 393-399).

The research was conducted using mixed methods – they included a quantitative method (a survey conducted using a standardized questionnaire among 864 employees) and a qualitative method (a scenario-based in-depth interview with 61 managers). The entities responsible for the development of methodology and survey instruments were: Aalto University School of Business (FI), Gdansk University of Technology Faculty of Management and Economics (PL) and Stockholm School of Economics from Riga (LV) – the scientific partners of the project<sup>4</sup>.

The research tools were prepared in cooperation with Juhani Ilmarinen (Ilmarinen Consulting) and Marjo Wallin (Finish Institute of Occupational Health - FIOH) – the members of Project's Advisory Council. They use FIOH's experiences in research methodology (Tuomi et al., 1998; Ilmarinen et al., 1997; Gould, 2008; Wallin and Hussi, 2011).

The methodology proposed in the Project made possible the following:

- \_ to diagnose the level of awareness of aging process and its importance for organizations in enterprises and non-profit organizations participating in the Project,
- \_ to diagnose the level of awareness of the aging process and its importance for the organization among managerial staff and employees – due to organization's country of origin, employees and managers age, or employees' position in organization hierarchy,
- \_ to define the role attributed to older workers in organizations and measures used optimize the usage of their knowledge and experience potential,
- \_ to identify current age management practices applied in the SMEs organizations.

3 <http://www.best-agers-lighthouses.eu/>

4 The detailed information about research methodology used in the Project is described in Competitiveness and employment for the future: good examples of age management in the Baltic Sea Region, [http://www.best-agers-lighthouses.eu/downloads/Public/Evaluation%20and%20Case%20Studies/bal\\_cof\\_ansicht.pdf](http://www.best-agers-lighthouses.eu/downloads/Public/Evaluation%20and%20Case%20Studies/bal_cof_ansicht.pdf)

The study was conducted in the period from June 2013 to February 2014.

The results presented in the article are derived only from quantitative research, i.e. a survey conducted among 864 employees of nine organizations participating in the project from Finland, Sweden, Germany, Lithuania and Latvia. The target group of the study were all employees of these organizations, regardless of age, gender and other characteristics. Upon verification of the completeness and correctness of responses 816 questionnaires were enrolled to further analysis, of which 438 (53.7%) were from women and 378 (46.3%) from men (Table 1).

	N of respondents	% of respondents	Female		Male	
			N	%	N	%
21–34 years	183	22.4%	91	20.8%	92	24.3%
35–44 years	217	26.6%	131	29.9%	86	22.8%
45–54 years	177	21.7%	89	20.3%	88	23.3%
55–70 years	239	29.3%	127	29.0%	112	29.6%
Total	437	100%	438	100%	378	100%
			53.7%		46.3%	

**Table 1**

Characteristics of the study participants

183 (22.4%) questionnaires were completed by respondents representing the youngest age group (21–34 years), 217 (26.6%) by individuals aged 35–44 years, 177 (21.7%) by individuals aged 45–54 years, and 239 (29.3%) by representatives of the oldest age group (55–70 years). Among the 113 study participants (13.8%) individuals represented management (superior responsibility), 504 (61.7%) – the white collar group, 105 (12.9%) – the blue collar group and 94 (11.6%) – other employees.

The survey questionnaire contained 63 substantive questions and 5 questions characterizing the respondent. All questions were closed — the respondents chose only one answer from the four possible: 'No', 'I'm not sure', 'Yes', 'I do not wish to answer'.

This article does not take into account all the issues constituting the substantial scope of the survey. It is limited only to discussions of the answers given by respondents to questions about their assessment of the significance of demographic changes for the organization they work for, as well as the possibilities of using the older workers' potential by the organization. For this purpose, a detailed analysis of the responses to four out of 63 questions was conducted:

- \_ Q17: *Is the situation concerning age, the ageing workforce or life course in your organization challenging?*
- \_ Q 18: *Is the situation concerning business needs in your organization (e.g. difficulties in recruiting or lack of skilful staff) challenging?*
- \_ Q 20: *Does promoting ageing workers' resources enhance their work ability and lead to a longer work life?*
- \_ Q21: *Is your organization recognizing the invaluable competence and skills of older workers?*

The matrix analysis of correlation coefficients between the responses received to the questions indicated above and the characteristics of respondents (age, gender, position in the hierarchy of the organization and the country in which the organization operates) showed that

there is no statistically significant relationship between respondent gender and country of origin of respondent organizations and the respondents' answers. The statistical significance of the relationship between the two other characteristics of respondents and their responses was also low, but the article focuses on a review of results taking into account just these categories: age of the respondents and the position occupied by them in the hierarchy of their organization.

The analysis of the responses to selected questions was based on frequency tables, descriptive statistics and contingency tables. Contingency tables represent in this case a combination of four frequency tables arranged in such a way that each cell in the table represents an unambiguous combination of specific values of tabularized variables: the age of the respondent, their position in the hierarchy of the organization or the answers given to a pair of converging substantive questions. The contingency tables have enabled the analysis of frequencies corresponding to categories delineated by selected variables. The analysis of these frequencies enabled the identification of relations that exist between the tabularized variables, as well as the verification of two working hypotheses:

- \_ H1: the employees' awareness of the importance of demographic changes for their organization is low and depends on their age and position held in the hierarchy of the organization;
- \_ H2: the employees' awareness of the potential of older workers and the possibility of its use in the creation of the development of their organization is low and depends on the age and the respondent's position in the hierarchy of the organization.

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## Results and discussion

In order to determine whether employees are aware of the continuing process of ageing and the challenges it poses for organizations, they were asked in question Q17: *Is the situation concerning age, the ageing workforce or life course in your organization challenging?* and in question Q18: *Is the situation concerning business needs in your organization (e.g. difficulties in recruiting or lack of skilful staff) challenging?*

Responding to a question Q17, slightly more than one third of the survey participants (38.2%) were not sure whether the situation associated with an ageing workforce constitutes a real problem and challenge for their organization. Almost as many respondents (37.1%) confirmed that the problem of an ageing workforce in the organization exists and the organization has to face it. The problem is primarily seen by employees representing management (superior responsibility). 58.4% of managers (superior responsibility) admitted that the demography of employees is a challenge for their organization. In the case of the white collar respondents, there were 10 percentage points (p.p.) more individuals who saw the problem than those who did not appreciate its significance. The largest group in the population of white collar respondents are, however, individuals who have no opinion on this issue (41.5% replied *I'm not sure*). The blue collar workers' answers were similar to those given by the white collar employees. Also in this group almost half of respondents (45.7%) had no opinion on the impact of ageing of workers on the organization (cf. Table 2).

The consequences of the ageing of the workforce and the related challenges for the organization are more likely to be recognized by the older employees, as opposed to the younger ones (cf. Table 3). Question Q17 was answered *Yes* by 46.5% of the respondents in the 45–54 age group and 40.2% of the respondents in the 55–70 years age group, while only a little over 30% representing each of the younger age groups gave such an answer. Employees from the youngest age group (21–34 years) covered by the study showed, in comparison with the other

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
Superior responsibility	N	15	28	66	4	113
	%	13.3%	24.8%	58.4%	3.5%	100%
White collar	N	106	209	158	31	504
	%	21.0%	41.5%	31.3%	6.2%	100%
Blue collar	N	18	48	31	8	105
	%	17.1%	45.7%	29.5%	7.7%	100%
Others	N	15	27	48	4	94
	%	15.9%	28.7%	51.1%	4.3%	100%
Total	N	154	312	303	47	816
	%	18.9%	38.2%	37.1%	5.8%	100%

Table 2

Answers to the question Q17, taking into account the position taken by the respondents in the hierarchy of the organization

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
21–34 years	N	34	81	55	13	183
	%	23.5%	44.3%	30.1%	2.1%	100%
35–44 years	N	47	92	68	10	217
	%	21.7%	42.4%	31.3%	4.6%	100%
45–54 years	N	30	55	84	8	177
	%	16.9%	31.1%	47.5%	4.5%	100%
55–70 years	N	43	84	96	16	239
	%	18.0%	35.1%	40.2%	6.7%	100%
Total	N	154	312	303	47	816
	%	18.9%	38.2%	37.1%	5.8%	100%

Table 3

Answers to the question Q17, taking into account the age of the respondents

participants, the deepest lack of understanding of the importance of demographic changes for the functioning of the organization. 23.5% of respondents from this age group answered that the ageing of workers is not a problem for the organizations they work for.

When asked in question Q18 about possible difficulties in meeting the needs of the organization in terms of access to qualified personnel, one quarter of respondents replied that they do not see such difficulties (cf. Table 4). 33.3% of respondents were of the opposite opinion, 34.1% had no opinion on this issue (answer *I'm not sure*), while 7% declared that they did not want to respond to such a question (the answer *I do not wish this answer*). By far the highest awareness of the growing risks faced by the organization in terms of access to qualified personnel was demonstrated by the representatives of managers (answer *Yes* given by 51.3% of the superior responsibility group) and blue collar workers (in this group, 43.8% of respondents have answered *Yes*).

As in the case of the answers to question Q17, also in the case of responses to question Q18 the highest awareness of demographic changes and their importance for organizations was shown by employee representatives from older age groups. 36.7% of respondents aged 45–54 and 33.9% of those aged 55–70 years felt that the threat for the access to adequate, qualified labour resources exists. In the 21–34 years and 35–44 years age groups the percentage of individuals being of similar opinion was lower and amounted to 31.7% and 31.3%

Table 4

Answers to the question Q18, taking into account the position held by the respondents in the hierarchy of the organization

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
Superior responsibility	N	26	26	58	3	113
	%	23.0%	23.0%	51.3%	2.7%	100%
White collar	N	151	186	135	32	504
	%	30.0%	36.9%	26.8%	6.3%	100%
Blue collar	N	15	30	46	14	105
	%	14.3%	28.6%	43.8%	13.3%	100%
Others	N	17	36	33	8	94
	%	18.1%	38.3%	35.1%	8.5%	100%
Total	N	209	278	272	57	816
	%	25.6%	34.1%	33.3%	7.0%	100%

Table 5

Answers to the question Q18, taking into account the age of the respondents

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
21–34 years	N	44	73	58	8	183
	%	24.0%	39.9%	31.7%	4.4%	100%
35–44 years	N	60	77	68	12	217
	%	27.6%	35.5%	31.3%	5.6%	100%
45–54 years	N	47	51	65	14	177
	%	26.6%	28.8%	36.7%	7.9%	100%
55–70 years	N	58	77	81	23	239
	%	24.3%	32.2%	33.9%	9.6%	100%
Total	N	209	278	272	57	816
	%	25.6%	34.1%	33.3%	7.0%	100%

respectively. Approximately 25% of respondents in each of the four age groups did not notice that their organization had any difficulties in accessing skilled workers (cf. Table 5).

The use of contingency tables allowed for examining the consistency of the answers given by the respondents to each question and the relationship between age / position in the organization and the awareness of the importance of the process of ageing of the workforce and the population in general for the organization. For analysis based on a contingency table a pair of essentially converging questions was selected: Q17 and Q18. In question Q17 the respondents were asked to say whether the demographic situation, including the ageing of the employees working for their organization, constitutes a problem for it. In turn, in question Q18 they were asked whether their organization has problems with access to qualified personnel. The data collected in Table 6 show that half of the respondents answered Q17 and Q18 consistently, i.e. gave the same answers to both questions. Nominally, the most consistent answers were the affirmative ones. 160 participants (almost 20%) replied *Yes* to both questions, which means that they are aware of the present demographic changes and the associated risks. At the same time, 93 respondents (11.4%) replied negatively to both questions, which may suggest that they do not perceive the risks associated with progressive ageing. Quite often the affirmative (*Yes*) or negative (*No*) answer granted to one of the questions was combined with the response *I'm not sure* in the second question — however, the answer *I'm not sure* in question

Q18 was more frequent with the response *Yes* than with the answer *No* given in the question Q17. Despite having captured such regularities, it is assumed in the article that the answer *I'm not sure* will be treated as lack of respondent's opinion on the studied subject.

			Answers to the question Q18			
			No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer
Answers to the question Q17	No	N	93	35	19	7
		% of total	11.4%	4.3%	2.3%	0.9%
	I'm not sure	N	70	146	88	8
		% of total	8.6%	17.9%	10.8%	0.9%
	Yes	N	41	91	160	11
		% of total	5.0%	11.2%	19.6%	1.3%
	I do not wish to answer	N	5	6	5	31
		% of total	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%	3.9%

Table 6

Respondents' answers to questions Q17 and Q18

Answer to question Q17	Answer to question Q18		21–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–70 years
Yes	Yes	N	30	40	42	48
		% of line	18.75%	25.00%	26.25%	30.00%
		% of column	54.55%	58.82%	50.00%	50.00%
No	No	N	17	33	18	25
		% of line	18.28%	35.48%	19.35%	26.88%
		% of column	50.00%	70.21%	60.00%	58.14%
			Superior responsibility	White collar	Blue collar	Others
Yes	Yes	N	40	78	20	22
		% of line	25.00%	48.75%	12.50%	13.75%
		% of column	60.61%	49.37%	64.52%	45.83%
No	No	N	7	72	8	6
		% of line	7.53%	77.42%	8.60%	6.45%
		% of column	46.67%	67.92%	44.44%	40.00%

Table 7

Respondents' answers to questions Q17 and Q18, taking into account their age and position in the hierarchy of the organization

The summary of responses to the questions Q17 and Q18 in the contingency table presented as Table 7 helped to confirm previous observations, thereby **positively verifying the H1 working hypothesis**. A higher level of awareness of the demographic risks faced by the organization is present among the older workers and the employees occupying managerial positions.

The affirmative answer (*Yes*) to questions Q17 and Q18 was most frequently given by workers aged 55–70 years (30.0%) and 45–54 years (26.25%). A dual negative answer (*No*) was more often given by employees from the younger age groups (53.76% of aggregate results of ages 21–34 years and 35–44 years) than by the older workers (46.23% of the results for workers aged 45 years and more).

According to the criterion of the position in the hierarchy of the organization, answer *Yes* to both questions Q17 and Q18 was most frequently given by white collar workers (48.75%). It should be noted here, however, that white collar workers constituted the largest group among the providers of a double negative response (77.42%). The second largest group of respondents who provided doubly positive responses (25.0%) were the representatives of management (superior responsibility). In addition, more than 60% of respondents in this group replied *Yes* to both questions.

The participants of the study were also asked whether their organization recognizes the potential of knowledge and skills of older workers (Q21) and whether the activation measures aimed for older workers actually increase their willingness to work and encourage them to continue professional activity (Q20). The responses to such questions were to provide information on the subjects' awareness of the potential of knowledge and competencies of employees in the era of an ageing and shrinking labour resources and the need for their efficient use. In addition, they were to diagnose the readiness of the organization for the forthcoming demographic changes.

In question Q21 *Is your organization recognizing the invaluable competence and the skills of older workers?* the majority of respondents (54.3%) said that their organization recognizes the potential of knowledge and skills of older workers (cf. Table 8). The answer *Yes* was most often given by the representatives of management (superior responsibility) and white collar workers (40.7% of all respondents). Replies confirming that the potential of knowledge and skills of older workers is not properly recognized in the organization for which the respondents work accounted for 8.6% of the total. Such answer was most likely to be given by the blue collar workers (21.9% of *No* responses given by this group). The negative responses from respondents from this group accounted for over 30% of all negative answers.

The replies confirming the recognition of the potential of knowledge and skills of older workers often come from respondents representing the younger age groups, as opposed to the older ones (cf. Table 9). In the surveyed population aged 21–34 years the *Yes* response was given by 64.5% of the respondents, as compared to 55.3% among those aged 35–44 and only 46% in the oldest group. The oldest age group provided also the highest number of negative responses (12.6%), which accounted for 42.9% of all negative responses to this question. It is essential that about one third of the survey participants (this applies to every age group) expressed no opinion on the matter by replying *I'm not sure*. In response to the question Q20

**Table 8**

Answers to the question Q21, taking into account the position held by the respondents in the hierarchy of the organization

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
Superior responsibility	N	10	30	72	1	113
	%	8.8%	26.5%	63.7%	1.0%	100%
White collar	N	35	188	260	21	504
	%	6.9%	37.3%	51.6%	4.2%	100%
Blue collar	N	23	24	50	8	105
	%	21.9%	22.9%	47.6%	7.6%	100%
Others	N	2	23	61	8	94
	%	2.1%	24.5%	64.9%	8.5%	100%
Total	N	70	265	443	38	816
	%	8.6%	32.5%	54.3%	4.6%	100%

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
21-34 years	N	11	46	118	8	183
	%	6.0%	25.1%	64.5%	4.4%	100%
35-44 years	N	14	76	120	7	217
	%	6.5%	35.0%	55.3%	3.2%	100%
45-54 years	N	15	57	95	10	177
	%	8.5%	32.2%	53.7%	5.6%	100%
55-70 years	N	30	86	110	13	239
	%	12.6%	36.0%	46.0%	5.4%	100%
Total	N	70	265	443	38	816
	%	8.6%	32.5%	54.3%	4.6%	100%

Table 9

Answers to the question Q21, taking into account the age of the respondents

regarding the activation of seniors and the possibility of increasing their readiness to continue employment in this way, the majority of respondents expressed a positive opinion (cf. Table 10). Almost 51% of respondents confirmed that promoting and activating older workers can translate into their increased involvement in work and readiness to remain employed (by implication: also beyond the formal retirement age). Among the representatives of management (superior responsibility) such an opinion was expressed by more than 63% of respondents, among white collar workers it was almost 50%, and among blue collar workers – 43.8%. Among the blue collar workers participating in the study, over 14% were of the opposite opinion, while in the other groups the reply *No* was given by 5% to 7% of respondents.

The positive responses to question Q20 constituted a majority in each of the age groups (cf. Table 11). Nevertheless, the share of answers *Yes* in each age group increased with age, i.e. in the youngest age group, 21–34 years, accounted for 41.5% all the responses, in the group aged 35–44 years – 52.5%, in the group aged 45–54 years – 53.1%, whereas in the oldest group (55–70 years) – 54.4%. On the basis of answers to question Q20 it can be concluded that awareness of the needs of older workers and the impact of actions taken against this group depends on the age of the respondents. The respondents representing older age groups are more likely to formulate a positive response than the younger ones. Moreover, the relationship between the age of respondents and their responses can also be seen in the

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
Superior responsibility	N	8	26	72	7	113
	%	7.1%	23.0%	63.7%	6.2%	100%
White collar	N	32	184	249	39	504
	%	6.3%	36.5%	49.4%	7.8%	100%
Blue collar	N	15	34	46	10	105
	%	14.3%	32.4%	43.8%	9.5%	100%
Others	N	5	28	47	14	94
	%	5.3%	29.8%	50.0%	14.9%	100%
Total	N	60	272	414	70	816
	%	7.4%	33.3%	50.7%	8.6%	100%

Table 10

Answers to question Q20, taking into account the position held by the respondents in the hierarchy of the organization

Table 11

Answers to the question Q20, taking into account the age of the respondents

		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	Line total
21-34 years	N	15	76	76	16	183
	%	8.2%	41.5%	41.5%	8.8%	100%
35-44 years	N	15	70	114	18	217
	%	6.9%	32.3%	52.5%	8.3%	100%
45-54 years	N	10	56	94	17	177
	%	5.6%	31.6%	53.1%	9.7%	100%
55-70 years	N	20	70	130	19	239
	%	8.4%	29.3%	54.4%	7.9%	100%
Total	N	60	272	414	70	816
	%	7.4%	33.3%	50.7%	8.6%	100%

case of the answer *I'm not sure*. Unlike the answers *Yes*, the answer *I'm not sure* it is provided by the group of older respondents less often than in the case of the younger ones.

To confirm the authenticity of the H2 working hypothesis, the contingency tables comparing the responses to questions Q20 and Q21 were used (cf. Table 12). The aim of such comparison was to determine whether the respondents are aware of the potential of knowledge and skills of older workers, whether they are ready to use them, whether their organization is ready for the forthcoming demographic changes, as well as whether the answers given depend on the age of the respondents and the position held by them in the hierarchy (cf. Table 13). Questions Q20 and Q21 are mutually verifying. This means that the answers given by respondents to question Q21 should verify the answers given to question Q20. Due to the widespread promotion of social inclusion policy of the seniors it was to be expected that most of the answers to question Q21 would be positive. Such a response is a kind of declaration of political correctness of the respondent, which does not necessarily reflect their true beliefs. The pooled analysis of the answers to questions Q20 and Q21 provides a more reliable assessment of reality.

The responses to questions Q20 and Q21, gathered in contingency tables, **do not allow for unambiguous positive verification of H2 working hypothesis**, stating that the employees' awareness of the potential of older people and the possibility of its use in promoting the de-

Table 12

Respondents' answers to questions Q20 and Q21

		Answer to the question Q21				
		No	I'm not sure	Yes	I do not wish to answer	
Answers to the question Q20	No	N	17	21	20	2
		% of total	2.1%	2.6%	2.5%	0.2%
	I'm not sure	N	17	111	141	3
		% of total	2.1%	13.6%	17.3%	0.4%
	Yes	N	33	119	252	10
		% of total	4.0%	14.6%	30.9%	1.2%
	I do not wish to answer	N	3	14	30	23
		% of total	0.4%	1.7%	3.7%	2.7%

Answer to the question Q20	Answer to the question Q21		21–34 years	35–44 years	45–54 years	55–70 years
Yes	Yes	N	60	69	56	67
		% of line	23.81%	27.38%	22.22%	26.59%
		% of column	78.95%	60.53%	59.57%	51.54%
No	No	N	6	5	2	4
		% of line	35.29%	29.41%	11.76%	23.53%
		% of column	40.00%	33.33%	20.00%	20.00%
			Superior responsibility	White collar	Blue collar	Others
Yes	Yes	N	48	142	30	32
		% of line	19.05%	56.35%	11.90%	12.70%
		% of column	66.67%	57.03%	65.22%	68.09%
No	No	N	4	4	7	2
		% of line	23.53%	23.53%	41.18%	11.76%
		% of column	50.00%	12.50%	46.67%	40.00%

Table 13

Respondents' answers to questions Q17 and Q18, taking into account their age and position in the hierarchy of the organization

velopment of the organization is low and depends on the age and the position held by the employee in the hierarchy of the organization. First of all, most employees (the highest percentage in all age groups and positions held in the hierarchy) declared that the organizations they work for recognize the potential of older workers (which in this case was equated with the declaration of the respondent's awareness of such potential). Secondly, most respondents have declared that they expected that the activation of older workers will increase their willingness to continue employment, which can be equated with the awareness of the need to take action aimed at increasing the efficiency of the usage of the potential related to knowledge and experience of older workers. A pooled analysis of answers to questions Q20 and Q21 (Table 12 and Table 13) does not provide clear answers about the relationship between age and the position held by the respondents in the hierarchy of the organization and their awareness of the possibilities and conditions of use of the knowledge of older workers in the organization. However, partial responses (mainly to question Q20) may suggest that such a relationship exists — especially the dependence between awareness and age (cf. Table 11).

The results of a survey conducted among employees of organizations participating in Best Aged Lighthouses Project, are related with the research carried out among employees and managers of Polish organizations. Differing levels of awareness of older employees' potential was confirmed in a study conducted at the request of the Polish President's Office. 69% of respondents indicated a belief that workers aged over 50 are at least as productive as younger workers and 79% - their competences are at least the same as employees under the age of 35. The respondents' attitudes toward aging and the role of older workers in organizations was clearly linked to their age, education, place of residence and interest in politics (*Polacy na temat aktywności*, 2011). Attitudes of managers and employees at other levels in organizations' hierarchy toward older employees were studied by Wisniewski (2009) and Misztal et al. (2006). Results from both of those studies showed differences in assessments, depending on place occupied in organization's hierarchy and respondents' age. More positive opinions were formulated by management representatives and persons from older age groups.

## Conclusions

An ageing population is a problem of demographic, economic, social and psychological nature. Although in recent years the topic has been widely present in the public debate, scientific considerations or the practice of institutions dealing with the social policy, a deficit of awareness of the nature and consequences of the ageing process is still observed. The dominant part of the discussion on the implications of ageing belongs to the field of macroeconomics and economy in general. The need to extend the retirement age, the threat to sustainability of public finances by rising spending on pensions and health care of seniors or new markets focused on meeting the needs of senior customers are the main associations with the term 'ageing population'.

Still very little space in the discussions and analyses is devoted to the effects of ageing in the microscale — within individual companies. According to forecasts, the SME sector organizations operating in industry, traditional services, education, healthcare and trade will soon begin to feel the effects of ageing and depopulation. There will be deficits of skilled personnel, difficulties in retaining organizational knowledge in connection with retiring of employees, lack of continuity and succession of businesses run by current sexa- and septuagenarians. The problem is deepened by the lack of or insufficient awareness of the fact that the labour market is changing, that it transforms from the 'employer's market' into 'employee market', and the main reason for such evolution are demographic changes in countries such as Poland, exacerbated by high emigration. Lack of awareness translates into the lack of preventive measures that would allow the organizations to prepare for the new reality. This lack of awareness affects entrepreneurs-business owners, managers, and employees equally.

The article, based on research carried out among over eight hundred employees of the SME sector organizations, confirmed that the level of awareness of demographic changes and the associated risks for the organizations is low and depends on the age of employees and the positions occupied by them within the organization. It has been shown that by far the greater awareness is shown by the respondents occupying higher managerial (superior responsibility) positions and those of older age. Based on the results of the research, the authors have also tried to confirm the hypothesis stating that employee awareness of the potential of older workers and the possibility of its use in the creation of the development of the organization is low and depends on the age and the respondent's position in the hierarchy of the organization. The answers obtained in the study did not allow for an unequivocally positive verification of such hypothesis. It turned out that respondents, regardless of age or position held, recognize the potential of older workers. Nevertheless, the possibility of taking action to promote the seniors and the efficient use of their potential in the organization has been more consciously articulated by the respondents holding managerial positions and those of older age.

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## A. Richert-Kaźmierska. Senėjanti darbo jėga – iššūkiai organizacijoms

Straipsnyje analizuojami įvairūs aspektai: demografinių pokyčių problematika, jų pasekmės organizacijoms ir vyresnių žmonių kaip profesionalų vaidmuo organizacijoje demografinių pokyčių kontekste.

Straipsnyje pristatomi tyrimo, kuriame dalyvavo 864 respondentai, rezultatai. Respondentai atstovavo organizacijas, dalyvavusias tarptautiniame projekte „Geriausi amžiaus švyturiai – strateginis amžiaus valdymas smulkiojo verslo įmonėse Baltijos jūros regione“. Klausimyną sudarė 63 dalykiniai klausimai ir 5 demografiniai klausimai. Straipsnyje, iš 63 klausimų, analizuojami atsakymai į 4:

- K17: *Ar situacijos, susijusios su amžiumi, senėjančia darbo jėga, yra iššūkiai jūsų organizacijoje?*
- K18: *Ar situacijos, susijusios su verslo poreikiais, yra iššūkiai jūsų organizacijai (pavyzdžiui, įdarbinimo sunkumai, kvalifikuotos darbo jėgos stoka)?*
- K20: *Ar vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų skatinimas įgalina jų darbingumą, darbinį ilgaamžiškumą?*
- K21: *Ar jūsų organizacijoje pripažįstamos neįkainojamos vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų kompetencijos ir įgūdžiai?*

Straipsnyje verifikuojamos dvi hipotezės:

- H1: darbuotojų susirūpinimas demografinių pokyčių svarba jų organizacijai yra žemas ir priklauso nuo amžiaus bei hierarchinės pozicijos organizacijoje;
- H2: darbuotojų supratimas apie vyresnių darbuotojų potencialą ir jo panaudojimą kuriant pridėtinę vertę organizacijoje yra žemas ir priklauso nuo amžiaus ir respondentų pozicijos organizacijos hierarchijoje.

Remiantis tyrimo rezultatais, pirmoji hipotezė verifikuota pozityviai. Demografinės rizikos poveikis organizacijai aktualesnis vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojams bei užimantiems vady-

bines pozicijas. Tyrimo rezultatai neleido teigiamai verifikuoti antrosios hipotezės. Pirmiausia dauguma darbuotojų teigė, kad jų organizacijoje pripažįstamas vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų potencialas (nepaisant amžiaus ir hierarchijos valdymo struktūroje). Antra, respondentų dauguma teigė, kad jie tiki, jog vyresnių darbuotojų skatinimas padidins jų norą tęsti darbinę veiklą. Ši pozicija siejasi su tuo, jog repondentai pasisako už veiklas, kurios skatina vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų potencialo, susijusio su jų žiniomis ir patirtimi, panaudojimą

**REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** senėjanti darbo jėga, senėjanti visuomenė, senėjimo problematika.

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