

AGING SOCIETY AND ECONOMIC WELFARE

Employees 50+: How They Are Assessed and How They Assess Themselves

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Abstract

In Poland, the older workers are valued for their knowledge and professional experience. Many of them, during transition period, actively participated in the creation of today's businesses and now occupy exposed managerial positions, being aware of their own value. On the other hand, old age is one of the main reasons for the limited access to work. The seniors are assigned stereotypical characteristics, such as low levels of education, poor health, troubles with the adaptation to the new conditions, fatigue with work or fear of competition from younger workers (Jezowska, 2007). There are also frequent manifestations of ageism (Szukalski, 2011).

An attempt at testing the validity of assessments and feedback on employees aged 50 years or more generated by themselves and their superiors and co-workers was made in the article. The results collected in eight thematic reports drawn up by the Polish research centres in the years 2005–2012 were analysed.

Keywords: ageing in SMEs, employees 50+, age management.

Introduction

In light of the progressive ageing of the population, the issue of professional activity of seniors is more and more frequently analysed in scientific research¹. An analysis of the conditions of such activity appears to be particularly interesting and needed (in the context of forecasting labour market structures in the coming decades) (Prognoza ludności, 2009; Prognoza wpływów i wydatków, 2014). In the literature of the subject the individual characteristics (Bugajska and Makowiec-Dąbrowska, 2006) and the conditions of the working environment (Ilmarinen, 2006),

including the assessment of older workers (in the sense of both self-esteem and the evaluation of direct superiors and co-workers), are mentioned among the most significant factors in this context.

Entrepreneurs and managers involved in research diagnosing the situation of seniors in the labour market pay most attention to the strengths of this group (primarily their expertise and experience) (Rzechowska, 2010) and declare that they do not see any obstacles to the employment of older workers (Osoby w wieku 50+, 2011). Over 90 % of entrepreneurs employ older workers, who constitute an average of 1/3 of their entire crew. Undertakings in which older workers predominate are often small service and manufacturing enterprises with a long history and a stable market position (Fryca and Maciejewska, 2010). The benefits of hiring older workers are more frequently indicated by enterprises from the public sector than by the private ones, as well as by those which currently are employing seniors (Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Gdańsku, 2009) Almost 50 % of the Polish employers participating in the research conducted within the framework of the ASPA project do not agree with the statement that in case it is necessary to restrict the scope of activity, first of all the younger employees should be retained, while only 23 % accept it as right (Perek-Białas and Turek, 2010).

Despite the awareness of the potential inherent in older employees, unfortunately in many enterprises, or even in the society as a whole, they are seen as old, unproductive and 'irreformable'. Moreover, the employees themselves accept this view as applicable more and more frequently and identify themselves in such a way (Bondyra et al., 2013). Discriminatory conduct on the part of employers (Kryńska, 2006) and stereotypes related to older workers (Kuchcińska, 2000; Starega-Piasek, 2006) are identified as the main causes of assessing workers aged 50+ unfavourably. As the results of 2011 research show, the belief that in Poland reaching formal retirement age equals to the termination of economic activity is held, among others, by 35 % of those aged 20–29 and by 36 % of entrepreneurs (TNS OBOP, 2011). In addition, many employees representing older age groups report discrimination due to age occurring in their workplace. In a study carried out within the framework of the *Aktywni 50+*

¹ Also research projects (referred to in this article) and databases of publications on this subject may indicate a growing interest in the scientific problems of an ageing population, as well as the economic and social consequences of this process. One of these databases was created by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/seniorzyaktywne-szarzenie/badania---aktywne-szarzenie/> (10.05.2014).

project, 65 % of respondents declared that the problem of discrimination on grounds of age has affected them personally or that someone in their immediate environment was affected by it. More than a quarter of respondents admitted that although they have not experienced discrimination, they believe it occurs in the labour market. Only 4 % of respondents agreed with the statement that people over 50 years of age have the same opportunities in the labour market as every younger employee (Giertler, 2012). The forms of discrimination in the workplace based on age were also encountered by one in ten respondents in the project *Pracuję, rozwijam kompetencje. Innowacyjny model wsparcia pracowników 50+* (Perek-Białas, Turek, Strzałkowska, 2011). Among the most common

manifestations of such discrimination the following forms can be distinguished (Thorpe, 2004; Łuczak, 2005):

- forcing the seniors to retire due to reaching the formal retirement age or becoming entitled to ‘earlier retirement’ benefits,
- difficulties in the recruitment process,
- offering jobs with low salary or in the form of temporary work,
- restricting access to training, which is offered mostly to younger workers,
- poor atmosphere at work, including unpleasant jokes, disregard and indifference, both from management and from co-workers.

Table 1

A description of the reports used for research analysis

Title of report	Research group	Research method and key research questions
Projekt Akademia Handlowa 50+ -innowacyjny model walidacji i uzupełniania kompetencji zawodowych osób 50+ (<i>Academy of Economics 50+ - an innovative model of validation and complementing professional competences of persons aged 50+</i>) (Laus, Ziarkowska – Hordyj, 2012)	Representatives of employers and employees	Qualitative research: Focused group interview Research question: Strengths and weaknesses of employees aged 50+
Raport podsumowujący analizę danych zastanych i badania własne zrealizowane na potrzeby projektu ‘Akademia 50+’ (<i>Report from the research carried out for the needs of the project ‘Academy 50 +’</i>) (2012)	Employees aged 50+ Experts working for individuals aged 50+ Trainers and coaches aged 50+	Qualitative research: Individual in-depth interviews, focus groups Research question: the specificity of work with individuals aged 50+
Osoby w wieku 50+ na mazowieckim rynku pracy (<i>Persons aged 50 + on Mazowieckie region labor market</i>) (2011)	Employers and employees of enterprises from the mazowieckie province	Qualitative research: Focus groups Individual in-depth interviews Research questions: The self-esteem of employees aged 50+ The perception of employees aged 50+
Raport Zarządzanie pracownikami 50+. Teoria a praktyka (<i>Management of employees aged 50+. Report. Theory and practice</i>) (Brzeziński et al., 2011)	HR experts and employees aged 50+	Qualitative research: Individual in-depth interviews Research question: What is the perception of employees aged 50+?
Zbiorczy raport z badań. ‘Pracuję – rozwijam kompetencje. Innowacyjny model wsparcia dla pracowników 50+’ (<i>I work - I develop my competences. An innovative model of supporting employees aged 50 +. Summary Report of Research</i>) (2011)	The employers and employees from the pomorskie province	Quantitative and qualitative research: Surveys and individual in-depth interviews Research question: the image of employees aged 50+, the professional self-esteem of employees aged 50+.
Fachowcy 45+. Raport z badania postaw pracodawców wobec pracowników w wieku 45+ w województwie łódzkim (<i>Experts 45+. Report from the research of employers’ attitudes towards employees aged 45 + in the Lodz region</i>) (2010)	The management of enterprises from the łódzkie province	Quantitative researched: structured interview. Research question: employees aged 45+ in the eyes of employers
Pięćdziesiąt plus. Raport z badania ankietowego Poznań WUP (50+). <i>The report from the survey conducted by Poznan Labour Office</i> (2006)	The unemployed aged 50+ registered in the district labour offices in Wielkopolska	Quantitative research: survey Research question: identifying the barriers to finding employment of individuals aged 50+
Uwarunkowania organizacyjne i psychologiczne Intermentoringu dla utrzymania osób 50+ na rynku pracy. Raport z badań (<i>Organizational and psychological determinants of intermentoring for prolonging professional activity of persons aged 50+. Research report</i>) (2006)	The representatives of management and employees aged 50+ from Elektrownia Rybnik and Żory City Office	Qualitative research: general interview and directed interview with management representatives, directed interview with employees aged 50+ Research question: strengths and weaknesses of employees aged 50+

Table 2

The frequency of indicated positive and negative characteristics of employees aged 50+ in both groups of subjects

	Employers/managers	Employees aged 50+
Strengths	45	55
Weaknesses	47	19

The latest report diagnosing the situation of individuals aged 50+ in the Polish labour market shows that the self-esteem of the seniors in terms of their skills and qualifications is increasing in comparison with previous years (Kryńska et al., 2013).

Methodology

The main aim of the presented research was the answer to the question: what strengths and weaknesses are assigned to employees aged 50+ by themselves and by the professionals associated with them: employers and managers? An additional aim was to examine which of these characteristics are indicated by both of the two groups studied, and which by only one of them.

The study was conducted using a comparative analysis and quantitative synthesis of primary research results carried out by Polish centres of research and science on assessment of the opportunities and conditions of availing of the potential inherent in this employee group. The direct analysis concerned the results of 8 reports created in the period 2005–2012 — a more accurate description of them is shown in Table 1. The selection of reports resulted from a willingness to find possibly most diverse research material concerning the individuals aged 50+. Due to the diversity of the features listed by participants in the studies, systematic of them was introduced and presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Results

The research material collected in the reports was analysed in terms of quantitative and qualitative differences in the perception and evaluation of characteristics of employees aged 50+. Table 2 presents a quantitative summary of the characteristics assigned to the employees.

The analysis of the presented quantitative results allows for concluding that in assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the employees aged 50+, employees from this age group assess themselves more positively than their employers and managers. (Chi-square=11,06; p<0,001). This tendency is evident both in the amount of attributed positive (45:55) and negative (47:19) characteristics and in the proportions between the positive and negative characteristics assigned by the surveyed groups of employers (45:47) and employees (55:19). The employees aged 50+ pointed out their strengths slightly more often than the employers and at the same time were by far less likely to indicate their weaknesses. In addition, while in the case of evaluation by employers the frequency balance of perceived strengths and weaknesses is similar, in the case of assessments by the employees aged 50+ themselves, only about 25 % of all indications apply to their own weaknesses.

Table 3

Strengths attributed to employees aged 50+

Strengths attributed to employees	Number of reports in which a trait is indicated	Number of reports in which a trait is indicated by:	
		Employers managers	Employees aged 50+
Experience	8	+++++	+++++
Competences and specialist qualifications	6	+++++	+++
Maturity, responsibility	6	++++	++++
Availability	5	++	+++++
Trustworthiness, conscientiousness	5	+++	+++++
Motivation, engagement	5	+++	++++
Loyalty	4	++++	+++
Respect for work, appreciation of work	4	+++	++
Social/soft skills	4	+++	+
Helpful, friendly	4	++	+++
General knowledge of life	3	+++	
Openness to new ideas, flexibility of thinking	3		+++
Honesty, trustworthiness	3	+	+++
Openness to the young	3	+	++
Patience	2	+	++
Resilience to stress	2	+	++
Better management, planning, decision making	2		++
Lower labour requirements	2	+	+
Lack of rivalry	1	+	
Humility	1	+	
Gratitude	1	+	
Activity	1		+
The willingness to develop and learn	1		+
Optimism, hope	1		+
Self-confidence, self-esteem	1		+
Performance	1		+
The sum of all the strength indications		45	55

Table 4

Weaknesses attributed to employees aged 50+

Weaknesses attributed to employees	Number of reports in which a trait is indicated	Number of reports in which a trait is indicated by:	
		Employers/managers	Employees aged 50+
Lack of modern competencies (computer skills, foreign languages)	6	+++++	++++
Fear, resistance to change	5	+++++	+
No desire to develop and learn	5	+++++	
Health problems, frequent illnesses	5	+	++++
Lack of flexibility/creativity	4	++++	
Low performance	4	+++	+
Poor physical condition	4	++	++
Behaviour deviating from the modern market requirements	3	+++	+
Low motivation for achievements	3	+++	
Burning out, tiredness	3	++	+
Difficulties in working with the young	2	++	+
Low self-esteem	2	++	
Lack of physical attractiveness	2	++	
Lower level of education	2	+	+
Worse in assimilating new knowledge	2	+	+
Routine	2	+	+
Lack of assertiveness	1	+	+
Fear of job loss, the sense of danger	1	+	
Poor mental condition	1	+	
Low availability	1	+	
Passivity	1	+	
The sum of all the weakness indications		47	19

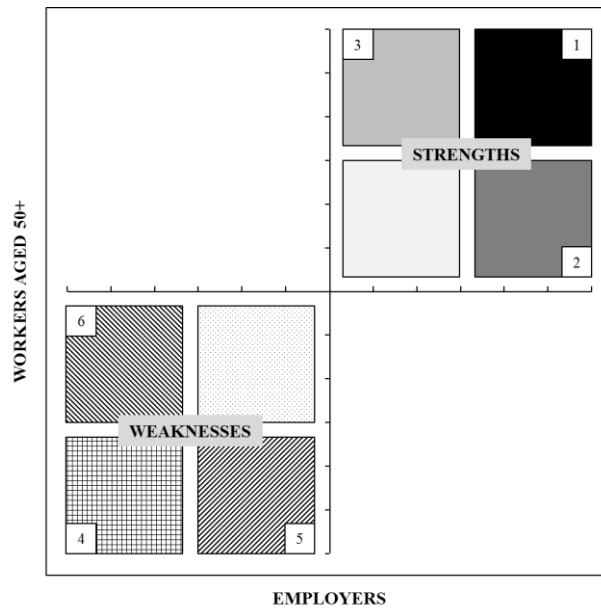


Figure 1. Matrix model of the strengths and weaknesses of employees aged 50+

Strengths of employees aged 50+:

- No.1. Indicated by employees aged 50+ and employers: experience, maturity and responsibility, specialist competences.
- No.2. Indicated by employers: general knowledge of life, social competences.
- No.3. Indicated by employees aged 50+: openness to new ideas and flexibility in thinking, honesty, better management and decision-making.

Weaknesses of employees aged 55+:

- No.4. Indicated by employees aged 50+ and employers: lack of modern competencies (IT, foreign languages), poor physical condition.
- No.5. Indicated by employees aged 50+: health problems and frequent illnesses.
- No.6. Indicated by employers: fear and resistance to change, lack of flexibility and creativity, lack of willingness to develop.

The material collected in the reports was analysed in order to find the answer to the question: what strengths and weaknesses are assigned to employees aged 50+ by themselves and by the individuals associated with them

due to professional reasons: employers and managers? Table 3 presents a summary of all the strengths assigned to older workers in the analysed reports and the number of reports in which a trait was indicated by the workers aged

50+ themselves or by individuals associated with them due to professional reasons.

The strength most often attributed to older workers was 'experience'. It has been mentioned in all 8 reports — in 5 by managers and an in 5 by employees. The number of indications do not add up to ten, which means that in two reports 'experience' was indicated in accordance by both of the studied groups. As a result, it can be concluded that this trait is in both groups the most frequently noticed and recognized strength of older workers. In six of the eight reports the respondents indicated 'maturity and responsibility' and just as before, this trait was indicated equally often by both evaluating sides. The 'competences and specialist qualifications' characteristic also appeared in the results of the six reports, although in this case it was slightly more often indicated by employers and managers (five reports) than by the employees themselves (three reports).

Other traits, such as 'motivation and commitment' and 'loyalty', were slightly less frequent but the relative agreement between the two assessing groups as to its occurrence was still noticeable. Further analysis of the characteristics attributed to older workers, however, showed greater differences. Employees from the 50+ age group believed their strengths include 'openness to new ideas and flexibility in thinking', 'honesty' and 'better management, planning and decision-making'. More often than employers and managers they regarded themselves as a 'available' and 'solid, conscientious'. In contrast, employers and managers attributed to older workers such strengths as 'general knowledge of life' and 'social and communication skills'.

The list of negative traits attributed to older workers is presented in Table 4.

In the case of weaknesses of employees aged 50+, large variation between traits indicated by both groups is clearly visible. The employers and managers of employees aged 50+ frequently indicate as traits of the latter: 'Fear and resistance to change', 'lack of willingness to grow and learn', 'lack of flexibility and creativity', 'low motivation for achievement', as well as 'poor performance' and 'behaviour deviating from the modern market requirements'. When asked about their weaknesses, the employees themselves indicate 'health problems and frequent illnesses'. Interestingly, the employers do not mention this characteristic practically at all. Coherence between the assessing groups as to the weaknesses of employees aged 50+ is evident only in the case of two traits: 'lack of modern competences' and 'less energy and poorer physical condition'. 'Lack of modern competences, including computer skills, and lack of knowledge of foreign languages' is also indicated most frequently among all the weaknesses of older workers.

The analysis of strengths and weaknesses of employees aged 50+ in the assessment conducted by themselves and by individuals associated with them professionally leads to the conclusion that part of the older workers' potential is noticed and appreciated by both parties. At the same time, another part is noticed only by one group of evaluators. In order to illustrate this situation, the compiled results of the analysed reports are shown in

two matrix models of strengths and weaknesses of employees aged 50+ (Figure 1).

The comparison of the indications of the two groups concerning the strengths and weaknesses of employees from the 50+ age group shows a total discrepancy in the evaluation of the traits described as 'openness, flexibility and creativity'. Employers mention the lack of such traits as one of the most common weaknesses of employees aged 50+, while the employees are inclined to consider themselves open to new ideas and flexible in thinking, and declare such attitude to be their strength.

Conclusions

The evaluation of employees aged 50+, in terms of their attractiveness in the labour market, is the subject of many studies conducted both by research centres and labour market institutions, as well as by entrepreneurs themselves. The article analyses the results collected in eight thematic reports. Although the authors of the reports included in the article were operating on different populations of respondents and applied different research methods, the method of comparative analysis allowed for the derivation of interesting generalizing conclusions. The repeating categories of assessments were also selected and a confrontation of evaluations formulated by the employers (supervisors or managers) and by the employees aged 50+ themselves was conducted.

First of all, it has been possible to identify the characteristics attributed to employees aged 50+, both by themselves and by employers and managers. These include experience, maturity and responsibility and social competences (as strengths), and the lack of modern skills and poor physical condition (as weaknesses).

The characteristic rated by workers aged 50+ as their main weakness was distinguished (health problems and illnesses), however it was also shown that employers recognize this characteristic extremely rarely.

Total discrepancies in the assessment were also identified. They were mainly related to such qualities as creativity, flexibility and openness to new ideas. Employers believe that this is one of the weaknesses of employees aged 50+, while the employees themselves mention this trait as their strength.

Finally, it was shown that employers (supervisors, managers) indicate both the strengths and the weaknesses of employees aged 50+ (their assessment is balanced). On the other hand, the employees focus in their self-assessments on their strengths, mentioning their weaknesses much less frequently.

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Darbuotojai 50+: kaip jie yra vertinami ir vertina save?

Santrauka

Visuomenėje vykstant gyventojų senėjimo procesams ir darbo rinkoje didėjant vyresnių darbuotojų skaičiui, straipsnyje koncentruojami ir vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų grupių svarbos organizacijos problemas. Pagrindinis straipsnio tyrimo klausimas: kokias darbuotojų 50+ stiprybes ir silpnības išskiria patys darbuotojai ir jų bendradarbiai. Svarbus tikslas, keliamas straipsnyje, – identifikuoti charakteristikas, kurias išskiria abiejų grupių respondentai, o kurias yra skirtingos abiejose grupėse. Straipsnyje taikyti šie tyrimo metodai: lyginamosios analizės metodas ir aštuonių teminių tyrimų, atliktų Lenkijos tyrimų centruose 2005-2012, ataskaitų kiekybinė sintezė. Ataskaitų atrankos kriterijus – noras atrasti diversifikuotus tyrimų duomenis, susijusius su tiriamaisiais 50+.

Tyrimų rezultatai rodo, kad 50+ darbuotojų stiprybes ir silpnības pozityviai vertino patys šiai grupei priklausančios respondentai lyginant su darbdaviais ir vadybininkais. Šią tendenciją patvirtino bendras pozityvių ir negatyvių charakteristikų skaičius, taip pat ir proporcijos tarp šių charakteristikų, atsispindinčios tarp tirtų darbuotojų ir darbdavių. Darbuotojai 50+ dažniau pažymėjo savo stiprybes nei darbdaviai ir mažiau indikavo savo silpnības puses. Pavyzdžiui, darbdaviai darbuotojų stipriąsias ir silpnības puses vertino vienodai, buvo juntamas balansas tarp išskirtų charakteristikų, tačiau tik 25 % darbuotojų 50+ identifikuavo savo silpnības puses.

Pagrindinė vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų vertybė – patirtis; tarp kitų charakteristikų buvo paminėtos – branda ir atsakomybė, kompetencijos ir specialisto kvalifikacijos, motyvacija ir lojalumas ir pan. Darbuotojai 50+ kaip savo stiprybes taip pat akcentavo „atvirumą naujoms idėjoms ir mąstymo lankstumą, geresnius valdymo, planavimo, sprendimo priėmimo įgūdžius, sąžiningumą“. Dažniau nei darbdaviai ir vadybininkai jie save traktavo kaip „prieinamus“, „solidžius, sąžiningus“.

Priešingai, darbdaviai ir vadybininkai išskyrė tokias stiprybes kaip „bendrosios žinios apie gyvenimą“, „socialiniai ir komunikaciniai įgūdžiai“. Tarp silpnybių darbdaviai ir vadybininkai nurodė „baimė ir pasipriešinimas pokyčiams“, „noro augti ir mokytis nebuvimas“, „lankstumo ir kūrybiškumo nebuvimas“, „žema pasiekimų motyvacija“, „neaktyvi veikla“, „elgsena, neatliepanti šiuolaikinės rinkos reikalavimų“. Patys darbuotojai išskyrė tokias savo silpnybes: „sveikatos problemos ar turima negalia“. Įdomu, kad darbdaviai tokios charakteristikos apskritai nepaminėjo. Koherencija tarp abiejų respondentų grupių pastebima tik dėl dviejų silpnybių: „šiuolaikinių kompetencijų trūkumas“ ir „mažiau energijos bei blogesnė fizinė būklė“.

„Šiuolaikinių kompetencijų trūkumas, tarp kurių kompiuterinių įgūdžių stoka ir užsienių kalbų nemokėjimas“ taip pat dažnai indikuojama kaip vyresniojo amžiaus darbuotojų silpnybė.

Atlikus analizę, daromos šios pagrindinės išvados:

- charakteristikos, būdingos 50+ darbuotojams, yra identifikuojamos ir pačių darbuotojų, ir darbdavių;
- darbuotojų išskiriamos silpnybės retai koreliuoja ir yra atpažįstamos darbdavių;
- neatitikimai vertinant pastebimi visose respondentų grupėse.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: senėjimas smulkaus ir vidutinio verslo įmonėse, darbuotojai 50+, senėjimo valdymas.

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