

Employees 55+ - valuable resource in SMEs

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Abstract

Among the factors influencing the competitiveness of modern enterprises the so-called intangible resources at the disposal of the enterprise seem to be crucial — they include, i.a., the quality of its human and intellectual capital. In the era of an ageing population and shrinking labour force, more and more attention is paid to optimizing the use of the potential of employees representing older age groups.

The article relates to the problem of exploiting the potential of workers aged 55 years or more to build the competitiveness of the SME sector. The aim of the study was an attempt to formulate an answer to the question whether entrepreneurs and managers are able to identify the potential of older workers and whether they use this potential to build the competitiveness of their enterprises. The article is based on the results of a survey conducted among 61 managers of SMEs participating in international project Best Agers Lighthouses¹.

Keywords: intangible resources, human capital, workers aged 55+.

Introduction

The competitiveness² of modern enterprises and the competitive position achieved by them³ are determined by a number of factors (Gorynia and Łaźniewska 2009, p. 77-83) of an internal nature — depending on the company (Godziszewski, 1997) — as well as by factors related to the environment conditions in which the companies operate (Staszewska, 2007, p. 165-169). Among the key ones, the access to resources, the efficiency of their allocation and the ability to use them are distinguished (Cyrson 2002, p. 18-19).

¹ Project 'Best Agers Lighthouses – Strategic Age Management for SME in the Baltic Sea Region' has been realized in the period 2012-2014 by 12 partners and 9 Lighthouse Organizations from 6 countries, as a part of Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013, co-financed by European Regional Development Fund.

² At this point, competitiveness is defined as 'the entity's ability to compete and therefore operate and survive in a competitive environment' (Gorynia and Łaźniewska, 2009, p. 51).

³ At this point, the competitive position is defined as 'the result of applying a particular competitive strategy in the context of a specific competitive potential and the result of evaluation of the company's offer by the market (mostly buyers)' (Gorynia and Łaźniewska 2009, p. 58).

Human capital is the resource of particular importance in the development of modern enterprises. Its growing role involves on the one hand the potential of people's working in the company knowledge (mainly tacit knowledge, non transferable), on the other - with the ongoing process of contraction of the labor force.

More and more organizations use modern methods of human resource management (Oleksyn, 2006) to secure the organizational knowledge, thereby enhancing the competitive potential (Gorynia and Łaźniewska, 2009, p. 55-56). The main task is to optimize the utilization of the potential of all employees, including potential of older workers. Older employees have attributes that can be considered as very important in shaping the competitiveness of enterprises: knowledge, experience, commitment to work, loyalty, communication skills and relationships established during the whole working life (Richert-Kaźmierska, 2013). Despite this, many entrepreneurs still do not see and do not want to or can not properly utilize the potential of this group. Entrepreneurs in the Nordic countries perfectly cope with that issue, but those from the new EU Member States (such as Poland and Lithuania) are not familiar with practices of the effective usage of the strengths of workers aged 55 years and more.

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Literature review

In the *resource-based view of the firm*, the company sees itself as a unique bundle of tangible and intangible resources (Oblój, 1993; Collis and Montgomery, 1995) that distinguish it from competitors and constitute a source of its competitive advantage and competitive position (Reed and De Fillippi, 1990; Barney, 1991; Dierickx and Cool, 1998). Among the resources that determine the competitiveness of enterprises, Czerniachowicz and Szczepkowska (2009, p. 33-34, 219-241) mention: human, material and intangible resources.

Economists agree, however, that in the 21st century, in the era of knowledge-based economy, material resources diminish in importance as a source of competitive

advantage and more attention should be paid to intangible resources (Wawrzyniak, 2001; Sopińska, 2007). Despite the difficulties with a clear definition of intangible resources (Murawska, 2008, p. 43-81) and the multiplicity of terms used in the literature for the determination of their scope⁴, it can be assumed that the intangible resources are unique, non-physical assets of the enterprise, which upon integration with its physical assets determine its competitiveness in the market. The importance of intangible resources in the process of building the competitiveness of businesses is determined by their special features (Dytwald, 1996):

- stability and increase in value over time,
- uniqueness and the impossibility of identifying and describing the cause and effect relationships occurring within individual resources (organizational culture, etc.), determining the difficulty of imitation,
- imperfect substitutability,
- difficult identification of properties, preventing the purchase or acquisition of a resource (like relationships with suppliers/customers).

According to Hall (1992), intangible resources can be divided into skills and assets (Table 1) and the special importance is attributed by the author to those from first group. Skills are in this case defined quite broadly, i.e. as the ability to use the resources owned by the company as a result of knowledge transfer and development by the human capital. While the assets (patents, trademarks, etc.) understood as property may be relatively simply traded and acquired in the market, skills are treated as an immobile resource which is difficult to transfer.

In the context of the impact of the intangible resources on the competitiveness of enterprises, the perception and management of their human capital⁵ becomes particularly important. First of all, the effective use of the potential of the knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes and worker motivation (Łukaszewicz, 2009, p. 20) — the foundations of the individual and organizational intellectual capital⁶ — should be taken into account here. As Fitz-Enz (2009) writes, actions of managers within the area of human resources management should be targeted at developing the right combination of:

- traits that a worker brings to their job — their intelligence, energy, positive attitude to work, trustworthiness or commitment;
- learning ability — talents, imagination, creativity;

⁴ Among the concepts used as synonyms of intangible resources, the following can be distinguished: 'intellectual capital' (Stewart, 1991; Edvinsson, 1997; Bontis 2001), 'intangible marketing assets' (Guinding and Pike, 1993) and 'intellectual potential' (Pulic, 2014).

⁵ In this paper, the term *human capital management* is understood as a process comprising the basic functions of management, aimed at coordinating the use of qualitative characteristics of both human resources managers at all levels and line personnel for the efficient and effective achievement of the set objectives (Chatzkel, 2004, p. 140).

⁶ Human capital is the knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitudes, attitudes, motivation and health, having a specific value, constituting a source of future earnings or satisfaction. Intellectual capital of an entity, in turn, is a combination of genetic legacy, education, experience, as well as attitudes towards life and business. In this perspective, human capital is a part of the intellectual capital of an individual (Hudson, 1993, p. 13–213).

- motivation to share information and knowledge — team spirit and focus on goals.

Despite the significant importance of human capital in shaping the competitiveness of enterprises and the development of the concept in recent years⁷, still a lot of companies do not practice human capital management. Research suggests that HR departments of many companies still poorly cope with human capital management: they focus on the financial aspects of employee motivation, forgetting the more advanced programmes of supporting the employee involvement in the development, or do not control the costs and profitability of the investment in the development of human capital (*Szkolenia w Polsce* 2012, p. 54-56). It can be seen particularly well in the smallest enterprises, where the personnel function is limited to the basic staffing issues, i.e. keeping records of employee attendance, salaries and leaves. In the micro- and small businesses owners do not have sufficient financial resources for the organization of advanced structures and systems of human capital management, or do not see the need to implement them. Most entrepreneurs from such companies say that they do not need the HR department due to the small number of employees, no formal organizational structure or the use of outsourced services (*Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w MSP*, 2014).

It is predicted that the issue of human capital and the possibility of its use in building the competitiveness of enterprises will be the subject of particular development in the coming years. It is related to two overlapping global demographic changes: a progressive depopulation and the ageing of population. Economists argue that demographic changes over the next two decades will be a key challenge faced by European companies. This applies both to the situation in the labour market, including the availability of skilled workers, and to the situation in the market for the products offered (it will be necessary to support new groups of target customers).

Population in Poland and other European Union countries decreases and ages quickly. Demographic projections indicate that by the year 2030 Polish population will decrease by more than 3 million and the median age will exceed 45 years (United Nations, 2012). By 2060, the population of the European Union will be reduced by approximately 3 % and the median age will be 47,5 years (The 2009 Aging Report, 2009).

The forecasts of limited access to new, young workers, are forcing companies to look for ways to optimize the use of human capital they have currently and will have in the future (Górniak, 2013). In large enterprises solutions for age management aimed at ensuring the effective use of the potential of employees of all ages and the preservation of organizational knowledge through extensive systems of

⁷ The concept of human capital was initiated in the sixties of the twentieth century by T.W. Schultz, who drew attention to the heterogeneity of capital as a category and stressed the importance of investment in knowledge and skills as an important feature of the economic system. Currently, the concept of human capital is associated most commonly with G.S. Becker, an American economist whose work *Human Capital* paved the way for extensive discussion and research on the nature and role of human capital in the functioning of economic systems.

Table 1

A framework of intangible resources and capacity differentials

		CAPABILITY DIFFERENTIALS				
		FUNCTIONAL	CULTURAL	POSITIONAL	REGULATORY	
PEOPLE DEPENDENT	Know-how of employees, suppliers, distributors	Perception of quality, ability to learn				SKILLS
			Reputation, networks			ASSETS
PEOPLE INDEPENDENT			Databases	Contracts, licenses, trade secrets, intellectual property rights		

Source: Hall, R. (1992). The strategic analysis of intangible resources. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13.

Table 2

The characteristics of the interviewed respondents

The country of the enterprise	The number of interviewed managers	Management experience [Average years]
Finland	4	29
Lithuania	17	14,7
Latvia	9	16,4
Germany	20	19
Sweden	11	12,1

intergenerational knowledge transfer have been implemented for several years (Ilmarinen, 2006; Naegele and Walker 2006; Clas-Håkan et al., 2011; Jense and Mřberg, 2012). Efforts are also made to transfer experience (methods, tools, age management) from large enterprises to small and medium sized ones. Unfortunately, their implementation is effectively made difficult, as in the case of solutions in the field of human capital management, by lack of basic knowledge on the topic, financial means, adequately tailored organizational structures, and, finally, awareness and the willingness on the part of entrepreneurs, managers and employees themselves.

Methodology

Results presented below were obtained on the basis of research carried out among employees and managers of enterprises — the participants of the international project Best Agers Lighthouses.

The main objective of the project was to develop practical solutions in the area of age management at the level of the SME sector and to promote them as a kind of good practice. It is about showing the entrepreneurs, worker organizations and politicians what the consequences of the implementation of and the failure to implement the idea of age management in small and medium-sized enterprises may be in the context of building their competitiveness.

One of the key stages of the project was to conduct research diagnosing the current knowledge and attitude of the workers and management to demographic changes occurring in the environment, ageing workforce,

cooperation in teams of different age, knowledge transfer and the broadly understood concept of age management. The results of the research⁸ formed the basis for the development of an individual *Action Plan* project for each of the participating enterprises, including the application of methods, tools and actions extending the existing spectrum of activity in the area of age management.

The results presented below are derived from the qualitative research, i.e. the in-depth interviews with 61 managers of the participating enterprises (including 34 women). The respondents represented different levels of management in their companies. They included CEOs, CFOs, HR directors and project managers. The interviews were conducted in the period from October 2013 to March 2014.

The scenario used to conduct the in-depth interview consisted of 45 questions (18 main questions and 27 follow-up questions). The individuals responsible for conducting the interview were empowered to ask questions allowing for clarification of responses, provided that they do not change the final meaning of the original ones. The questions asked during the interview related to i.a.:

- the demographic situation in the company, i.e. the current and projected age structure of employees, the plans of the employees regarding retirement or the impact of demographic changes on the market situation of the company;

⁸ The research was conducted using mixed methods — they included a quantitative method (a survey conducted using a standardized questionnaire among almost 900 employees) and a qualitative method (a scenario-based in-depth interview with 61 managers).

- characteristics taken into account when hiring new employees and dismissing the existing ones;
- strengths of workers aged 55 years and more, as well as methods of using such attributes and investing in the professional development of individuals of pre-retirement age;
- threat of competence gap and methods of intergenerational knowledge transfer;
- incentives for the individuals of pre-retirement age to work longer, also upon reaching the formal retirement age.

In the analysis of the obtained results two methods were used: the conventional analysis (involving the understanding of individual statements and, on this basis, defining the category to which each of them belongs) and the summary analysis (the purpose of which is to understand the context of usage of given statements based on the quantitative analysis of constituent words or statements). On the other hand, during the preparation of the obtained results the methods of detailed description and classification of results were used.

This article does not take into account all the issues constituting the substantial scope of the interview. It is limited solely to the discussion of the respondents' answers to questions related to the assessment of the potential of workers aged 55 and over (their strengths) and methods of availing of such potential in enterprises. Analysis of answers received for 8 from 45 questions from in-depth interview scenario are included in this article. Those questions are as follow:

- Q14. Do you recognize some particular strengths of employees 55+?
- Q14B. If and how do you utilize those strengths in your company?
- Q 18. How do you find out the plans of seniors for the last years of their career? In what age would they like to retire? Is it desirable for the company that they continue working after formal retirement age?

- Q11. Which areas of your company's special competence might be disappearing through retirements within the next 3 – 5 years?
- Q12. Are you transferring crucial competences of your company from experienced employees to younger ones?
- Q 12 B. How Are you transferring crucial competences of your company from experienced employees to younger ones?
- Q 15. Are there (in your opinion) any solutions in your company, to motivate and encourage seniors to continue working longer?
- Q 15 B. Could you characterized those solutions?

The approach proposed in the article allowed for the verification of two of the working hypotheses formulated in preparation for the tests:

- H1: the entrepreneurs (in this case managers) recognize the strengths of workers aged 55 years or more, but fail to avail of them in building the competitive advantage of their enterprises;
- H2: the retirement of workers approaching retirement age is assessed by the entrepreneurs (in this case managers) as a threat that may entail the loss of organizational knowledge.

Results

The managers participating in the interview spontaneously pointed out the strengths of employees aged 55 years or more. The conventional analysis of the results allowed for distinguishing two main categories and six subcategories of the characteristics indicated by the managers (Figure 1).

In the course of the interview, the respondents were asked to identify at least three strengths of workers aged 55 years and over. 70 of the answers given were classified in the 'competences' category, while 57 of them were assigned to the 'personality' category.

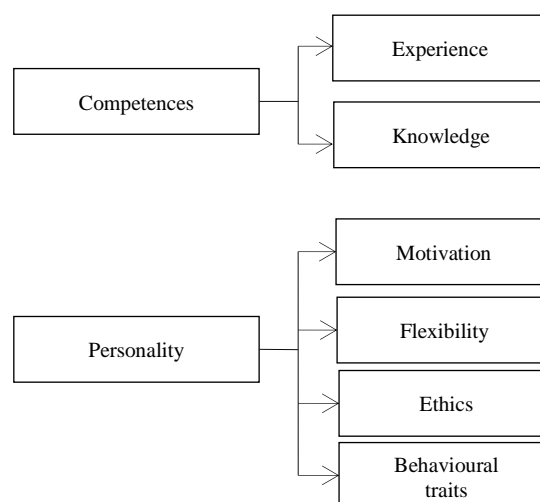


Figure 1. The strengths of workers aged 55+ in the opinion of the representatives of the management of companies involved in the Best Aged Lighthouses project – categories

Table 3

The strengths of workers aged 55+ in the opinion of the representatives of the management of companies involved in the Best Aged Lighthouses project – the terms used in the interview

Category	Subcategory	Terms
Competences	Experience	Experience
		Life experience
		Practical and/or professional experience
	Knowledge	Knowledge
		Know-how
		Wisdom
Specialist		
Personality	Flexibility	Flexibility
		Adaptation
		Availability
	Motivation	Motivation
		Engagement
		Not only money is important
		Diligence
		Persistence
	Ethics	Ethics
		Confidence
		Responsibility
		Disciplined
	Behavioural traits	Considerate
		Able to listen
		Assesses the risk
		Regularity
		Calm/doesn't hurry
		Careful with conclusions

Table 4

Examples of responses to the question ‘Do you utilize strengths of employees aged 55+ in your company? If yes, how?’ - a question in the 14C interview scenario

They are not used/used not sufficient enough	Cooperation between generations	New professional tasks	Mentoring/tutoring	Advising/counselling
<i>‘Not in some special way. Not the age is important, the competency is important and competences of all employees are used’</i>	<i>‘Transfer of knowledge between generations. Older people are regarded as experts’</i>	<i>‘They are provided by additional jobs, for example in the projects. They get better positions. They are invited to participate into various events, seminars, conferences’</i>	<i>‘They lead workshops and trainings and transfer their expertise to other employees. They are involved in the various working groups, as they have more experience’</i>	<i>‘When I need to make a difficult decision, I really ask older staff about their experience. Overall, consultations are very important’</i>
<i>‘I do not know. Intentionally – not’</i>	<i>‘Fixing work together; senior leads and junior follows and they work together. Younger employees respect older ones, they also have courage to doubt things’</i>	<i>‘They are offer positions where these qualities are very important’</i>	<i>‘To act as mentors’</i>	
<i>‘It is not sufficient, how the strengths are used’</i>	<i>‘Build age mixed teams’</i>		<i>‘I use them as tutors’</i>	
<i>‘The competencies are used informally, but not directed’</i>	<i>‘Teams across age groups’</i>			
<i>‘Are not used systematically’</i>				
<i>‘Sadly, we do not always make use of that’</i>				

The list of terms used by the managers participating in the study along with their assignment to the various categories and sub-categories is presented in the following Table 3.

Managers were also asked whether, and if so, in what way, they avail of the potential (strengths) of workers aged 55 and over in their company. The responses to such question can be classified into five groups:

- strengths of workers aged 55 and over are not used in the enterprise or are used in an insufficient manner;
- the knowledge and experience of the employees from this group are routinely used in the enterprise by building age-diversified teams, in which the transfer of knowledge and experience in the relations between the younger and the older workers occurs naturally, uncontrolled by organizational procedures;
- the potential of older workers is used to introduce the new, young hires to their duties;
- workers aged 55 years and more are provided with modified responsibilities - they are entrusted with more independent tasks which require more knowledge and experience,

workers from this group are involved in decision-making processes: they become advisers to the management

Based on the results, including answers given above, it is possible to **verify the H1 working hypothesis positively**. It means that the entrepreneurs (in this case managers) recognize the strengths of workers aged 55 years or more, but fail to avail of it in building the competitive advantage of their enterprises. While all of the respondents mentioned the strengths of workers aged 55 years or more, not all of them were able to identify specific examples (methods) of using them in their enterprise. Almost one fifth of respondents (aggregated answers 'no', 'unfortunately not', 'probably not', 'not sufficiently' and 'I don't know') were not able to provide any example of using the potential of older workers in their enterprise. In addition, in only one of the positive answers the issue of using the potential of workers aged 55 years or more was associated with the problems of development and competitiveness of the company.

The managers participating in the survey are aware of the demographic situation in their enterprises and declare that they know the plans of their workers related to retirement. Respondents representing companies in Lithuania and Latvia express the belief that employees from older age groups show great interest and willingness to continue work, also upon reaching the formal retirement age.

Examples of responses:

'Usually people want to continue working. There are even employees aged 70+ who are still working and want to continue working on part-time' (LT).

'The average age of retirement is 67, 68 usually, but some employees aged 70+ don't want to leave' (LT).

'It differs and depends from the person, his/her character. Often employees continue to work in their first year of the formal retirement age. Often seniors wish to work on part-time. Sometimes there is a need to work,

depending on his/her family economic situation. Also it is related with the pension – if pensions were large and normal, then person could work less' (LT).

'Different situations – some retire when retirement age comes, but many want to stay longer' (LV).

'Most of people want to work after retirement age' (LV).

'Tendency is to stay over retirement age definitely for several years' (LV).

In turn, managers of the companies from Germany, Finland and Sweden, pay attention to the older workers' interest in retiring before reaching the formal retirement age foreseen in the existing legislation.

Examples of responses:

'Employees will retire when they have the possibility (60 years, or 63,5 years), it depends on their contract of agreement. Very few have the will to leave at 65 years' (FI).

'Yes, I would really like them to stay. Today we have problem with hiring new employees' (SE).

'We really need continuity at our organization, so I would appreciate if they continued to 65 or longer' (SE).

'It depends of person, but very many want to retire just after they are 50 years old' (DE).

The differences in the respondents' responses related to the average age of the workers who want to retire and their interest in continuing employment beyond the formal retirement age may be derived from a number of factors⁹, including:

- the diversity of pension systems in individual countries (governing the retirement age and the availability of pension benefits),
- the standard of living (determined by the macroeconomic situation, differences in the amount of pension benefits and current salary, as well as the level of income earned by individuals and other members of their families),
- the type of work, as well as the organization's requirements for the employees (like physical fitness, ITC skills etc.).

In the case of question 11 **'Which areas of your company's special competence might be disappearing through retirements within the next 3 – 5 years?'**, there have been noted different responses due to the country of origin of the companies represented by the managers.

The respondents representing companies from Lithuania have expressed a strong opinion that despite the departing of some employees due to retirement in the coming years, there will be no loss of organizational knowledge in their organizations.

Examples of responses:

• *'Even difficult to identify the reasons why they should disappear?' (LT).*

• *'People are not irreplaceable' (LT).*

⁹ The research did not include any statistical analysis of the relationship between the answers to these questions and the country of origin of the companies whose representatives gave the answers. The factors listed below were identified as exemplary — most frequently mentioned in the literature on the determinants of the decision to retire or continue work taken by the seniors.

- *'This cannot happen. I do not see such threat'* (LT). Other managers (representing companies from Latvia, Finland, Sweden and Germany), when asked to provide the competences that may be lost by their organizations in connection with the retirement of employees, usually indicated:
- the specialist knowledge and the so-called hidden knowledge (*'Knowledge of experience that has not been written down in manuals'* DE; *'Specialists we need are poorly paid and there is no education in our region'* SE);
- the experience necessary in decision-making and coping in crisis situations (*'You have to have long experience with some specific equipment to decide how to act in emergency situations etc.'* LV);
- the involvement in work (*'It is hard work and younger ones are not interested in that. We are a 'shrinking' business'* FI);
- internal and external relationships of the organizations (*'Networks: formal and informal'* DE).

Despite their awareness of the danger of losing a certain potential of knowledge and experience in connection with older workers' retirement, the managers participating in the study could not always indicate the methods used to limit this phenomenon. When answering to question 12, **'Are you transferring crucial competences of your company from experienced employees to younger ones?'**, 11 participants answered that their companies do not apply methods to ensure such transfer or apply them sporadically.

Examples of responses:

- *'No, not in my responsibility'*.
- *'Not targeted and structured'*.
- *'There is no system, incorporating is usually arbitrary, skills transfer is very individual'*.
- *'No, because they are elementary, they are nothing to teach or learn about'*.
- *'We do that, because we think that the older people who are still necessary for us will not be fired'*.
- *'Only in special single cases/events that require action'*.
- *'Only partial in single cases; not systematic'*.

Among the positive replies — when respondents declared that their companies apply the arrangements for the transfer of knowledge and experience of older workers — the most often indicated methods of such transfer were:

- the codification of knowledge and sharing it with younger workers (*'Experienced workers are preparing materials for young workers'; 'Writing down experiences; documenting, making guidance for critical situations, people in crucial positions in main functions have to prepare their successors and transfer knowledge'*);
- cooperation in teams consisting of people of different ages (*'Working in pairs –model is in use'; 'We build teams with a younger and older employees'*);
- mentoring systems (*'There is mentoring used: for new employees' mentors are assigned. Mentoring duration is usually half a year. Mentoring is an individual process. One employee needs a mentor for*

a longer period of time, another – for shorter'; 'Through assigning tasks, there is system of mentors, individual support from managers');

- training systems (*'There are people in technical branches of company responsible for organizing this transfer of knowledge, young employees have obligatory trainings, mentoring, informative days discussing various work issues, learning together specifics of new equipment'*).

On the basis of the responses received in the course of the investigation, **it is not possible to conclusively verify the working hypothesis H2**. Although results of the study confirm that the managers know the age structure of their workforce, the age at which employees want to end their economic activity, the details of the process of the employees' departure as a result of their retirement, and that retirement of workers means the loss of specific knowledge and organizational competencies, it cannot be definitively confirmed that the entrepreneurs (in this case managers) evaluate the fact of the employees' departure as a real threat of losing special organizational competencies. One in five of the respondents has declared the lack of solutions to stopping the knowledge and experience of the older age groups, and the lack of willingness to implement them/need for implementing them in their company. Additional concerns that prevent the expression of unequivocal opinion on the matter, are caused by the responses to question 15: **'Are there (in your opinion) any solutions in your company, to motivate and encourage seniors to continue working longer?'**. 38 managers (62 %) participating in the study responded negatively (aggregated answers 'no' and 'rather not').

Examples of responses:

- *'Not necessary'*.
- *'I do not know about it, I hear quite the opposite, you want to separate from employees in order to save labour costs. A large part of the job has to be reoccupied and younger are cheaper'*.
- *'The blockade comes from the top management, they would rather employ young colleagues to rejuvenate the age structure'*.
- *'During the crisis we sometimes welcomed when older employees decided to go'*.
- *'We do not have the problem to convince them to stay longer in the company (until retirement). We need the 'workplace' for the younger employees'*.

Discussion

The ageing of population entails and will be entailing a number of socio-economic consequences. In the literature, most attention is paid to the context of macro-economic risks: an increase in public spending due to the growing number of retirees receiving benefits and the rising cost of medical care. The structural changes that affect the labour market are also stressed.

The depopulation and the increase in the share of elderly in the total population also have their consequences in the microeconomic dimension (at the level of individual companies). The competitiveness of enterprises depends

nowadays primarily on the intangible resources being at their disposal, such as knowledge, technology, market relations, the capacity to respond to crises etc. The type and quality of these resources is influenced first of all by the employees and managers — the human capital of enterprises. Due to demographic changes and the prospect of shrinking access to qualified staff, companies face the necessity to seek solutions ensuring the optimal use of their employees' potential.

Large companies have been using age-management instruments for several years already. Thanks to that, they use the potential of their employees of all ages competently, and — what is very important — ensure the continuity of organizational knowledge and competence by using methods of the intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience.

In the SME sector, which constitutes over 98 % of all enterprises in the European Union, the implementation of the concept of age management is still a major challenge. Among the barriers hindering it, the entrepreneurs and managers mention the lack of sufficient funds, outdated organizational structures etc. However, it seems that in many cases the brake to implementing age management practices is the lack of understanding of the reality of demographic changes and their consequences, as well as the inability to manage human capital properly.

Conclusions

The results of research carried out among managers participated in the project Best Agers Lighthouses seem to authorize the formulation of the following some general conclusions.

The managers of companies involved in the project declared knowledge of the strengths of their older workers, although quite often they were not able to indicate the manner in which these qualities (strengths) are/could be used in their enterprise. In addition, in only one of the positive answers the issue of using the potential of workers aged 55 years or more was associated with the problems of development and competitiveness of the company.

Despite their declared fear of losing a certain potential of their organization's knowledge and experience in connection with older workers' retirement, the managers participating in the study could not always indicate the methods used to limit this phenomenon.

It can be deduced from the statements of managers that the current situation and short-term goals (such as the fight against the crisis) limit their interest in finding new methods of human capital management, including age management.

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Darbuotojai 55+ - vertingas smulkaus ir vidutinio verslo įmonių išteklius

Santrauka

Straipsnio problematika siejasi su darbuotojų, kurių amžius daugiau kaip 55-eri metai, potencialo panaudojimu siekiant smulkaus ir vidutinio sektoriaus įmonių konkurencingumo. Pagrindinis straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti, kaip antreprenieriai ir vadybininkai identifikuoja vyresnių darbuotojų potencialą (stiprybes) ir panaudoja jį kuriant įmonių konkurencinį potencialą. Taip pat straipsnyje yra fokusuojamasi į darbdavių suprantimą, kad pensijinį amžių pasiekę darbuotojai, išeidami iš darbo vietos, gali kartu išsinešti ir organizacines žinias, kurių praradimas – ypatingas nuostolis įmonei.

Straipsnyje pristatomi giluminio interviu rezultatai. Interviu atliktas su 61 vadybininku, kurių įmonės dalyvauja tarptautiniame projekte „Įmonės švyturiai“. Duomenys apdoroti taikant kokybinių tyrimų metodus.

Straipsnyje pateikiama respondentų atsakymų analizė ir diskusija, susijusi su darbuotojų, turinčių daugiau kaip 55-erius metus ir daugiau, potencialo ir jų stiprybių nustatymu, taip pat analizuojama, kokie metodai leidžia nustatyti tokio pobūdžio potencialą. Straipsnyje keliamos ir verifikuojamos atitinkamos hipotezės:

- H1: vadybininkai atpažįsta 55-erius ir daugiau metų turinčių darbuotojų potencialą (stiprybes), bet jų neįvertina, siekdami įmonės konkurencinio pranašumo;
- H2: pensijinio amžiaus darbuotojų išėjimas iš darbo vadybininkų yra suvokiamas kaip pavojus, kad gali būti prarastos organizacinės žinios.

Rezultatai leido darbinę hipotezę H1 verifikuoti teigiamai. Tai reiškia, jog vadybininkai atpažįsta stipriąsias darbuotojų puses, bet neįvertina jų potencialo siekiant įmonės konkurencinio pranašumo. Nors daugelis vadybininkų paminėjo tirtos grupės darbuotojų stipriąsias puses, tačiau ne visi iš jų galėjo paminėti specifinius pavyzdžius (metodus), kaip šios stiprybės panaudojamos ir nustatomos įmonėje. Viena penktoji respondentų negalėjo pateikti nei vieno pavyzdžio, kaip potencialas buvo nustatomas. Taip pat straipsnyje pastebima, kad buvo tik vienas pozityvus atsakymas, susijęs su vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų potencialu ir jo sąsajomis su įmonės vystymusi bei įmonės konkurencingumu.

Tyrimo metu gauti rezultatai neleido verifikuoti darbinės hipotezės H2. Tyrimo rezultatai atskleidė, kad vadybininkai žino darbuotojų amžiaus struktūrą, amžių, kada darbuotojai nori baigti savo ekonominę veiklą, išėjimo į pensiją procesą ir tai, kad darbuotojų išėjimas reiškia specifinių žinių ir organizacinių kompetencijų praradimą, tačiau vadybininkai nelabai suvokia, kad darbuotojų išėjimas yra susijęs su specialiu organizacinių kompetencijų pradimu. Vienas iš penkių respondentų teigė, kad trūksta sprendimų, kaip išsaugoti turimą vyresnio amžiaus darbuotojų žinių ir patirties kapitalą; noro nebuvimą kaip panaudoti žinių kapitalą įmonės veiklai tobulinti ir konkurencingumui didinti.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: žmogiškasis kapitalas, nematomi ištekliai, darbuotojai 55+, organizacinės žinios.

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