

Elwira Gross-Gołacka, Izabela Warwas, Justyna Wiktorowicz

Development Potential of SMEs in Poland

Selected Aspects of Age, Diversity and Intellectual Capital Management



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Introduction

Several changes can be observed nowadays in organizations and their environment. Regardless of the size of organizations, their management and human resource management are influenced by the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of the environment, which is referred to as VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity). The phenomenon stems from the 2008–2009 financial market crisis, which affected the economic situation of many countries. However, complications related to the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus were global in nature and its effects are still being faced by the economies of countries on all continents. In addition, Ukraine and neighboring countries have recently been affected by hostilities, with widespread and multidimensional consequences. Certainly, the phenomena will leave lasting marks in the social and economic spheres, governance, people management, employment and labor (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2020; Bednarkiewicz & Warwas, 2022). Thus, societies, economies, companies and their employees are not only forced to cope with the VUCA phenomenon but also to face other challenges, related to globalization, internationalization, cultural diversity, tertiarization, informatization and artificial intelligence, aging societies, increased competition and innovation, as well as changing consumption patterns and customs of citizens, along with the growing role of social media in acquiring knowledge and information about the world around them. The economic, technological, environmental, demographic and social changes taking place create a new context for theories, policies and practices of age management, diversity or human capital management. The changes largely affect small and medium-sized organizations.

Among the megatrends affecting human capital management, the phenomenon of population aging occupies an important place. It is an objective process, inevitable in the foreseeable future, since demographic changes are not reversible in the short term. The phenomenon can be looked

at both from the perspective of the organization and the labor market, social partners (Warwas & Matuszewska-Kubicz, 2022), difficulties in recruiting employees, the need to extend working life and changes in the ways of retirement (Wiktorowicz, 2016), as well as the context of raising or lowering the retirement age (Kuchciak & Warwas, 2021). Organizations can respond by implementing age management or multigenerational management if they have representatives of other generations working in addition to mature employees.

Diversity is an extremely important issue of interest in human capital management. The growing importance of the issue is due to, among other things, the above-mentioned demographic changes, but also the processes of population migration and free movement in the labor markets, including those forced, as in the case of the Ukrainian exodus. In addition, the diversity of human resources can be seen as a source of competitiveness of organizations (Gross-Gołacka, 2018b).

According to REGON data, 368,000 new enterprises were registered in 2021, while 190,000 companies were deleted from the register. Compared to 2019, the number of newly established enterprises increased by 11.9%, while the number of deleted enterprises increased by 11.8%. It is worth noting that over the 2008–2021 period, the number of newly established companies was (except in 2009 and 2011) higher than the number of liquidated companies, so the category is characterized by an upward trend. In 2020, there were declines in the number of new business registrations, which was most likely related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, greater fluctuations in the number of de-registered businesses have also been noted (Statistics Poland, 2022). It may confirm the uncertainty of the environment and the need for SMEs to cope in these challenging and turbulent conditions. In 2021, the largest number of SMEs were established in the following sectors of the economy: construction (72.9 thousand and this accounted for 19.8% of the total number of newly established companies), trade and repair of motor vehicles (59.6 thousand—16.2%), professional, scientific and technical activities (41.2 thousand—11.2%), information and communication (30.4 thousand—8.3%) and manufacturing (25.4 thousand—6.9%) (Statistics Poland, 2022).

Of Poland's SMEs, 53% are engaged in services, 21.6% operate in trade; 15.5% in construction and about 10% are engaged in industrial activities. The service sector includes areas such as tourism, catering and also IT, financial and legal services.

The trade sector is a diverse sphere, ranging from small local grocery stores to specialty stores. Industry is a sector where SMEs are an important part of

the value chain, often supplying specialized components and semi-finished products to larger companies. There are many SMEs in the metal, food, wood, chemical or technology industries (Skowrońska & Tarnawa, 2022).

Lachiewicz and Matejun emphasize that a peculiar feature of SMEs is a low-formalized, with the dominance of line ties, organizational structure, thus possessing high flexibility of operation. Entities representing this model have mainly a single decision-making center, a very fast way of transmitting information and ease of communication.

The high flexibility of operations makes it possible to respond to changes in the environment, which is undoubtedly an attribute of small and medium-sized enterprises. Sourcing of employees in SME companies is mainly based on recommendations and referrals, as well as family contacts. Such companies have an unofficial working atmosphere based on informal contacts, strong integration into the company, and a high degree of independence of action on the part of employees. In addition, limited opportunities for direct support from specialists are a distinguishing feature, as small and medium-sized enterprises often do not employ them. Under the conditions, intangible resources, including innovation, are of great importance to SMEs (Zastempowski, 2014, pp. 27–37). Small and medium-sized enterprises operating in an uncertain environment find it very difficult to survive and grow. One of the ways to cope with such a situation is to direct their activities to develop the ability to acquire and exploit market opportunities (Lisowska, 2020).

Human capital management, including aspects of managing diversity and age of employees, is a major challenge for organizations, and for small and medium-sized companies in particular. Therefore, it is important to gain insight into the functioning of small and medium-sized companies in Poland through the lens of selected aspects of human capital, which is attempted in this monograph.

The monograph is theoretical and empirical in nature and consists of six chapters. The first chapter is devoted to presenting the determinants of development and success factors of small and medium-sized enterprises. The second chapter reveals the role of human capital in building sustainable competitive advantages of enterprises in general, including small and medium-sized enterprises. The chapter precedes the presentation of research results on the role of intellectual capital in Polish SMEs, which are described in the third chapter.

The fourth chapter, in turn, deals with diverse resources and indicates the relationship between intellectual capital and diversity management, as well as the benefits of its implementation in businesses. The last two chapters

touch on one of the dimensions of diversity—multiple employees. Of these, the fifth chapter presents the results of research on age management in institutional, instrumental and functional terms, while the sixth chapter focuses on the themes of intergenerational knowledge transfer and the departure of mature employees.

The authors hope that the content presented in the monograph will broaden the debate on topics that are current, important and still gaining importance in today's socio-economic realities. At the same time, it seems crucial to give voice to Polish entrepreneurs, as the book is based on the results of two complementary research projects.

Abstract in Polish

Współcześnie w organizacjach i ich otoczeniu można zaobserwować szereg zmian związanych z: globalizacją, internacjonalizacją, różnorodnością kulturową, tertiaryzacją, informatyzacją i sztuczną inteligencją, wzrostem konkurencji i innowacyjności, a także ze zmieniającymi się wzorcami konsumpcji i obyczajami obywateli, rosnącą rolą social mediów w pozyskiwaniu wiedzy i informacji na temat otaczającego świata. Niezależnie od wielkości organizacji, na zarządzanie nimi oraz ich zasobami ludzkimi w dalszym ciągu wpływają zmienności, niepewności, złożoności oraz niejednoznaczności otoczenia. Pandemia COVID-19 oraz działania wojenne na Ukrainie pozostawią trwałe ślady w sferze społecznej i gospodarczej, zarządzaniu organizacjami i ludźmi oraz w poziomie zatrudnienia. Wśród megatrendów wpływających na zarządzanie kapitałem ludzkim istotne jest zjawisko starzenia się społeczeństwa. Innym niezwykle ważnym zagadnieniem stanowiącym przedmiot zainteresowania zarządzania kapitałem ludzkim jest różnorodność (*diversity*).

Zarządzanie kapitałem ludzkim, w tym aspekty zarządzania różnorodnością i wiekiem pracowników stanowią duże wyzwanie dla organizacji, a w szczególności dla małych i średnich firm. Dlatego tak ważny jest wgląd w funkcjonowanie małych i średnich firm w Polsce przez pryzmat wybranych aspektów kapitału ludzkiego, czego próbę podjęto w niniejszej pracy.

Monografia ma charakter teoretyczno-empiryczny i składa się z sześciu rozdziałów. Rozdział pierwszy poświęcony jest prezentacji determinant rozwoju oraz czynników sukcesu małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw. Rozdział drugi ukazuje rolę kapitału ludzkiego w budowaniu trwałej przewagi konkurencyjnej przedsiębiorstw, w tym małych i średnich. Poprzedza on prezentację wyników badań na temat roli kapitału intelektualnego w polskich MSP, które zostały opisane w rozdziale trzecim.

Rozdział czwarty z kolei dotyczy różnorodnych zasobów i wskazania relacji pomiędzy kapitałem intelektualnym a zarządzaniem różnorodnością oraz wskazuje na korzyści z jego wdrożenia w przedsiębiorstwach. Dwa ostatnie

rozdziały dotyczą jednego z wymiarów różnorodności – wielu pracowników. Rozdział piąty prezentuje wyniki badań zarządzania wiekiem w ujęciu instytucjonalnym, instrumentalnym i funkcjonalnym, natomiast szósty koncentruje się na wątkach międzygeneracyjnego transferu wiedzy i odejściach pracowników dojrzałych.

Monografia opiera się na wynikach badań dwóch komplementarnych projektów. Pierwszy to badanie przeprowadzone przez zespół badaczy z Instytutu Organizacji i Zarządzania w Przemysle – ORGMASZ w maju 2019 r. metodami CATI i CAWI na reprezentatywnej grupie 1067 przedsiębiorstw działających w Polsce. Drugie badanie zostało przeprowadzone w 2017 r. jako jeden z etapów projektu „STAY. Wsparcie aktywności zawodowej osób 50+ w przedsiębiorstwie. Zdrowy i zmotywowany pracownik – zadowolony pracodawca”, techniką CATI wśród małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw w Polsce ($n = 1000$).

Chapter 1.

Success Factors and Determinants of the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

The small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector plays a decisive role in the economic development and economic health of countries. There are currently about 21 million small and medium-sized enterprises worldwide and there is no doubt that SMEs are and will always be the backbone of any economy as they consistently generate significant income, employment, products, innovations, and new technologies. In light of the above, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are noteworthy engines of economic development (Obi et al., 2018; Ndiaye et al., 2018; Mazzarol et al., 1999) and are crucial to most economies around the world, especially in developing and emerging countries. The issue of small and medium-sized enterprise development has been an important focus of interest in economic and management sciences and quality sciences for many years now. This is due, among other things, to the significant impact of SMEs on the socio-economic processes taking place in the modern economy. Researchers repeatedly point out that countries around the world are focusing on the development of the sector of activity due to the fact that SMEs are the driving force behind the promotion and improvement of the economy (Subhan et al., 2013; Amofo, 2012, p. 53). Thus, it comes as no surprise to anyone today that it is SMEs that constitute an important entrepreneurial base and form a dynamic sector of the economy. Also worthy of special attention is the fact that the functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises is an extremely “delicate” sphere of activity, susceptible to the influence of various factors and conditions that may support or hinder their development. The factors, referred to

as stimulators, determinants, or catalysts of development, are measurable components distinguished in a complex of phenomena considered as a cause or condition of development processes, constituting their driving forces.

Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

In colloquial language, growth and development are usually used as synonyms, or at least words with the same meaning. However, in the literature on the subject, a clear difference in the categories of the terms resounds, as growth is seen as a quantitative category and development as a qualitative category which also takes into account structural changes as well as social, environmental, and other aspects of the quality of life in the economy, the business sector, and individual companies (Borowiecki et al., 2018, p. 13).

Ackoff (1993) refers to the growth of a company as an increase in size and number, and M. Goold (1999) identifies the following criteria for company growth (market value of the company, global profit earned by the company in a given year, earnings per share, and sales value). The team of D. Katz and R. Kahn identifies five types of growth, four of which directly relate precisely to the issue of company size (growth through increasing the size of a given unit, growth through the creation of parallel units, growth through diversification, i.e., the creation of units dealing with new markets or new products, as well as growth through mergers and acquisitions). The fifth type defined as growth through specialization, on the other hand, implies an improvement in labor productivity through the reallocation of functions, which should result in an improvement in the financial performance indicators of a given company (Katz & Kahn, 2015).

Factors influencing the development of SMEs can be viewed from various perspectives. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the development of an enterprise, and often its success, depends on the correct management of a company by its owner or manager. On the other hand, the environment in which the organization has to function is not without significance, either (Bieńkowska, 2004).

A theoretical framework for the study of SME development/growth is provided by theories of organizational development, e.g.: phase models of growth. Here, the terms life-cycle stages and development stages or growth stages are most often used interchangeably. Authors use different names for the various phases, although they are often based in meaning on the changes

that occur in organizations, e.g.: emergence, survival, growth, expansion, maturity, etc. The models describe a different number of phases with different names, though they are generally based on the same criteria: management and organizational style, marketing problems, fundraising, main strategies, or owner involvement in the company (Wasilczuk, 2004, p. 71). One can encounter three-phase (e.g.: Thaine & Mitzberg), five-phase (e.g.: McGuire, Greiner, Churchill & Lewis) and ten-phase (e.g.: Adizes model) models (Stabryła 2002; Puto & Brendzel-Skowera, 2011, p. 95). However, it is worth mentioning at this point the SME development model of N. Churchill and V. Lewis (1983, p. 38). This is one of the best-known models of the life cycle of small and medium-sized enterprises distinguishing the following phases of development:

- 1) emergence (establishment),
- 2) survival in the market,
- 3) success: – with an exploitation (consumption) orientation, – with an active growth orientation,
- 4) dynamic growth (expansion),
- 5) maturity (Churchill & Lewis, 1983; Poznańska, 2011).

A distinction is therefore made in the literature between the life cycle of small and medium-sized enterprises and that of large business entities. Indeed, it cannot be assumed that the majority of small businesses are in the initial phase of development. Only a few entities will become medium-sized or large enterprises through intensive growth, while others may remain in the group of entities categorized as small or micro-enterprises throughout their lives (Poznańska, 2011, p. 34). In addition, Churchill and Lewis (1983) distinguished eight factors determining the success or failure of a small business, the importance of which changes as the business develops and grows. Four of the factors are related to the owner and the remaining factors are related to the enterprise. Consequently, the first four factors are more static in nature and relate to the business itself. They include (Churchill & Lewis, 1983):

- financial resources (financial resources, financial reserves, borrowing capacity),
- personnel resources (the number and qualifications of persons employed),
- system resources (company information system, management system),
- business resources (market share, supplier relationships).

Other factors related to the characteristics of the entrepreneur him/herself include aspects such as:

- motivation (attitude towards the company and oneself),
- capacity to act (ability to carry out marketing, innovation, production, or management activities independently),
- managerial skills (ability to delegate authority and responsibility, ability to direct the work of others),
- strategic capabilities (forward thinking, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).

At each successive stage of development, a company faces new problems and challenges, and the role of individual entrepreneurial and management factors also changes. As the company grows, the owner's ability to perform tasks independently decreases, while the importance of strategic planning, employee qualifications, and the entrepreneur's ability to delegate tasks, authority and responsibility increases (Machaczka, 1998, p. 83).

Basically, the literature indicates that the development of small and medium-sized enterprises is determined by external and internal factors. The former can come from within the organization, being its strengths (internal factors), while the latter can come from the environment, creating opportunities for the development of the small enterprise (external factors) (Machaczka, 1998). And by knowing the determinants and adapting the business accordingly, the enterprise can grow faster than the competition. Enterprise development, therefore, means coordinated changes to systems within the enterprise, adapting it to an ever-changing environment. Adaptations are effective if they ensure that the enterprise achieves and maintains a competitive advantage, which is a necessary condition for staying in the market.

Determinants of Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Development

The determinants of enterprise development can be divided into two basic groups—factors influencing enterprises from the external environment and internal determinants usually created by the enterprise itself. The external environment is a set of factors influencing the functioning and development of the enterprises. In entity terms, the environment is a set of institutions and organized interest groups, while in object terms, it is a set of processes

and phenomena to which the enterprise is subject and which it can also influence (Wach, 2008; Kamińska, 2011; Lemańska-Majdzik et al., 2017). External factors can include (Mitek & Micuła, 2012, p. 60):

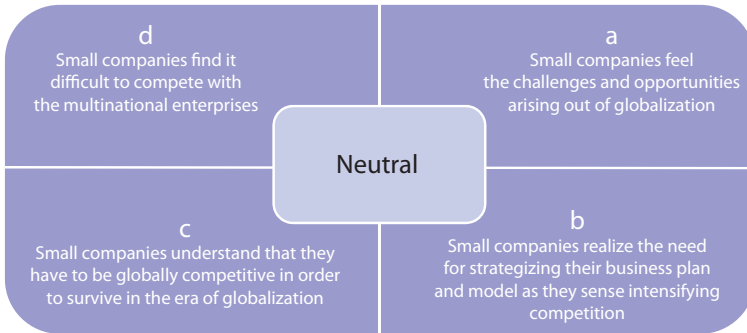
- 1) globalization of the economy,
- 2) economic prosperity,
- 3) the foreign and domestic market situation,
- 4) innovation,
- 5) State fiscal policy and regulation,
- 6) level of economic growth,
- 7) free movement of goods and services.

The above-mentioned external factors, such as globalization or free access to foreign markets, have a strong impact on the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. The unlimited connectivity of companies and consumers worldwide via communication (Internet), for example, means that products can be shipped between countries and economies at reduced costs and in a very short time. This has virtually eliminated borders between countries. As a result, consumers are willing to use the Internet to search for the perfect product, and it does not matter whether they are from Australia or Poland. Suddenly, with this phenomenon, the small business serves not only the local market but also international customers, and the one that has an established niche or demonstrates the ability to innovate and succeed in business can emerge in internal and sub-regional/regional markets. Additionally, free access to foreign markets forces change, most often in the form of innovation. The combination of globalization and trade liberalization can allow for greater economies of scale and opportunities for the small SME segment. Globalization can provide better access to standardized market information and to larger and more diverse markets (Liñán et al., 2020; Popescu, 2019). Although studies show that in practice:

- a) smaller companies find it difficult to face greater challenges in international business because of the difficulty in reaching export markets, and
- b) markets around the world are dominated by multinational corporations (Kahiya, 2018; Paul & Sánchez-Morcilio, 2018).

The difficulties faced by SMEs in the age of globalization are represented by a four-dimensional matrix (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four-dimensional matrix for SMEs based on difficulties, challenges, and opportunities



Source: Liñán, F., Paul, J., & Fayolle, A. (2020). SMEs and entrepreneurship in the era of globalization: advances and theoretical approaches. *Small Bus Econ*, 55, 695–703.

In addition to the external factors determining the development of a company, the development also depends on internal factors, which constitute the competitive potential dependent on the company. The competitive potential consists of the following factors (Mitek & Micuła, 2012):

- 1) material resources,
- 2) intangible resources,
- 3) management efficiency,
- 4) business arrangements and relationships,
- 5) competitiveness of products and services,
- 6) activities and processes within the company.

According to the most classic classification of resources, intangible resources should be understood as goods without material form, based primarily on knowledge, and characterized by three basic properties: uncertainty of production, limited possibilities of imitation and reproduction, and occurrence in a specific organizational context in which they acquire a specific meaning (Webster & Jensen, 2006). Material resources, on the other hand, comprise the factors present in physical form that constitute the essence of their economic use. They belong to a group of internal factors for the development and building of a company's competitiveness. The resources are expressible in numerical units and it is relatively easy to determine their specific financial value. Intangible resources, unlike tangible resources, do not exist in a physical form. It makes them much more difficult to identify, quantify and value. On the other hand, they are difficult for market competitors to imitate and copy because of their unique

nature. For the reason, the resources have a much stronger impact on the development of enterprises and the level of their competitive potential than material resources. Moreover, owner-managers of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises should make every effort to base the development of their entities on maximizing the use of intangible resources. It is due to both the value of the resources and the specific nature of SMEs, which, compared to large enterprises, do not have significant tangible and/or financial resources at their disposal (Adamik & Nowicki, 2012). Intangible resources nowadays play a fundamental role in the development of companies' core competences and constitute a growing part of a company's market value. Their diversity as well as complex and multidimensional nature results in specific categories within the group which may include: (1) human, (2) relational, (3) market, (4) technological, (5) organizational, and (6) cultural resources (Urbanek, 2011). The importance of intangible assets in an organization—which is able to attract employees who are knowledge holders—is still the most important source of competitive advantage.

Essentially, all the above-mentioned determinants of SME development—the internal and external ones—boil down to the market competitiveness of an enterprise. Dynamic development, innovations, capital held, tangible and intangible resources, management, the price level of products and services, and others can be defined as competitive advantages. Researchers point out that the success and failure of SMEs depend not only on the financial aspect but also on other strategic features (Menefee et al., 2006). Purpose and strategy are also important determinants of development, but development can also be equated with growth (economic, social, financial, etc.), and its main focus is to increase the number of transactions and the number of customers. When we consider management efficiency or the activities and processes taking place in a company, the determinant becomes the person or persons managing the business entity and their strategic, marketing, and analytical activities leading to the maintenance of market stability (Glinka & Pasieczny, 2015, pp. 240–241). Hence, leadership is one of the main internal resources with an important role in building competitive advantage. As owner-managers in SMEs exercise control over both ownership and management, they provide leadership, set direction, and formulate strategies to guide the company and navigate an uncertain business environment. In addition, SMEs focusing on how to effectively utilize the existing internal resources, especially with a limited size and fewer employees, require direct management intervention and involvement (ASEAN, 2014).

When analyzing the process of doing business, factors related to the operating strategy adopted, the company's policies towards its employees and

customers (Taylor & LaBarre, 2006), and the innovations introduced (Lee et al., 2012; Pervan et al., 2015) are taken into consideration. In addition, factors influencing growth include the specialist skills of the company's employees and control within the wider organization (Ashkenas et al., 1998). Whether a company adopts the right operating strategy, plans well its activities, adapts to a changing environment, hires the right employees (Skibiński et al., 2016), as they make a real contribution to the organisation's goals and objectives (Latifi & Shooshtarian, 2014) and the creation of a good workplace climate, etc. it will affect its performance in the market.

Also, in light of current research, entrepreneurial competence is seen as an accelerator for SME success, as the competitive business environment requires SMEs to seek new opportunities for survival. Owner-managers of SMEs who can increase their entrepreneurial competence over time can outperform their competitors and their companies may experience higher growth rates (Bachmann et al., 2016; Stam & Elfing, 2008). Owner-managers of SMEs should be entrepreneurially competent to identify opportunities, management uncertainty and ambiguity, and organize resources to commercialize ideas and transform them into innovative products and services (Chandler & Jansen, 1992). Moreover, in addition to the right leadership, entrepreneurial competence, and technical aspects, innovation can be understood as one of the key success factors for SME profitability and growth. Peter Drucker once said that innovation is a company's only competitive advantage because quality improvements and price reductions can be replicated, as can technology. Therefore, if a company can only have one core capability, it should be innovation (Ng & Kee, 2017). Innovation is also increasingly recognized as an important source of sustainable competitive advantage for organizations (Tseng et al., 2009). In summary, therefore, recent research shows that the following will be among the key factors for SME success and growth: transformational leadership, entrepreneurial competence, technical competence, and enterprise innovation.

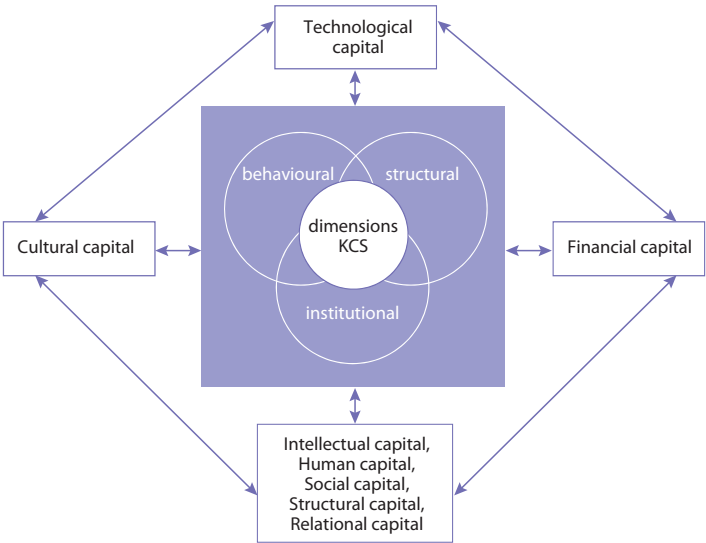
Key Success Factors for SMEs

In the literature on factors affecting the performance of SMEs, we find the perspective of so-called key success factors. The key success factors for SMEs are defined as the resources and skills in which a company invests in the market for its business and which explain most of the observed variation in value obtained and costs incurred (Grunert & Ellegard, 1992). Previous studies by international researchers show that those success factors

include managerial skills, government support, training, access to intellectual capital, marketing, market orientation, competitive pricing, human resource management, social skills, location, family, and friends (Chawla et al., 2010; Chong, 2012; Gupta & Mirchandani, 2018; Al-Tit et al., 2019). The approach that deserves special attention is the one that systematizes the success factors into two groups: individual factors and non-individual factors. Individual factors include entrepreneurial characteristics such as an owner-manager’s skills, personal characteristics, gender, and motivation, while non-individual factors refer to internal factors (marketing, the ability to compete, technology, and innovation) and external factors (limited finances, market conditions, and intense competition) (Nikolić et al., 2015).

Also noteworthy is the approach of Polish researchers—the model of key success factors by E. Skawińska and R.I. Zalewski (2016, p. 22)—it identifies four types of capital, in the form of intellectual capital (including human, social, structural, and relational capital), technological, cultural, and financial capital. The authors have demonstrated that there are feedback relationships between the indicated capitals and that three dimensions of key success factors emerge, i.e., behavioral, structural, and institutional (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Model of key success factors of Polish enterprises of the future



Source: Skawińska, E., & Zalewski, R.I. (2016). Konkurencyjność – kluczowe czynniki sukcesu przedsiębiorstw XXI wieku. *Przegląd Organizacji*, (3), 16–25.

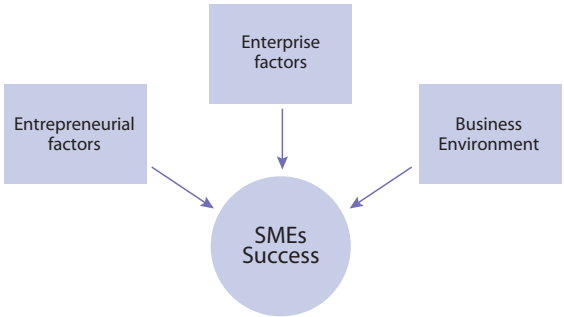
Human capital (which is a component of intellectual capital) influences the other types of capital through characteristics such as knowledge, talents, skills, perseverance, courage, and ingenuity. Human capital complemented by social values (trust, mutual understanding, and norms) creates social capital. Technological, financial, cultural, and intellectual capital are seen as opportunities for development, and their effective use is a key factor for success. Relationships, as intangible resources, contribute to the creation of relational capital, which in combination with technological and financial capital enables the realization of innovative projects in the sphere of products, technologies, or processes. Without appropriate relationships, it is difficult to build cultural capital, including in particular: trust, entrepreneurship, the level of information generated, its protection and the ability to acquire, attitudes to work, acceptance of common goals and changes, tolerance, and understanding of the future. Cultural capital built up over the years can be strengthened, weakened, or lost through opportunistic behavior resulting in the loss of trust, committed resources, or initiating the process of ending interaction (Skawińska & Zalewski, 2016).

The literature does not suggest that there is only one determinant of growth and success, but points to the multiplicity and diversity of factors (Dobbs & Hamilton, 2007; Lampadarios, 2016; Lampadarios et al., 2017; Lussier, 1995; Lussier & Halabi, 2010; Lussier & Corman, 1995; Alasadi & Abdelrahim, 2007; Félix & dos Santos, 2018; Trang, 2016). Moreover, the factors can vary considerably from region to region, country to country, and sector to sector for economic, geographical, or cultural reasons (Alasadi & Abdelrahim, 2007). In view of the determinants, it can be said that success is a multidimensional phenomenon. Both the internal factors of the company and the external factors of the company must be optimized at the same time.

Key success factors can be divided into three groups based on where they occur. The first perspective—the micro perspective—comprises aspects directly related to the managers of the business (the owner's age, gender, educational level, management experience and skills, entrepreneurial orientation, personality, prior work experience, and management skills). The next is the macro perspective—the characteristics of the business (company age and size, business networks, financial resources, customer relationship management; human capital, marketing, and strategic planning). The last group of business success factors constituting the meso perspective includes business environment factors (political environment, economic environment, socio-cultural environment, technological environment, legal and regulatory environment, ecological and environmental aspects, access to finance, advisory service, and government policies). It should be emphasized that

the issue of the success or, on the other hand, bankruptcy of businesses has not yet been sufficiently explored, and there are insufficient analyses in the area. It is due, for example, to the ambiguity of the term “bankruptcy”, as well as to the lack of reliable data and research methodology in the area (Krezymon, 2018).

Figure 3. Key success factors for small and medium-sized enterprises



Source: compiled from Gibb (2000), Rutherford et al. (2001), and Simpson et al. (2012).

Chapter 2.

Role of Intellectual Capital in Building a Corporate Advantage —Theoretical and Empirical Aspects

The aforementioned intellectual capital, which is often referred to as the wealth of an organization or the treasure of an organization, is seen as the driver of the global economy of the future which is also the key to success in the 21st century (Kaczmarek, 2005). In today's dynamic reality, the value of a company and its competitive advantage in the market are shaped by many factors, with factors based on intellectual capital becoming increasingly important. (...) (Dąbrowska, 2019). The concept of intellectual capital is increasingly known and valued. (...) Showing the essence and components of intellectual capital justifies posing the key question: why is it so important for a company? Or even putting forward a thesis that it is important. Based on such a thesis—voiced by practitioners and theoreticians alike—intellectual capital is undoubtedly an important resource for a company, determining its success in both the domestic and international markets. On the one hand, dynamically changing external conditions force companies to introduce innovative solutions, products, and services. On the other hand, only unique resources, difficult for competitors to reproduce, make it possible to achieve and strengthen their competitive advantage. High-quality intellectual capital allows companies to meet the challenges and achieve strategic goals.

Research indicates that intellectual capital is positively and significantly correlated with organizational performance, as confirmed by numerous researchers (Tan et al., 2007; Diez et al., 2010; Gigante, 2013; Isanzu, 2015). However, it is important to note that the intangible nature of intellectual capital and the multiplicity of its elements means that awareness of the importance of

intellectual capital for their development is still insufficient in many companies. Therefore, there is a need to study issues related to intellectual capital due to its direct impact on the growth of competitive advantage of enterprises (Gross-Golacka et al., 2020).

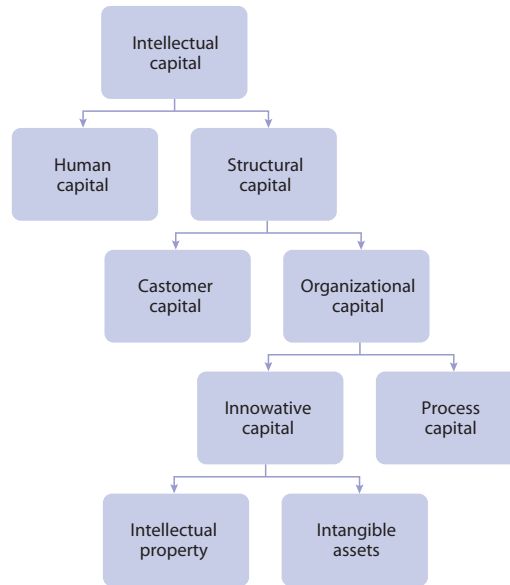
According to Roos and Roos (1997, pp. 413–426), intellectual capital is defined as a set of intangible assets (resources, capabilities, and competitiveness) that influence organizational performance and value creation. Sveiby (2008) emphasizes that: “intellectual capital and knowledge management are twin concepts—two branches of the same tree”.

Classifications of Intellectual Capital

Various classifications of intellectual capital are discussed in the literature. The most widespread concept for the division of intellectual capital is the model developed in the early 1990s by L. Edvinsson at the Swedish insurance company Skania regarded as a forerunner of intellectual capital research. The approach assumes that the market value of a company is made up of financial capital and intellectual capital, which in turn is created by human capital (representing all the intangible assets of a company that are not owned by the company, in particular: the knowledge, skills, capabilities, and experience of its employees) and structural capital (which can be owned and can be sold as a result of a company’s targeted activities) defined as “the embodiment, empowerment and supporting infrastructure of human capital. It is also an organizational capability, including the physical systems used to transfer and store intellectual material” (Edvinsson & Malone, 2001, pp. 34–35). Thus, according to the concept developed by L. Edvinsson, intellectual capital consists of human capital and structural capital.

In this model, human capital includes the knowledge, skills, as well as experience of employees which drive the development of a company. It also encompasses such employee characteristics as intelligence, creativity, the ability to share knowledge, and the ability to learn (Patalas-Maliszewska, 2010).

Structural capital, on the other hand, includes organizational structure, technical infrastructure, software, licenses, and patents, among others. It is usually the result of employees’ activities and represents what is the capacity of a company and supports the productivity of its employees. In the structure of structural capital, a distinction is made between customer-related capital called market capital and organizational capital. The former consists of a company’s image and the entirety of a company’s relations with the environment,

Figure 4. Skandia's intellectual capital model

Source: Edvinsson, L. (1997). Developing Intellectual Capital at Skandia. *Long Range Planning*, 30(3), 366–373.

e.g.: customers and their loyalty, customer relations, cooperation time, distribution channels, contracts, or license agreements. Organizational capital, on the other hand, consists of intangible assets owned by the company that are not included in the financial statements. It is “the company’s investment in systems, tools and a philosophy that accelerates the flow of knowledge within the organization and externally—to suppliers and distribution channels” (Edvinsson & Malone, 2001, p. 35). The researcher further distinguishes elements such as innovation capital (intellectual property and other non-transferable assets, the ability to renew and impact innovations in the form of protected commercial rights, intellectual property and other intangible assets used to create and quickly market new products and services (Edvinsson, 1997; Edvinsson & Malone, 2001, p. 35) and process capital (they are various types of procedures, instructions, techniques, employee programs, and work processes that result in increased and enhanced efficiency in manufacturing or service delivery, the kind of practical knowledge used in continuous value creation). The literature distinguishes between internal structural capital, organizational capital, external structural capital, and relational capital (Chomiak-Orsa, 2014, pp. 27–40). Internal structural capital comprises the technologies, methods and processes that enable a company to function.

Various approaches to the classification of intellectual capital can be found in the literature. Noteworthy are the approaches represented by Joachim Warschat, Kristiana Wagner and Ilia Hauss or Hubert Saint-Onge's value platform. The former conceptualize the components of intellectual capital and group them into two areas of capital. Namely, human and organizational capital (forming the intellectual capital of employees) and market and innovation capital (forming the intellectual capital of the company) (Warschat et al., 1999; Sveiby, 1998). Hubert Saint-Onge, on the other hand, presents an approach that identifies that the market value of a company is created through the links, flows and dependencies between the components of intellectual capital defined as human capital (employee competencies), organizational capital (organizational structure, databases, systems, and intellectual property) and customer capital (the company's links and relationships with the environment and all stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, and the local community or media) (Edvinsson, 1997; Petrash, 1996; Stewart, 2001, p. 13; Bontis & Fitz-enz, 2002, p. 629).

In general, the components of intellectual capital identified in the literature (e.g.: by Leif Edvinsson, Thomas A. Stewart, Hubert Saint-Onge, Nick Bontis, Baruch Lev et al.) are: human capital, structural capital (organizational structural capital/organizational capital), and relationship capital (relationship structural capital/customer market capital). Structural capital, on the other hand, is made up of intellectual property (innovation capital) and processes (process capital, infrastructure assets), and relationship capital is made up of customers and networks of interrelationships, i.e., relationships with suppliers as well as other collaborators and strategic partners. Thus, the basic elements of intellectual capital are human capital, intellectual property, and processes (structural capital), along with customers and networks of interrelationships (relationship capital) (Dominiak et al., 2012). Relational capital is based on relationships with the external environment, including relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, and partners.

Table 1. Classification of intellectual capital—selected concepts

Author of the concept	Components of intellectual capital
A two-component categorization of intellectual capital	
L. Edvinsson (Skandia)	• human capital • structural capital
J. Lichtarski	• personal capital • impersonal capital
A. Pietruszka-Ortyl	• social capital • organizational capital
A three-component and more categorization of intellectual capital	
H. Saint-Onge	• human capital • organizational capital • customer capital
N. Bontis	• human capital • organizational capital • relational capital
K.E. Sveiby	• human capital • internal structural capital • external structural capital
T. Stewart	• human capital • customer capital • structural capital
G. Roos, J. Roos	• human capital • organizational capital • customer capital
A. Brooking	• marketable assets • human assets • intellectual property • structural assets

Source: Edvinsson, L., & Malone, M.S. (2001). *Kapitał intelektualny*. PWN; Lichtarski, J. (Ed.). (2003). *Podstawy nauki o przedsiębiorstwie*. Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej we Wrocławiu; Gross-Golacka, E., Jefmański, B., & Spalek, P. (2019). *Kapitał intelektualny przedsiębiorstw w Polsce wybrane aspekty teoretyczne i praktyczne*. Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne; Pietruszka-Ortyl, A. (2002). Kapitał intelektualny wyznacznikiem poziomu zasobów niematerialnych przedsiębiorstwa. In W. Cieśliński (Ed.), *Przedsiębiorstwa jako świątynie wiedzy* (pp. 79–92). Wydawnictwo WWSZiP; Stewart, T.A. (1995, October 2). *Trying to grasp the intangible*. Fortune. <http://penta.ufrgs.br/edu/telelab/10/leadinge.htm>; Stewart, T.A. (2001). *The Wealth of Knowledge*. Intellectual Capital and the Twenty-First Century Organization. Nicholas Brealey Publishing; Sveiby, K.E. (1997). *The New Organizational Wealth: Managing & Measuring Knowledge-based Assets*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers; Roos, G., & Roos, J. (1997). Measuring Your Company's Intellectual Performance. *Long Range Planning*, 30(3), 413–426. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301\(97\)90260-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-6301(97)90260-0); Brooking, A. (1996). *Intellectual Capital: Core Asset for the Third Millennium Enterprise*. International Thompsons Business Press.

Intellectual Capital Components as Determinants of Company Value Creation

Taking the above into account, it can be said that intellectual capital is an intangible asset responsible for generating enterprise value (Dąbrowska, 2019). Intellectual capital creates the value of the enterprise, determines its operational and strategic performance and functioning in the market, and creates the vision of the enterprise. It is difficult to distinguish which component of intellectual capital is the most important. It can be said, however, that human capital is an important component of intellectual capital, as it determines how the other capitals will develop. The theory of intellectual capital was a kind of response of the economic world to the transition from the industrial age, based on the use of traditional factors of production, to the knowledge age. It resulted in developing new standards of management in changing competitive conditions (Kunasz, 2003, p. 285).

Importantly, intellectual capital is not just a compilation of resources from the three categories discussed but also the value created through the interplay of all its elements. Organizational capital, through computer networks, information systems, databases, patents, and others, supports the development of human capital skills and knowledge (Beyer, 2017). On another note, good relations with the environment can be a reflection of what is happening within the company. Moreover, skillful management of intellectual capital leads to increased innovation and creativity, improved relations with customers and suppliers, an improved corporate image, and a change in employees' attitudes, which will consequently contribute to the organization's efficiency and growth (Ottawa, 2011).

The value of intellectual capital can be significant. It is recognized as the most important asset of many of the world's largest and most successful companies. It is the foundation for the market dominance and continued profitability of leading corporations (King & Zeithaml, 2003). An organization's competitive position and its ability to innovate depend significantly on the intellectual capital of that entity and its ability to develop intellectual capital through knowledge management processes (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

In addition, human capital is the basis for creating the company's organizational (structural) capital. Human capital and organizational capital work together to create customer capital. At the center of all the elements of intellectual capital, which overlap, the value of the company is created (Kaczmarek, 2005, p. 321).

To emphasize the importance of relationships in the creation of corporate value, relational capital is increasingly presented as a separate, equal component of intellectual capital. Relational capital, which consists of the value of all relationships with customers and other stakeholders, is a component of a company's intangible assets (Walecka, 2016, pp. 159–161; Sokołowska-Durkalec & Jaskólska, 2018). Relational capital refers to those parts of human capital and structural capital that include relationships with stakeholders and their perceptions of the company (Walecka, 2016).

There is a strong correlation between structural capital and human capital, as it is human capital that makes it possible to build relationships with customers, as well as relationships and interactions with other companies, and the company's position on the market. This strong correlation indicates that every company should develop a system for transforming the knowledge resulting from human capital into knowledge that becomes part of structural capital and remains in the company's resources even when employees have to leave the company (Kaczmarek, 2005, p. 324).

Stewart notes that human, relationship and organizational types of capital are all interconnected. It is not enough to invest in people, systems or customers—separately. They can support each other, but they can also diminish each other (Walecka, 2016, p. 161). It is important that the structural capital created enables the development of employees' skills, thereby expanding their knowledge and transforming into human capital (Sokołowska-Durkalec & Jaskólska, 2018). A review of the concept of intellectual capital also indicates that the weakness of one component of capital—human, structural/organizational or the role of intellectual capital in shaping the image of a relational enterprise—leads to a reduction in the image value generated from the total intellectual capital.

Importance and Role of Human Capital in SMEs

The role of human capital management in an organization is very important because human capital is the knowledge and skills that employees possess that can help a company achieve its goals. Today, it is common knowledge that without human capital management, it is very difficult for an organization to achieve success and its objectives. The human factor is therefore the most important capital, as it overlaps with other elements and areas of business functioning (Wyrzykowska, 2008). It is important to bear in mind that human capital cannot be identified as the sum of the employees

employed in a given enterprise. It is true that each of them has their own individual diverse potential, which is worth exploiting in many aspects of the organization's functioning. At present, without giving the human factor its due importance and without a strategic personnel management policy, the creation of a sustainable competitive advantage through cost or investment strategies alone is difficult, often impossible, to achieve. Thus, a condition for obtaining high results in an organization is to treat its participants (people) as a strategic resource since investment in their development stimulates the entrepreneurial spirit, initiative and creativity in the company (Penc, 2007).

Examples can be found in the previously cited work published by Edvinsson and Malone (1997) or Stewart (2001). It is often said that intellectual capital is divided into three subsets: human capital, structural capital, and relational capital. There is a strong relationship between the elements, characterized by a feedback loop. From a managerial perspective, in order to create value, it is essential to link the three elements together. In this context, intellectual capital is a phenomenon of interaction, transformation, and complementarity. As such, effectiveness of one resource can improve based on investing in others. Thus, the value of an enterprise created on the basis of intellectual capital is the result of the performance of each of its sub-elements. It is therefore essential that intellectual capital is properly managed in companies, in a way that takes into account its identification, measurement, development, and protection. Structural capital includes, among others, organizational structure, technical infrastructure, software, licenses, and patents. It usually results from the actions of employees. Relational capital is based on relationships with the external environment, including relationships with customers, suppliers, competitors, and partners. There is a strong relationship between the elements of intellectual capital, characterized by a feedback loop. From a managerial perspective, it is essential to link the three elements together in order to create value. In this context, intellectual capital is a phenomenon of interaction, transformation, and complementarity.

Publications discussing the role of intellectual capital in business development can be found in the literature. One of them is a publication by Barkat et al. (2018), it focuses on the impact of different elements of intellectual capital on innovation capability and organizational performance. The authors of the paper, based on data collected from 295 large textile enterprises in Pakistan, showed significant positive direct and indirect effects of human, relational and technological capital on innovation capability and organizational performance. Ibarra Cisneros and Hernandez-Perlines (2018) tested the relationship between different components of intellectual capital

(human, organizational, technological, and relational) and organizational performance in small and medium-sized firms in the manufacturing sector in the Baja California region of Mexico. The results indicate that the four capitals have a positive impact on the organizational performance of companies. Ginesti et al. (2018) analyzed the impact of intellectual capital on the reputation and performance of Italian enterprises. The results show, among other things, that companies with a reputation score under ICA show a positive relationship between IC components and various measures of financial performance. The impact of intellectual capital on the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises is also discussed in the article by Arshad and Arshad (2018). Based on a sample of 350 enterprises, the authors of the article show that intellectual capital has a significant impact on the performance of textile enterprises in Pakistan. A study on intellectual capital was also conducted by Hamdan (2018). The study focused on analyzing the relationship between intellectual capital and accounting-based and market-based company performance. A study of 198 companies from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Bahrain indicates a relationship between intellectual capital and accounting-based performance. Sardo and Serrasqueiro (2017) noted in their study that intellectual capital plays a dominant role in increasing the wealth of European firms. Previous publications include the following: Maditinos et al. (2011), Ramezan (2011), Basuki and Kusumawardhani (2012), Mehralian et al. (2012), Komnenic and Pokrajčić (2012), Mention and Bontis (2013), Khan and Terziovski (2014), and Ozkan et al. (2017).

The literature provides arguments that intellectual capital is the so-called “hidden” source that forms an important intangible resource (Anifowose et al., 2017; Isola et al., 2020; Chiucchi et al., 2018). “Hidden” because it sums up the *de facto* human, structural and relational capital of companies, its efficient use by the organisation results in favorable impacts on company performance. It follows that the optimal use of intellectual resources can reflect the attributes of management, such as competence, skills, experience, exposure, as well as dynamism or diversity of human resources in an organization (Isola et al., 2020; Shettima & Dzolkarnaini, 2018).

Chapter 3.

Role of Intellectual Capital in SMEs in Poland —Results of an Empirical Study

The following part of the study is an attempt to present how SMEs operating in Poland perceive intellectual capital (its individual elements) from the perspective of its role in organizational development. The issue is important in view of the contemporary conditions of business operations. In today's turbulent conditions of strong competition and globalization trends, it is necessary for organizations to increase their competitiveness by focusing both on “soft” skills within their management and on intangible assets. As research shows that focusing on “hard” management skills is not enough.

The part of the monograph will present the results of the survey which was conducted by a team of researchers from the Institute of Organization and Management in Industry—ORGMASZ in May 2019 using CATI and CAWI methods on a representative group of 1,067 enterprises operating in Poland (with a minimum of 10 employees) with an assumed confidence level of 0.95 and an estimation error of 3%. A proportional selection of enterprises by voivodeship and size of enterprises measured by the number of employees was applied. The adopted sample structure also assumed differentiation of enterprises in terms of the type of activity conducted (the number of interviews conducted was proportional to the share of enterprises in particular sections of Polish Classification of Activity). The structure of the research sample was created as based on Statistics Poland data from January 2019. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the management of the enterprises surveyed (Gross-Gołącka et al., 2019).

In the measurement of the importance of each element of intellectual capital with regards to the sustainable development of enterprises, a four-level scale was used, with each level being respectively described by the

statement: “not at all important”, “unimportant”, “important”, and “very important”. In the construction of the measurement tool, it was also provided that respondents could answer “difficult to say” if they were unable to definitely determine the influence of elements of intellectual capital on the sustainable development of their enterprises. The measurement scale applied in the survey is a type of a Likert scale, a type of scale most often utilized in gathering opinions and attitudes of respondents.

Importance of Human Capital Factors for the Development of Enterprises Operating in Poland

The survey asked respondents from small, medium-sized and large enterprises about the importance of the different elements of intellectual capital for the development of the organization. As can be seen from the responses given, they were similar for all three groups of companies—with slight differences. Thus, for small enterprises operating in Poland, issues such as employee honesty (99% of responses), employee reliability (97% of responses), employee skills (95% of responses), employee involvement (95% of responses), and health (93% of responses) are very important and significant for organizational development among human capital factors. Also, the ability and willingness of employees to share knowledge and information, employee wellbeing, teamwork skills, employee satisfaction, and employee creativity and innovation are of importance to this group of companies.

Table 2. Importance of human capital factors for small business development—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Staff knowledge	1	4	4	33	58
Staff skills	1	2	2	32	63
Staff creativity and innovation	1	7	8	43	41
Employee motivation	1	2	4	44	49
Staff experience	1	3	7	44	45
Staff reliability	1	1	1	32	65
Employee integrity	1	0	1	29	69

Table 2. (cont.)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Ability to work as part of a team	0	3	7	50	40
Ability and willingness of staff to share knowledge and information	0	4	6	52	38
Employee satisfaction	1	2	5	49	43
Employee involvement	0	1	2	44	53
Employee well-being	0	4	8	52	36
Health	1	2	4	42	51

Source: own elaboration based on Gross-Golacka et al. (2019).

As far as medium-sized companies are concerned, the respondents point to the aspect of employees honesty and integrity (98% of responses), their skills (97% of responses), knowledge (60% of responses), and reliability (56% of responses) as factors of human capital important for the development of the organization. Employee satisfaction, employee wellbeing, willingness to share knowledge and information, and employee experience are also important to the stakeholders.

Table 3. Importance of human capital factors for the development of medium-sized enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Staff knowledge	0	3	4	33	60
Staff skills	0	2	1	34	63
Staff creativity and innovation	0	8	11	39	42
Employee motivation	0	1	6	46	47
Staff experience	0	6	9	50	35
Staff reliability	0	0	2	42	56
Employee integrity	0	0	3	34	63
Ability to work as part of a team	0	5	6	47	42

Table 3. (cont.)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Ability and willingness of staff to share knowledge and information	0	4	12	52	32
Employee satisfaction	0	1	5	56	38
Employee involvement	0	0	5	50	45
Employee well-being	0	5	9	54	32
Health	0	2	3	52	43

Source: own elaboration.

Large companies do not deviate from the position represented by small and medium-sized enterprises. For the companies, it is the reliability and commitment of employees (100% of responses), as well as the knowledge of employees, their skills, honesty, motivation (95% of responses) that are key factors for development. For only 63% of the respondents, employee well-being is important for the development of the company.

Table 4. Importance of human capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Staff knowledge	0	5	0	18	77
Staff skills	0	5	0	22	73
Staff creativity and innovation	0	5	0	63	32
Employee motivation	5	0	0	45	50
Staff experience	5	0	9	59	27
Staff reliability	0	0	0	68	32
Employee integrity	0	0	5	40	55
Ability to work as part of a team	0	5	5	68	22
The ability and willingness of staff to share knowledge and information	0	5	9	45	41
Employee satisfaction	5	9	5	49	32

Table 4. (cont.)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Employee involvement	0	0	0	50	50
Employee well-being	0	9	18	46	27
Health	0	9	9	50	32

Source: own elaboration.

In the case of large companies, responses differ from the given by respondents representing SMEs. For $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents, it is the experience of employees, the reliability of employees, and the health of employees that are important and very important for the development of the company. With regard to the other factors, opinions are divided.

Table 5. Importance of human capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Staff knowledge	0	25	0	75	0
Staff skills	0	0	0	75	25
Staff creativity and innovation	25	0	25	50	0
Employee motivation	0	0	50	25	25
Staff experience	25	0	0	25	50
Staff reliability	0	0	25	75	0
Employee integrity	0	0	50	50	0
Ability to work as part of a team	0	0	50	50	0
Ability and willingness of staff to share knowledge and information	25	0	25	50	0
Employee satisfaction	0	0	25	50	25
Employee involvement	0	25	25	25	25
Employee well-being	0	25	25	50	0
Health	0	25	0	75	0

Source: own elaboration.

Importance of Organizational Capital Factors for the Development of Companies Operating in Poland

Another group of questions in the research carried out concerned the respondents’ stance on the elements of organizational capital and their impact on the development of the enterprise. For small enterprises, factors related to organizational capital are to a large extent important and very important and are at the following level: technical infrastructure (85% of responses), organizational culture (84% of responses), and management processes and methods (83% of responses). Intellectual property, on the other hand, is perceived as important by 56% of entities, while 29% of small businesses consider it to be of no importance for their development.

Table 6. Importance of organizational capital factors for small business development —survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Technical infrastructure	1	6	8	54	31
Information resources/ Systems and databases	1	12	9	46	32
Intellectual property (patents, licenses, trademarks)	5	24	15	37	19
Organizational culture	1	6	9	59	25
Management processes and methods	1	7	9	53	30

Source: own elaboration.

Medium-sized enterprises have a similar perception of the components of organizational capital as small entities. In this group, technical infrastructure (91% of responses), management processes and methods (88% of responses), as well as organizational culture (84% of responses) were indicated as important and very important. Intellectual property in this group was also identified as an important factor by 61% of the companies, while 26% considered it not important for the development of the company.

Analyzing the distribution of responses given by representatives of large enterprises, one can conclude that technical infrastructure and IT resources/ systems and databases (95% of responses) are important organizational capital factors for the development of the company. Organizational culture

and management processes and methods come next (86% of responses). Intellectual property, on the other hand, was identified as a decisive factor for company growth by just over half of the respondents (95%).

Table 7. Importance of organizational capital factors for the development of medium-sized enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Technical infrastructure	0	4	5	54	37
Information resources/ Systems and databases	0	11	6	47	36
Intellectual property (patents, licenses, trademarks)	2	24	13	36	25
Organizational culture	0	6	10	51	33
Management processes and methods	0	6	6	54	34

Source: own elaboration.

Table 8. Importance of organizational capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Technical infrastructure	0	5	0	72	23
Information resources/ Systems and databases	0	5	0	63	32
Intellectual property (patents, licenses, trademarks)	0	14	32	36	18
Organizational culture	0	9	5	41	45
Management processes and methods	0	14	0	36	50

Source: own elaboration.

Taking into account the responses given by the respondents representing large entities in the analyzed scope, it should be noted that they differ from the responses given by smaller entities. For large companies, it is definitely the technical infrastructure, management processes and methods, information resources/systems and databases (100% of responses) that are important for the development of the company. And with regard to the issue

of intellectual property and organizational culture, 50% of the respondents surveyed indicated that the organizational capital factors were important for the development of the company, while the other half had no opinion on the issue.

Table 9. Importance of organizational capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Technical infrastructure	0	0	0	50	50
Information resources/ Systems and databases	0	0	0	75	25
Intellectual property (patents, licenses, trademarks)	0	0	50	25	25
Organizational culture	0	0	50	25	25
Management processes and methods	0	0	0	50	50

Source: own elaboration.

Importance of Relational Capital Factors for the Development of Companies Operating in Poland

Another area that was analyzed included relational capital factors—they were expressed through the following items: customer loyalty and satisfaction, customer participation in the creation of products/services, relations with investors, relations with research and development units, relations with suppliers, and the company’s reputation and image in the market—and their impact on the development of the company.

Based on the survey, such factors of relational capital as reputation and image of the enterprise in the market (97% of responses) as well as loyalty and satisfaction of customers (95% of responses) are very important and significant for the development of small enterprises.

According to 50% of the entities surveyed, relations with scientific and research units are a factor of no importance. Relations with investors and participation of customers in the creation of products/services are not important for 27% and 24% of the respondents, respectively.

Table 10. Importance of relational capital factors for small business development —survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Customer loyalty and satisfaction	1	1	3	34	61
Customer involvement in product/service development	4	20	17	39	20
Investor relations	8	19	11	35	27
Relationships with research institutions	15	35	16	25	9
Supplier relations	3	6	4	46	41
Reputation and market image of the company	1	1	2	28	69

Source: own elaboration.

Medium-sized enterprises considered the company's reputation and image on the market (96% of responses), customer loyalty and satisfaction (92% of responses), and relations with suppliers (83% of responses) as very important and important factors for the development of the company. According to one-fifth of the respondents, relations with suppliers and participation of customers in the creation of products/services are unimportant factors for the development of the company. Also, similarly to what was declared by representatives of small companies, 42% of the respondents perceive relations with scientific and research units as unimportant for the development of the organization, and 15% have no opinion concerning the factor.

In the case of large enterprises, the distribution of responses given to the question posed about the importance of relational capital factors for enterprise development is quite similar to that obtained for small and medium-sized companies. According to the respondents, the company's reputation and image on the market (90% of responses), customer loyalty and satisfaction (86% of responses), as well as relations with suppliers (72%) are important and very important. Participation of customers in the creation of products/services and relations with suppliers are not important for about 1/4 of the respondents. On the other hand, for only about 40% of the respondents from large companies, relations with research and development units have a significant impact on the development of the company, for the remaining 1/3 of the respondents, this factor is unimportant, and the rest have no opinion on the issue.

Table 11. Importance of relational capital factors for the development of medium-sized enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Customer loyalty and satisfaction	1	3	4	36	56
Customer involvement in product/service development	1	18	15	40	26
Investor relations	6	15	10	35	34
Relationships with research institutions	11	31	15	28	15
Supplier relations	0	9	8	44	39
Reputation and market image of the company	0	1	3	28	68

Source: own elaboration.

Table 12. Importance of relational capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Customer loyalty and satisfaction	0	9	5	50	36
Customer involvement in product/service development	0	14	22	50	14
Investor relations	5	14	23	40	18
Relationships with research institutions	5	27	32	23	13
Supplier relations	0	5	23	45	27
Reputation and market image of the company	0	5	5	40	50

Source: own elaboration.

For large companies, in the area of relational capital, relations with investors are very important (50% of responses). On the other hand, factors such as customer loyalty and satisfaction (50% of responses) and relations with suppliers (50% of responses) are rated as important. On the other hand, the respondents surveyed consider relations with scientific and research institutions to be an unimportant factor for their company development (50% of responses).

Table 13. Importance of relational capital factors for the development of large enterprises—survey results (%)

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Customer loyalty and satisfaction	0	0	25	50	25
Customer involvement in product/service development	25	0	25	25	25
Investor relations	25	0	25	0	50
Relationships with research institutions	25	50	0	25	0
Supplier relations	25	0	25	50	0
Reputation and market image of the company	0	0	50	25	25

Source: own elaboration.

Taking into account the responses given by large companies, customer loyalty and satisfaction is the factor that most respondents consider important for the growth of their company (75% of responses).

Chapter 4.

Human Resource Diversity and the Building of Intellectual Capital in Organizations

In today's dynamic and rarely stable environment of fierce competition and globalization trends, increasing one's competitiveness is a prerequisite for business growth. Society is changing rapidly and demographic changes in the world, in Europe, and in Poland have the potential to affect many aspects of organizational management. G. Mulgan (2009) believes that three factors will determine the shape of the future economy: ecology, globalization, and demography. Confirmation of the thesis does not require long and meticulous observations, as it is now a fact (Gross-Gołacka, 2018b). One of the significant challenges facing modern organizations today is related to the changes taking place in the available human resources. Thus, the diverse external and internal environment requires organizations to take measures to adapt to the circumstances. In addition to the transfer and use of modern technology, it is necessary to focus on both soft skills in management and intangibles. As the experience of organizations shows, focusing on hard skills in management is no longer sufficient. Maximizing diversity and benefiting from it in an organization are important issues for today's quality of management and not only human resource management (Gross-Gołacka, 2016).

Diversity of Human Resources in an Organization

In addition, it seems that the new (current) management paradigm essentially revolves around teamwork and continuous learning within the framework of experience on the basis of analysis of actions taken, which fits in with the concept of diversity management. It also revolves around improved communication,

integration, collaboration, as well as closer interaction and partnership with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Considering the above, the creation of added value, innovation, integration, and teamwork should be considered a useful principle leading to the shaping of a new organizational environment—one that is open to diversity. Regardless of the motives of managers when deciding to use the diversity paradigm in relation to an organization's human resources, benefits of introducing diversity management are encouraging enough to expect dissemination of the concept and practices in this regard (Urbaniak, 2014). However, not all employers are aware of the many opportunities created by diversity management. The skillful management of employees' talents and their potential resulting from diversity, for example, can be an opportunity for a company to build its market position and competitive advantage on the market (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2019).

Diversity should be understood as a mixture of many factors of both differences and similarities that employees bring to an organization. It is a range of different categories of characteristics. The characteristics include age, gender, (dis)ability, race, ethnicity, religion, but also education level, family structure, position, geographical location, style, and values, hence visible and invisible characteristics. The approach shows that diversity cannot be easily defined in terms of a closed catalogue of characteristics. There is a great deal of variability and diversity. The result of the diversity in an organization is a valuable differentiated team contributing, among other things, to diverse experiences, different points of view that foster cooperation, creative problem solving, innovation, and creativity (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2019). In view of such a definition, diversity is undoubtedly counted among the so-called intangible assets of a company, as it builds an organization's intellectual capital. It is worth mentioning that, according to Kaplan and Norton (2004), value creation through intangible assets is indirect and results from interrelated relationships, causes, and consequences. The intangible assets of an organization are also very often linked to tangible assets that do not create value on their own. In view of the argumentation put forward in such a way, and in the age of knowledge economy, it is advisable to adopt the perspective where employees should not be viewed solely through the prism of costs. The important role of their knowledge and competences should be recognized as a very valuable component of intellectual capital, capable of creating profit as well as directly determining a company's competitiveness. The following part of the monograph therefore aims to highlight diversity management as a concept that can have an impact on the quality of intellectual capital in an organization and to show some synergies between two real and contemporary concepts—intellectual capital management and diversity management, both from a theoretical and empirical point of view.

Returning to the issue of diverse human resources in an organization, an analysis of the literature and practitioners’ experiences allows us to observe that the implementation of the diversity management concept makes it possible to achieve positive effects at the organizational, group, or individual level (Rakowska, 2021), which can improve the operational result in the short and medium term and the strategic assets of the company in the long term (Morrone et al., 2022; European Commission, 2003; Post & Byron, 2019; Gross-Golacka, 2018a). Thus, it appears that diversity in an organization has many advantages, including from a macroeconomic perspective, contributing to increased productivity, increased innovation and creative action, or to the conquest of new markets and persistence in the existing ones. On the other hand, improving goods and services to customers, attracting talent from the widest possible pool of potential employees, or reducing staff shortages and turnover are benefits from a micro perspective (Sonnenschein, 1997). Effects of diversity management measures need to be considered comprehensively, as many of the effects are often interconnected. Nevertheless, the literature and practitioners pay attention to the perspective of the place of impact and the perspective of time in achieving them. A summary of the resulting benefits of implementing diversity management concepts from the perspective of when they are achieved is presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Benefits of implementing diversity management concepts from the perspective of when they are achieved

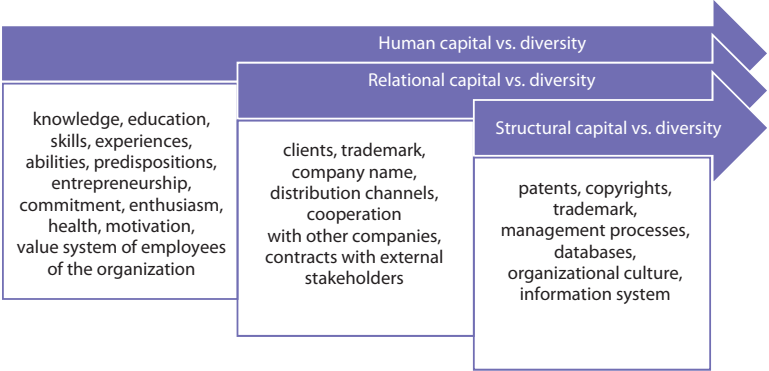
Benefits of implementing diversity management concepts	
Short-term	Long/medium term
• Impact on talent management • Increased innovation and creativity • Developing a culture based on tolerance • Strengthening the company’s external image and credibility among customers and business partners • Good reputation among employees • Ensuring loyalty from employees, customers, and business partners • Better understanding of phenomena occurring within the organization • Creating a diverse environment to facilitate learning and exchange of experiences • Increased organizational flexibility • Breaking patterns and routines	• Reaching out to new groups of candidates in the labor market • Increasing the ability to recruit and retain talent • Entering new markets • Development of new products and services • Better response to the needs of diverse (new) customers • Ability to reach a larger audience for products and services • Better response to the needs of diverse (current) customers • Reducing costs associated with staff turnover and absenteeism • Reducing lawsuits and legal costs

Source: own elaboration based on Gross-Golacka (2019).

Relationship Between Intellectual Capital and Diversity Management

Previous reflections and studies by other researchers underline the existence of economic benefits derived from implementing the concept of diversity management. When considering the components of intellectual capital—human capital, relational capital, and structural capital—some common elements with the concept of diversity management can be observed. Diversity benefits in the form of creating a rich talent pool and attracting the best talent with broad knowledge are aspects that undoubtedly create human capital. Increasing creativity among employees and supporting innovation can be seen as a matter of building commitment and pro-entrepreneurial attitudes. And, finally, increasing know-how and multicultural management can be seen from a structural capital perspective. The above-mentioned observations allow us to see that there is a link between the concept of diversity management and the elements of intellectual capital in an organization. It means that the benefits that an organization can achieve from diversity management are linked to intellectual capital and its quality (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Elements of intellectual capital versus elements of the diversity management concept



Source: own elaboration based on Jelínková and Jirincová (2015).

In essence, in the 21st century, under the conditions of volatility in the modern world, there has emerged an urgent need to take a broader look at the most important resource of organizations, namely people and human capital characterized by competence, subjectivity, and responsibility. Companies today, while setting one of the most important goals related to the creation of their

value, at the same time point to the growing role of intangible resources and the increasing importance of the concept of intellectual capital (Czerniachowicz, 2016). Today, success is based not on carefully structured processes of action, but on adaptability, the speed of decision-making, the use of intuition and acceptance of risk (Skrzypek, 2011). Over the last few years, an increasing awareness of the importance of an organization's intangible resources in building its market position can be observed both in the global academic literature and in business practice (Mansion & Bausch, 2020). Resource-based theory argues that a company's intangible assets are important in determining its success (Sulistyo & Ayuni, 2020).

Results of numerous studies carried out in the problem area clearly indicate that intangible resources are currently a key issue in the process of building the market value of the analyzed business entities.

According to the European Commission (2003), implementation of a diversity management policy is a form of investment in intangible assets, especially in human capital and organizational structure. Researchers confirm that decisions on investment in intangible assets are one of the most important sources of competitiveness for a modern organization, based on economic knowledge (Blair & Kochan, 2000; Lev, 2001). Today, investors are also placing greater emphasis on monitoring non-financial factors. As T. Oleksyn (2014) notes, values of intellectual capital, product reputation or satisfaction are important values for owners. Research evidence suggests that human capital is considered by investors as one of the most important forms of intangible assets (Bassi et al., 2000).

This, in turn, helps to create a potentially supportive environment among investors for diversity programs. There is ample evidence that the most successful organizational diversity initiatives have resulted in some intangible benefits, and their scope is very broad, which only confirms the existing relationship between intellectual capital and diversity management (Hubbard, 2003; Jelínková & Jiřincová, 2015). Researchers from several countries undertake analyses on the relationship between diversity of human resources in an organization—obviously from the perspective of different dimensions—and intangible resources including intellectual capital. For example, Chinese researchers show a significant relationship between gender diversity and intellectual capital performance (Nadeem et al., 2017). Canadian researchers in a sample of 4,008 companies studied between 2002 and 2020 observed that gender diversity was positively related to financial performance, confirming that a diversified board of directors improves board effectiveness and provides new resources to the company to improve its performance. More interestingly, studies show that the relationship between gender diversity and

performance is more pronounced for the mediating role of intellectual capital (Ouni et al., 2022). Other studies show that gender diversity in organizations positively influences employee performance issues (Dezsö & Ross, 2012), supports creativity and innovation (Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2007; Low et al., 2015), and can support market and customer sharing activities (Daily et al., 1999). In light of the above considerations, it is possible to identify some intangibles that have to do with the diversity of human resources and their effective management. Namely: cost reduction, headcount reduction, access to new markets, increased efficiency in current markets, access to talent pools, stress reduction, reduced employee absenteeism, reduced employee turnover, reduced complaints and lawsuits, improved communication, increased motivation levels, decreased conflict levels, improved teamwork quality, global management agility, increased innovation and creativity, improved reputation in the environment (e.g.: political) and among stakeholders, improved marketing image, and cultural values.

Benefits of Diversity Management in the Light of Empirical Research

The following section of the publication cites selected results of research that was carried out in the first half of 2019 as part of the research activities of the Łukasiewicz Research Network—ORGMA SZ Institute for Organization and Management in Industry (Gross-Gołącka et al., 2019), as mentioned. One aspect that has been analyzed is the opinions of companies on the benefits that the creation of a diverse workplace and the management of the diversity it can bring. In general, the overwhelming number of companies surveyed note that diversity management brings numerous benefits, and the distributions of responses are quite similar for all organizations regardless of their size. Thus, large companies with 250 to 999 employees, when asked what benefits diversity management can bring, gave the following responses: increased motivation (82%), improved quality and effectiveness of teamwork (77%), increased commitment (73%), improved communication between employees (73%), and talent acquisition and retention (68%). Among the least significant benefits were increased employee retention (41%) and reduced stress (55%).

Table 15. Benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization by company size (large)—survey results (%)

Type of benefit	Yes	No	Difficult to say
Increased motivation	82	5	14
Improving the quality and effectiveness of teamwork	77	9	14
Improving communication between employees	73	14	14
Increased commitment	73	5	23
Talent acquisition and retention	68	9	23
Fewer conflicts	59	9	32
Stress reduction	55	18	27
Increased staff retention	41	18	41

Source: own elaboration.

The medium-sized companies with between 50 and 249 employees also note that diversity in the organization can result in numerous benefits. This group of companies pointed to the following benefits: improved quality and effectiveness of teamwork (82%), improved communication between employees (81%), increased motivation (81%), and increased commitment (81%). A slightly smaller group of the respondents, although also significant, saw an increase in employee retention (58%).

Table 16. Benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization by company size (medium)—survey results (%)

Type of benefit	Yes	No	Difficult to say
Improving the quality and effectiveness of teamwork	82	9	9
Improving communication between employees	81	9	9
Increased motivation	81	10	9
Increased commitment	81	6	13
Talent acquisition and retention	78	11	11
Fewer conflicts	72	15	13
Stress reduction	72	14	15
Increased staff retention	58	18	24

Source: own elaboration.

Table 17. Benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization by company size (small)—survey results (%)

Type of benefit	Yes	No	Difficult to say
Improving communication between employees	87	7	7
Improving the quality and effectiveness of teamwork	85	6	9
Increased motivation	85	7	9
Increased commitment	84	6	10
Fewer conflicts	79	10	12
Stress reduction	75	13	12
Talent acquisition and retention	74	13	13
Increased staff retention	62	19	19

Source: own elaboration.

The responses given by respondents representing small enterprises do not differ from those representing large and medium-sized enterprises. Among the benefits of diversity management, small businesses indicated: improved communication between employees (87%), improved quality and effectiveness of teamwork (85%), increased motivation (86%), increased commitment (84%), and reduced conflicts (79%). Slightly less important for small companies is an increase in employee retention (62%), with the rest the same as for the medium and large companies surveyed.

Results of the research clearly show that companies of all sizes perceive the benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization, and they mainly include improved communication between employees, improved quality and effectiveness of teamwork, and increased motivation and commitment. The analyses conducted also reviewed perceptions of the benefits of diversity management from the perspective of the PACs represented by specific companies. Again, no significant differences were found. Improved communication between employees appears to be the most important for the following industries: Agriculture, forestry, hunting, and fishing (86%), Manufacturing (86%), Transport and storage (89%), Accommodation and food service activities (91%), as well as Professional, scientific, and technical activities (81%). In contrast, improving quality and team effectiveness received the most responses in the industries of Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, including motorbikes (88%), Information and communication (84%), Administrative and support

activities (100%), as well as Arts, entertainment and recreation activities (95%). The results also indicate that an increase in motivation (82%) is the most significant benefit for companies in the Financial and Insurance Activities industry. For the Information and Communication and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation industries, talent acquisition and retention (82% and 85%, respectively) emerged as one of the most important benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization.

The selected research results presented above unequivocally confirm that small, medium-sized, and large enterprises operating in Poland perceive numerous benefits that can be derived from implementing diversity management. This conclusion fills us with great optimism and shows that the issues of creating diverse teams and benefiting from their value are not alien to companies operating in Poland. On the other hand, however, when we analyze, for example, what companies are actually doing to create diversity in their organizations, the findings are not so optimistic. It makes it possible to formulate a postulate that there is a need for awareness-raising activities concerning the role of diversity in organizations and societies. A major role can also be played by training and education activities for all employees in an organization (including managers) to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices along with all manifestations of discrimination and unequal treatment in the workplace and to promote the concept of diversity management. It is equally important to pay attention to the benefits that an organization can gain from attracting, retaining, and using diverse human resources in the organization to skillfully build a competitive advantage. The activities should be addressed at least to future and current managers. A well-defined rationale (business/social/ethical) is an important element for the implementation of diversity management in an organization and should be kept in mind when building a case for it and making changes. It is worth emphasizing that there are several motives for implementing strategies and practices that support diversity. They range from ethical and social justice issues, legislative requirements, existing market rules to strictly economic benefits for an organization. It seems, therefore, that in order to gain the attention of leaders/managers and achieve real benefits from implementing and managing diversity in an organization, a business case needs to be made comprehensive and understood by all participants in the process. The issues are closely linked both to the vision and mission, but also to the leadership philosophy. Thus, taking into account the above-discussed research results on the perception and perceived benefits of diversity management in companies operating in Poland and the rather multifaceted matter of inclusion and diversity policy, there is still a lot to be done on the analyzed topic—if only to disseminate the concept among organizations operating in Poland.

**Role and Impact of Individual Diversity Elements/
Characteristics on the Level of Intellectual Capital
—Selected Empirical Findings**

The role and impact of individual diversity elements/characteristics on the level of intellectual capital is another area that was analyzed in the empirical study presented above. In the following part of the study, the respondents surveyed expressed their opinions on how the individual dimensions of diversity in employee teams (age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, physical appearance, and marital status) affect the level of intellectual capital in a company. The distribution of responses given by small, medium-sized, and large companies varied in some ways. However, the companies’ surveys—regardless of their size—indicate that age is, in their opinion, the most important characteristic that affects the level of intellectual capital in an organization. Thus, more than half of the small companies surveyed perceive age as an important (44%) and very important (7%) dimension in the creation of a company’s intellectual level as along with disability (25%). For 18% of respondents, gender is also an important dimension in the context analysis. Other dimensions such as marital status (86%), physical appearance (74%), sexual orientation (83%), religion (82%), and race (80%) are not important in building their company’s intellectual capital according to the respondents surveyed.

Table 18. Impact of organizational human resource diversity on intellectual capital levels by company size (small 10–49 employees)—survey results (%)

Dimension of diversity	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Very important
Age	5	31	13	44	7
Disability	8	50	17	23	2
Gender	11	60	11	15	3
Physical appearance	12	62	12	12	1
Ethnic origin	13	65	15	6	1
Race	13	67	14	5	1
Religion	14	68	13	4	0
Marital status	16	70	10	4	0
Sexual orientation	15	68	13	3	0

Source: own elaboration.

As far as medium-sized companies are concerned, those with 50 to 249 employees are of the opinion that age (55%), disability (25%), and gender (20%) are the dimensions that have an impact on building the quality of human resources in the company. The other dimensions, as in the case of small companies, are unimportant or not at all important.

Table 19. Impact of organizational human resource diversity on intellectual capital levels by company size (medium 50–249 employees)—survey results (%)

Dimension of diversity	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Definitely important
Age	2	26	16	48	7
Disability	9	49	18	23	2
Gender	9	56	14	17	3
Physical appearance	15	64	14	7	1
Ethnic origin	13	63	18	6	1
Race	13	63	19	5	1
Sexual orientation	18	64	14	4	0
Marital status	19	67	11	4	0
Religion	18	64	16	3	0

Source: own elaboration.

And in the case of large companies, those with between 250 and 999 employees, only age (60%) and gender (23%) were found to be important and to influence the quality of intellectual capital. A large number of the respondents surveyed indicated a response of “difficult to say” for most characteristics.

Results of the research presented above show that small, medium-sized, and large companies operating in Poland perceive only basic differences between employees (age, disability, and gender). According to the majority of the companies surveyed—regardless of the size of the company—characteristics such as national and ethnic origin, cultural differences, race, religion, or talents have no significant impact on building their intellectual capital.

Taking into account the theoretical considerations to date, as well as the results of our own research, it should be clearly emphasized that the changes taking place around organizations, including, for example, demographic

trends, are not without significance for the labor market, the consumption market, and jobs. It means that the inevitability of changes in the supply of human resources is a major challenge facing organizations globally, in Europe, and in Poland. A situation in which the employer must, as it were, “adapt” to the diversity of employees and customer needs seems likely to be the scenario in the near future. It means challenges in attracting and retaining employees and many challenges related to an employer image, career paths, recruitment, or communication. Changes in labor market supply will tend to push businesses to seek talented employees among groups that are currently less economically active, such as people over 50, women, people with disabilities, foreigners, or people characterized by different cultures. It will entail adapting working conditions to the requirements of particular social groups (e.g.: providing work-life reconciliation solutions, adapting workplaces to the requirements of people with disabilities, introducing a foreign language into company communication, or taking into account various dietary needs).

Table 20. Impact of organizational human resource diversity on intellectual capital levels by company size (large 250–999 employees)—survey results (%)

Dimension of diversity	Not at all important	Unimportant	Difficult to say	Important	Definitely important
Age	0	27	14	55	5
Gender	14	41	23	23	0
Ethnic origin	14	41	36	9	0
Disability	14	32	45	9	0
Marital status	9	50	32	9	0
Race	18	45	32	5	0
Religion	14	45	36	5	0
Sexual orientation	14	45	41	0	0
Physical appearance	14	55	32	0	0

Source: own elaboration.

Therefore, having a diverse workforce will be a logical outcome, not to say an obligation, which, of course, will also bring new challenges that will have to be managed. As for its many benefits, it will, for example, enrich the decision-making process with new competencies or make it possible to profile products/services to customer groups. The analysis provides arguments that

today no organization should overlook the aspect of diversity of customers, suppliers, shareholders, and, ultimately, employees—if it wants to successfully realize its vision (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2019). Organizations that want to gain a competitive advantage in the future should take care of their employees, engage socially, care for the environment, respect consumers, and have an open dialogue with them, which seems to require viewing the concept of diversity management as a strategic issue in the area of intellectual capital building. It seems necessary to continue research on identifying and finding ways to integrate the benefits and components of diversity into the different parts of intellectual capital and its drivers. From the point of view of the proposed analysis, it can be concluded that the diversity of human capital and its effective management can be a stimulator for the development of the intellectual capital of organizations. It is, therefore, necessary to pay more attention to human resource management systems and, above all, personnel strategies in favor of, for example, age management or diversity policies, as the authors discuss later in the publication.

Chapter 5.

Human Resources Management in Polish SMEs —Results of Empirical Research

Pocztowski (2018) writes that “human resources management includes shaping strategies, processes, structures and tools supporting the achievement of high work efficiency and improving the quality and value of human capital as a source of generating value for shareholders”. At the same time, he points out that “people are not a resource, but a subject in the work process, the owner and administrator of resources of knowledge, skills, abilities, health and behavior that contribute to the functioning of the organization by providing work in various organizational and legal forms” (Pocztowski, 2018). Organizations as open systems are in constant interaction with the environment. It implies an approach to human resources, because they are different from other resources, and their management is sometimes described as “a strategic, integrated and coherent approach to the employment, development and well-being of people employed in the organization” (Armstrong, 2009). The overriding place in human resources management is occupied by the *Human Resources (HR)* philosophy, defined as the values and principles adopted by managers in the process of shaping the strategy understood as the direction of management. By choosing the right direction, organizations can efficiently and effectively manage employees, including: attracting them, rewarding them, training and creating development opportunities, ensuring appropriate conditions and shaping employment relationships (Warwas & Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2016). Thus, a number of (sub)functions of human resource management can be listed, from entering the organization to leaving it: analysis and planning of human resources; recruitment, selection, adaptation; motivating and rewarding, assessing and developing human resources, personnel controlling.

Among the areas of human resource management that have been developing dynamically and still have a significant development potential, international human resource management should be mentioned. Similarities and differences across countries and regions, as well as cross-cultural human resource management, are gaining in importance. Important issues in the area include processes of mobility and expatriation or diversity in employment (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

Recently, the analysis of human resources management in the context of *sustainability has gained importance*. Sustainable human resources management is a theoretical construct encompassing a holistic approach to human resource management policies and practices used in the process of acquiring, developing and retaining employees to ensure that the organization achieves its current and future economic, social and environmental goals. The features characterizing the approach include: subjective treatment of people in the work process, activity in the area of corporate social responsibility, demonstrating environmental awareness in personnel policy, developing highly effective work systems, strengthening trust as the basis for shaping social relations in work processes, “green” competences. Taking into account the economic dimension of HRM, the following issues can be identified, such as *performance management*, building commitment or rationalization of labor costs. In turn, the social dimension includes: creating an adapted work environment, ensuring work-life balance, developing well-being and a healthy organization. The environmental dimension is characterized by activities such as: building environmental awareness among employees and involving them in projects related to environmental protection, or developing “green” teams and “green” leadership (Pocztowski et al., 2021).

Ongoing demographic changes and global population ageing require organizations to pay special attention to their employment policies, including age management (Warwas et al., 2017). With working life extension and age management increasingly included in discussions about reactive versus proactive personnel policies, special importance is given to the term “generativity” as an approach to managing a generationally diverse workforce (Wiktorowicz, Warwas, Turek & Kuchciak, 2022), intergenerational transfer of knowledge or coaching and mentoring. Extending working life by supporting the balance between care duties and work among old persons is gaining importance (Wiktorowicz, Warwas & Szukalski, 2022).

Information About Research

The results of the analyses presented in the chapter are a slice of an extensive diagnosis of management in Polish small and medium-sized enterprises. It was carried out at the turn of 2016 and 2017 as one of the stages of the STAY project, supporting economic activity of people 50+ in the enterprise. A healthy and motivated employee—satisfied employer (*STAY. SupportiNg ActiviTY for people 50+ in the company. A healthy and motivated employee—satisfied employer*), co-financed by EU funds under the European Social Fund. Field research was conducted using the CATI technique (telephone-assisted questionnaire interviews) by a professional research company between November 2016 and January 2017 among small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland ($n = 1000$). The CATI survey assumptions adopted made it possible to obtain nationally representative results—the sample was randomly selected and its structure corresponds to the structure of the population of small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland. The participants of the study were persons responsible for HR policy in small and medium-sized enterprises, i.e., representatives of HR departments, owners/presidents/directors of enterprises or other persons indicated by them as competent in the field of age management in a given company, i.e., having knowledge of HR policy as well as tools and processes of HR management in a given enterprise.

Certain assumptions were made in the research to ensure that data on human resource management processes were obtained. By design, the research was to cover the SME sector. Due to the underdeveloped management processes in the smallest entities, with up to 9 employees, it was decided to limit the surveyed population in the quantitative study to small and medium-sized enterprises.¹ The structure of the sample reflects the structure of the population so defined, with small enterprises accounting for 83.4% ($n = 834$) and medium-sized enterprises for 16.6% ($n = 166$). The enterprises surveyed came from all provinces of Poland, with 8.5% being public entities and 91.5% non-public ones. Also, according to PKD, the structure of enterprises was diversified (adequate to the structure of the entire population), and the most numerous were entities representing manufacturing and industrial production (28.1%), wholesale and retail trade (23.8%), construction (7.8%), other service activities (7.1%), transport and storage (5.3%), as well as professional, scientific, and technical activities (3.9%).

¹ The initiators of this study were the co-authors of the monograph, Izabela Warwas and Justyna Wiktorowicz, who were also involved in the conception of the study, its implementation, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the results.

In most (96%) of the entities surveyed, the majority (a minimum of 2/3) of employees are employed under an employment contract. In 3.1%, the majority of employees are employed based on a civil law contract, but this is a relatively stable group, six of the entities surveyed usually cooperate with external experts or subcontractors, commissioning tasks as needed, and three usually cooperate with temporary employment agencies. On average, those were companies that had been in operation for about 22 years (with standard deviation $STD = 13.5$ years) at the time of the survey, and half of them had been in operation for 20.5 years.

Nearly half of the respondents were unable or unwilling to state the amount of their company's annual turnover in the previous year. Turnover between 0.5 and 10 million PLN was declared by 30% of SMEs, up to 100,000 PLN by 5%, 100–500,000 PLN by 10%, over 10 million PLN by 9%, and 0.5% of the entities analyzed had no turnover or did not exist yet in the year preceding the survey. When assessing their condition, 44% of SMEs indicated average liquidity and 42% high liquidity (5% low), 58% indicated average profitability of sales and 25% high profitability of sales (6% low), while half of SMEs indicated average innovation and 23% high innovation (14% low). The level of indebtedness of nearly half (47%) of the entities was low. It was average in the case of 4% is, and high in the case of just under 6%.

Staff turnover, measured as the ratio of the total number of employees who left the organization during the year to date and the total number of employees currently employed by the organization, was relatively low, as departures accounted for 11% on average. For half of the companies, it was no more than 6.3% (with a strong variation— $STD = 18\%$, as well as the skewness of the distribution—the skewness coefficient of 3.6 indicates the existence of entities with unusually high employee turnover—the maximum reaches as much as 150%, although 100% or more applies to only 1% of entities, and for 94% of the companies surveyed the turnover rate does not exceed 1/3). Fluctuation, measured by a modified indicator, i.e., as the ratio of the total number of employees who left the organization in the last year and the average number of employees hired in the last year (cf. Balcerek-Wieszala, 2011, p. 178), reaches 1.08 on average, which indicates that departures took place more often than hiring (although the median equals 1, so in the case of half of the companies it is a balanced situation or an excess of departures over hiring is observed). Here, too, the variation is high ($SD = 0.86$), and there are also organizations with unusually high turnover, manifesting itself in a significant excess of departures over hires (the maximum is as high as 6, and this excess was observed for as many as two-thirds of the entities).

Employees 50+ make up an average of 23% of the total workforce in the companies surveyed (for half of the companies surveyed, it was at least 20%, and for 25%, it was at least 33%), with a fairly strong variation of approximately 18 percentage points. The characteristics of the companies surveyed discussed above will, of course, determine the approach to age management in the workplace.

While providing the general characteristics of the study, let us also note that the objectives of the study were slightly broader than those adopted in this monograph, which determined the adopted definition of the population—the study covered small and medium-sized enterprises employing employees aged 50 and more. It made it possible to obtain a sample of entities with a generationally diverse employment structure—as results from previous research (Kryńska et al., 2013). Among Polish SMEs, approximately 40% of entities do not employ people aged 50+ (the adopted sample selection criteria therefore made it possible to avoid too large a number of entities not employing the *baby boomers generation*, which would make it difficult to assess all generations from the perspective of their functioning in the studied entities). The adopted approach makes it possible to assess the actual observations of their own employees by their employers, and not only the use of common opinions about older employees.

Age Management—Functional Dimension

Companies may use different configurations of HRM architecture as part of a broader organizational architecture (Nadler et al., 1992). Architecture is “applied art”, consumed by “ordinary people”. It sets the framework (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Lepak & Snell, 2002) for organizational life, not what that life should look like. With regard to HRM, we can talk about the HRM architecture understood as a configuration of HRM functions (functional approach), HRM operators (institutional) and HRM tools (instrumental), which should be established in order to create value for customers, employees, shareholders and the whole society (Ludwiczynski, 2005, p. 3). This issue is important in the context of the organization’s human resource management policy (Warwas, 2019) perceived comprehensively, including the social and labor spheres (Matuszewska-Kubicz & Warwas, 2023).

Within the realm of the modern management the function and rank of intangible resources are constantly growing in the era of intensive development of the economy pushed by knowledge. (Koźmiński & Piotrowski, 2007). Recognized as primary in relation to the material ones, intangible resources

are perfectly flexible in the meaning that they can be transformed into any material resource and for this reason they are the most important in the contemporary world (Koźmiński & Jemielniak, 2008, p. 110). Moreover, intangible and material resources’ distinguishing qualities also comprise a contributing factor here: (1) intangible resources may be used in many places at the same time whereas material resources can only be used in the place of their location; (2) the development of intangible resources involves a substantial amount of time; (3) the intangible resources’ trade is hindered; (4) intangible resources and skills do not depreciate in the course of their performance, on the contrary, they are enriched while being used (Marek & Białasiewicz, 2011, p. 133). Considering all the above enlisted issues, the fact that Polish employers from the SME sector asked about their greatest asset point to intangible resources is nothing but optimistic, however, due to the size of the surveyed enterprises, no statistically significant differences could be observed (Table 21).

Table 21. Resources of the enterprise and the employment size (% , n = 1000)

Specification	Total	Employment size (p = 0.512)		Form of ownership (p = 0.079)	
		10 to 49	50 to 249	Public	Private
Our assets are primarily intangible resources, such as expert knowledge of employees, patents and inventions	71.2	70.7	73.5	62.4	72.0
Our assets are primarily material resources, e.g. owned buildings, land, equipment, etc.	28.8	29.3	26.5	37.6	28.0

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test (excluding the “I don’t know” response);
* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on SME CATI survey (STAY project).

Only less than one third of enterprises perceive their competitive advantage in material resources (29%), moreover, the workforce size as well as the ownership form do not significantly differentiate the assessment. The feature of business resources seems to a certain extent affect their use of modern technology. Interestingly, through its rapid growth, information and communication technology provides organizations with solutions useful in terms of not only devices (computer, communication, network, data transmission and as well as office equipment) but also services (software, telecommunication and IT services). The research has shown that small and medium-sized Polish enterprises commonly employ technological

achievements to a large extent. Most companies have developed their own website (about 86%), built an internal computer network (about 75%) and used specialized computer programs (about 73%) (Table 22).

Table 22. Use of new technologies by ownership and size of firms (n = 1000)

Specification		Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p	public	private	p
Owns website	Yes	85.6	84.5	91.0	0.038*	88.2	85.4	0.511
	No	14.1	15.1	9.0		11.8	14.3	
	I don't know	0.3	0.4	0.0		0.0	0.3	
Has an internal computer network	yes	74.7	71.5	91.0	<0.001*	80.0	74.2	0.092
	no	24.6	27.7	9.0		16.5	25.4	
	I don't know	0.7	0.8	0.0		3.5	0.4	
Uses specialized IT programs	yes	72.8	69.7	88.6	<0.001*	83.5	71.8	0.040*
	no	23.9	26.6	10.0		15.3	24.7	
	I don't know	3.3	3.7	1.2		1.2	3.5	

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" responses);

* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Organizations differentiate in terms of the employment size. Based on the obtained results, the companies appear to be open to new technologies. Furthermore, larger entities oftener use advanced technologies. From the SMEs' ownership form point of view, significant differences were diagnosed only in relation to the use of specialized computer programs—public entities are undeniably more likely to reach for them (around 84%) than non-public entities (around 72%)—Table 22.

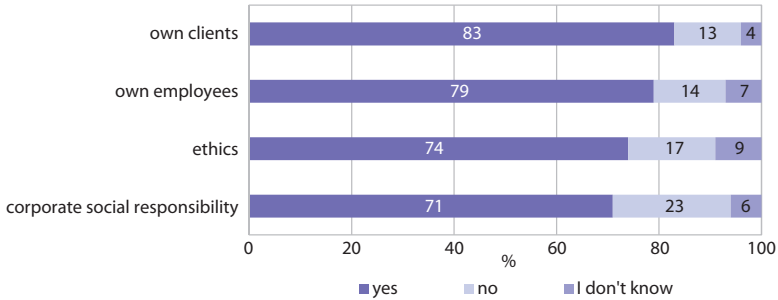
Strongly related to the above issues, the idea of gaining and sustaining competitive advantage also clearly affects strategic management which comprises creating and implementing action plan. The plan, in turn, has its roots in the vision of the enterprise founder, owner and/or its top management. What is more, each organization has a relatively constant pattern of action, a set of certain permanent rules or ways to respond to the emerging and anticipated changes in the environment. Nearly half of the surveyed enterprises have an established development strategy—17% in the form of an official document, 30% in the form of unwritten guidelines. More than a half of the organizations operating

in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector have no precise development strategy—54% of the surveyed companies pointed to the absence of such a document. As it can be expected, this is oftener the case of small (57%) rather than medium-sized enterprises (34%) (the chi-square test of independence with $p < 0.001^*$). In the case of about 15% of the former it takes the form of an official document and in the case of 28% it remains unwritten whereas in the latter it is 27% and 39%, respectively. Moreover, the form of the ownership of the enterprise is also important in this respect ($p = 0.042^*$), yet, the differences refer here primarily to the versatile degree of its formalization—22% of public entities in the possession of the written strategy and 19% of the unwritten while considering non-public entities, it is 16% and 31%, respectively.

The development strategy constitutes the basis for the preparation of functional action programs or (sub)strategies with the personnel strategy being one of the most important. Due to the subject matter of the project the personnel strategy comprises our area of interest. Compared with the development strategy, even a smaller percentage of companies can demonstrate the personnel strategy established in the form of an official document, only 10% of companies, or in the unwritten form, 17% of the studied entities. The vast majority of enterprises, 73%, have no personnel strategy. From the proactive age management in the organization point of view such a distribution of responses inspires everything but optimism. Human resources strategy contributes to achieving the organization's goals through the people employed in it and thus it has its own contribution to the company's strategy, but at the same time the development strategy functions as its justification. Personnel strategy was significantly more often ($p < 0.001^*$) developed by medium-sized (18% have it in written form, 32% in an unwritten) than small enterprises (9% and 14% respectively), as well as by public (18% written personnel strategy and 22% the unwritten) than private entities (10% and 16% respectively) ($p = 0.014^*$).

The development as well as the personnel strategy are inextricably linked to the enterprise's mission which can be broadly understood as the reason justifying the existence of the company. Only 42% of the analyzed companies have developed a mission—this applies to over a half of medium-sized (54%) compared to 40% of small enterprises employing less than 50 people (in chi-square test, $p = 0.001^*$). The form of the ownership does not significantly differentiate SMEs ($p = 0.810$). Among the enterprises which acknowledged the existence of the company's mission, the most popular aspect included in it referred to the clients (83% of responses). Next, the mission concerned employees of the company (79%), ethics (74%), and in the smallest degree—corporate social responsibility (71% of responses) (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Aspects of Polish enterprise’s operation included in the mission (% , n = 423)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Entries regarding the company’s clients were more often found in the mission of non-public (84%) rather than public entities (73%) ($p = 0.028^*$). On the other hand, the CSR records are significantly more often ($p = 0.030^*$) included in the missions of public companies (81%) when compared to private ones (69%). Similar conclusions concern the inclusion of employees’ perspective ($p = 0.013^*$)—the absence of such records could be found only in 3% of public companies as opposed to 15% of private ones.² The size of the enterprise does not differentiate the approach to developing the mission in any of the areas.

To sum up, the pro-client and pro-employee orientation of small and medium-sized enterprises is clearly visible. The mission contains a short, precise description of the most crucial objectives of the company, presents the general philosophy of its operation, that is the reason for its existence. The mission represents the enterprise; it constitutes a kind of its flagship, a declaration targeted at the environment, at and for the benefit of various stakeholders. With its content, the mission exposes and emphasizes the qualities that distinguish the enterprise from its competitors. Therefore, it is unfortunate that nearly half of the companies in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector fail to appreciate the fact of voicing it. Simultaneously, the companies with their established mission present general directions of their development.

² The small number of public entities with the implemented mission should yet be noticed ($n = 37$); the obtained results may only be treated in terms of a survey.

Age Management—Institutional Dimension

When analyzing the institutional sphere of human resources management, reference should be made to individuals responsible for personnel matters’ place in the organizational structure. In Polish SMEs, they are mostly top-level decision-makers—board members or business owners (40% of responses), with the decreasing percentage of top managers or owners of companies dealing with personnel issues in larger enterprises—it reaches 26%, while in the small ones—about 42%. Additionally, this is more often the case in private companies (41%) than in public ones (26%) (Table 23). In 27% of cases, they were the specialists (especially in medium and public entities), slightly less often middle-level managers (24%) or top-level management directors (9%, rather medium and public entities).

Table 23. Place in the organizational structure of the person responsible for the personnel issues and the employment size and the form of ownership (%)

Specification	Total	Employment size (p < 0.001*)		Form of ownership (p = 0.008*)	
		10 to 49	50 to 249	Public	Private
Board members or business owner	39.7	42.4	25.9	25.9	41.0
Top-level management director	9.4	8.4	14.5	12.9	9.1
Middle-level managers	23.6	23.1	25.9	20.0	23.9
Specialist	27.2	25.9	33.7	41.2	25.9
Other	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1

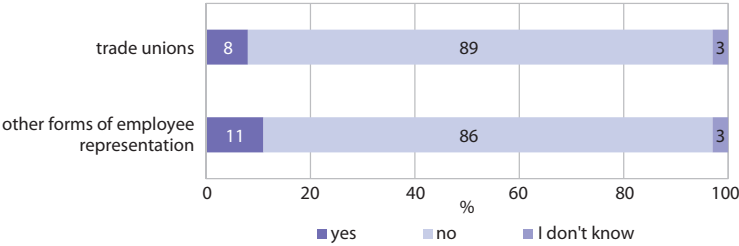
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Most companies in the small and medium-sized enterprises sector can be characterized by the absence of trade unions or other forms of employee representation. Only 11% of them point to the existence of employee representation forms in their structures yet other than trade unions whereas 8% of respondents indicate the presence of trade unions (Figure 7).

Respondents declaring cooperation with trade unions (and there are, let us recall, very few of them) claim that it is harmonious and based on partnership principles (90%). The law on trade unions applicable to mutual relationship between the employer and the trade union comprises only general laws. The principles of cooperation in this regard may be then specified in collective agreements. Regardless of the relationship between trade unions

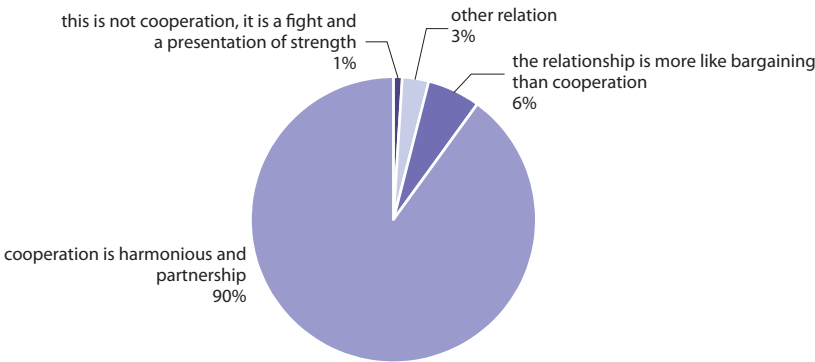
and the employer formalization level, it seems important that both sides should follow the principle of good faith in mutual relations. Neither should the trade union make demands for objective reasons impossible to be met by the employer and comply with the obligations, nor should the employer disrespect the power of union or their right to information. As a workers’ representative in the workplace, the trade union plays an important role in assuring the social peace. Only 6% of SME sector companies with trade unions negatively perceive their cooperation with them defining it as a tender with no equality of the interested parties (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Presence of the employee representation forms in the organization (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

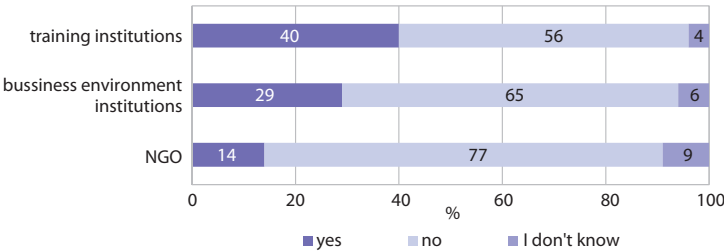
Figure 8. Response distribution regarding the question about the cooperation with the trade unions (% , n = 79)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Given the human resources management in the company, respondents were asked about cooperation in this area with other entities. SMEs cooperate mainly with training institutions (40%) and, yet to a lesser extent, with business support institutions (29%) as well as third sector entities (14%)—Figure 9.

Figure 9. Cooperation with selected business support institutions with regard to human resources management (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Medium-sized entities (57%) are more likely to cooperate with training institutions than the small ones (36%) (the private sector does not significantly differentiate SMEs). On the other hand, non-public entities (30%) more often than public ones (11%) interact with business support institutions which is consistent with the business environment institution’s objectives (the size of the enterprise makes no difference in this respect). However, cooperation with NGOs is equally rare in the case of both small and medium-sized enterprises as well as public and non-public entities.

In summary, a large group of small and medium-sized enterprises demonstrates a lack of external cooperation aimed at solving emerging problems and meeting challenges related to the human resources management. Certainly, numerous solutions, methods or techniques applicable in this area can emerge without external support, yet simultaneously a greater openness to the possibilities of such a cooperation is a blueprint for change worth indicating. Training institutions constitute the entities the SME sector enterprises are willing to cooperate. Inclusion of business support institutions into partnerships may be helpful in raising funds for the business development, including financing both the development and training activities. It may be similarly triggered in the case of the third sector entities. Cooperation may result in mutual learning of versatile solutions, e.g. employee volunteering or engaging in socially responsible activities in favor of the local communities. Employees of different generations, including volunteers, can get involved in the cooperation.

Activities Related to Employees' Development —Motivation, Performance Appraisal

The instrumental scope of human resource management also includes instruments related to employees' development. In this context, the functioning of the employee performance appraisal system is important as it comprises one of the most elementary human management practices inseparable from employment and salaries. Each employee is assessed, yet not every assessment takes on a formal character. Interestingly, the performance appraisal may be of a more formal character—it is then based on the supervisor's assessment and/or possibly employees' self-evaluation. However, half of the respondents from smaller companies point to the absence of any performance appraisal system. Similar situation, but on a smaller scale, also takes place in the group of enterprises employing from 50 to 250 people (42% of responses). Respondents representing companies employing from 10 to 49 people claim that the process of formal evaluation of employees is attended mainly by supervisors and managers (42%). In larger companies, the number equals 48% (Table 24).

Table 24. Principles of performance appraisal according to the employment size and form of ownership (% , n = 1000)

Specification	Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
		10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Participation of supervisors and managers	43.2	42.2	48.2	0.155	42.2	43.3	0.869
Participation of subordinates of the evaluated employees	4.8	4.6	6.0	0.419	5.9	4.7	0.594
The participation of the enterprise's customers	4.2	3.4	8.4	0.003*	1.2	4.5	0.251
Participation of associates of the evaluated employees	5.9	4.9	10.8	0.003*	1.2	6.3	0.053
Employee' self-evaluation	6.2	5.6	9.0	0.097	12.9	5.6	0.007*
Participation of human resources management employees	8.3	6.5	17.5	<0.001*	7.1	8.4	0.665
Lack of any performance appraisal system	49.0	50.4	42.2	0.054	54.1	48.5	0.324

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" response);

* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Distribution of responses seems to confirm the traditional nature of performance appraisal in the SME sector. The assessment close to 180, 270 or 360 degrees applies to only few companies.³ Medium companies are more advanced in this respect. Most often, the assessment process involves people who deal with human resources management (6% in small and 17% in medium firms) and associates subject to employee evaluation. Interestingly, allowing employees to assess their self-esteem is almost as popular as considering customer feedback in companies employing from 50 to 249 people (9% vs. 8%). Enterprises eager to include in the process of a job evaluation a diverse feedback which comes from numerous entities should be unequivocally positively evaluated. Depending on the atmosphere and organizational culture of the company, it can be a very motivational aspect of the work enabling the employee to correct negatively evaluated behaviors and to strengthen desirable attitudes. Noteworthy, employees should be allowed to honestly admit to their competence gaps.

Performance appraisal constitutes one of the elements closely related to motivating employees. At least one of the analyzed solutions—training, employee attitude and expectation research, bonuses and other components of remuneration (Figure 10) is applied in 87% companies employing 10 to 249 people. It gives a general picture of employers aware of the need to use motivational tools that will not only attract employees to the organization, but also stimulate the strategic goals on an ongoing basis and maintain a fairly stable level of staff. Nevertheless, every fourth small enterprise and 16% of medium ones apply only one of the analyzed solutions, and their wider range (at least 7 out of nine measures) can be found in 14% of medium and 10% of small enterprises.

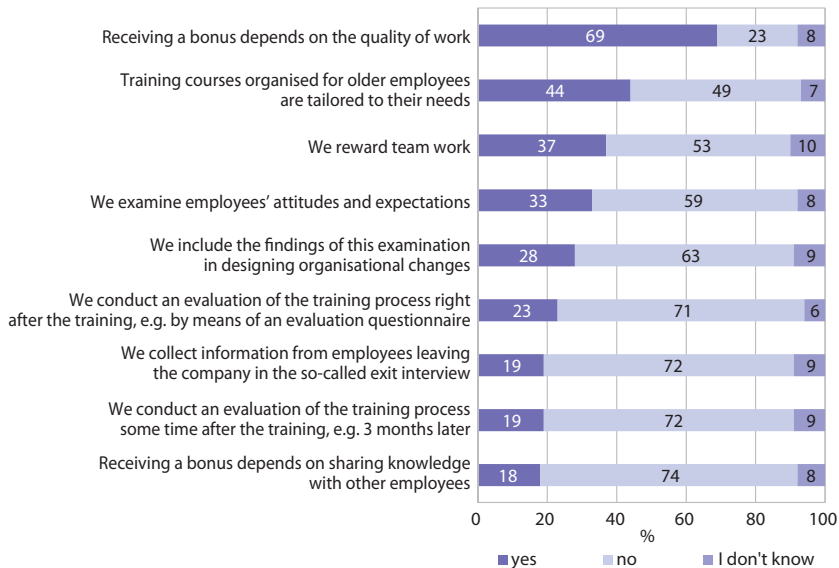
The bonuses most often applied in SMEs depend on the results of work (indicated by approximately 70% of employers) followed by training. What is important from the age management point of view, quite a lot of importance is also attached to rewarding teamwork (37%) and the examination of employees' attitudes and expectations (33%).

Properly designed trainings can be highly motivational for employees. Many of the respondents stated that the trainings directed to the older employees are tailored to their needs—in 43% smaller companies and 45% medium confirm this point of view (Figure 11). Thus, on the one hand, almost a half

³ The name comes from the number of stakeholders involved in the assessment. If “everyone” is involved in the employee assessment, i.e. immediate supervisor, co-workers, higher-level supervisors, human resource management employees, subordinates, clients, etc., then the assessment approaches 360 degrees (sometimes called feedback 360).

of the employers realize and respect the employees' training needs, but on the other hand, half of them do not. The reason may be the traditional approach to the return on investment in training and development, which in the case of employees approaching the retirement age may seem unprofitable. However, it should be borne in mind that in the case of knowledge workers, refreshing competences is necessary at any age due to the dynamic change of knowledge. Furthermore, employees should also be invested in just before the retirement and regardless of their age. The sooner the process begins, the more effective it is (Stam, 2009) which should be clearly emphasized in the context of extending the professional activity of mature employees.

Figure 10. Motivational tools found in SMEs in Poland (% , n = 1000)

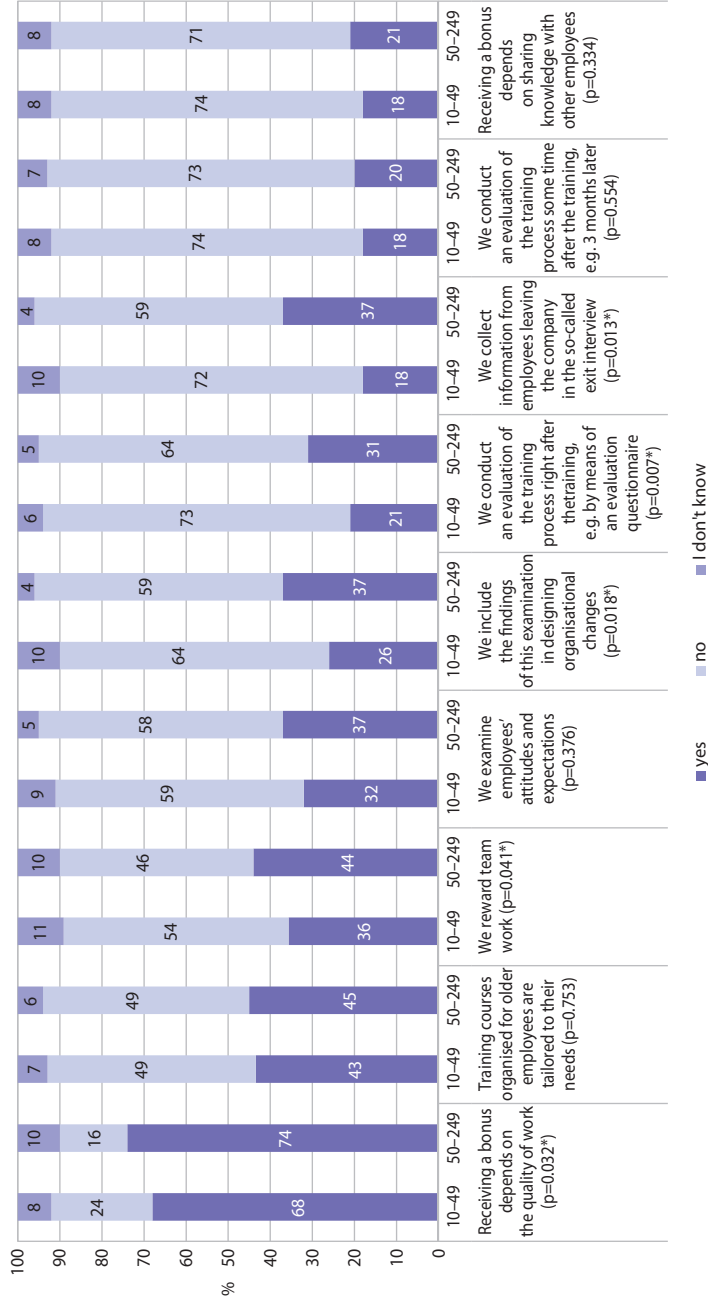


Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Training is planned based on the diagnosis of employees' training needs and organizational requirements. And then, at the end, evaluation of the training process should be carried out. More than a half of the respondents (73% of the representatives of smaller enterprises and 64% of people representing the larger ones), when asked about the evaluation of the training process conducted in the company just after the training, e.g. by means of an evaluation questionnaire, have given a negative response to the question.

Moreover, many of the respondents denied the existence of the training process evaluation after a longer time from the training, e.g. after 3 months

Figure 11. Motivational tools found in enterprises by the employment size (%)



p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" response); * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

(74% of the representatives of companies employing from 10 to 49 people and 73% of people from companies with 50 to 250 employees). Such a deferred evaluation of the achieved results is carried out by about one-fifth of companies (18% of small and 20% of medium size) and it comprises the least popular of the discussed incentive practices.

Examination of attitudes, expectations or employee satisfaction is considered a prerequisite for the creation of incentive systems. About one-third of SMEs conduct such research (32% of the small and 37% of the medium ones). Almost an equal number of organizations applies the next step in building employees' motivation—including results of such examinations in the design of organizational changes (26% of the small and 37% of the medium ones). The data indicates a fairly participative working environment in the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland.

Asked "Does the company collect information from people leaving the organization on exit interview?" most often negative responses were obtained (72% in companies employing from 10 to 49 people and 67% in enterprises with 50 to 250 employees) (Figure 11). It makes the practice of deriving information from the former, already neutral towards the organization, employees one of the least used practices.

What is then the approach to rewarding employees? In the group of entrepreneurs representing companies with the employment size from 10 to 49 people, 36% of respondents said that teamwork is rewarded, with as much as 54% denying the claim. In the group of respondents from larger companies, 44% confirmed the fact of rewarding teamwork, but at the same time 46% denied it.

In turn, awarding a bonus is appreciated by employers. The vast majority of employers (68% of companies employing from 10 to 49 people and 74% of entities with more than 50 employees) claim that the variable remuneration component is conditional on the achieved effects. In the case of the bonus based on the sharing knowledge condition the proportion is reversed—18% of small companies and 20% of medium-sized point to the absence of such remuneration systems. Therefore, the broadly understood knowledge management processes are not strengthened whereas combined with the employee evaluation with an embedded knowledge sharing criterion, it could constitute a leverage of behavior and clearly support the transfer of intergenerational knowledge.

Ensuring a Work-life Balance. WLB in SMEs

Work-life balance (WLB) is an important area of age management found among the higher-level age management strategies. The issue of reconciling professional and family roles in contemporary organizations is gaining importance. Life at an ever-increasing pace constitutes one of the challenges modern employees need to face. The reason is the extension and intensification of working time, the emergence of a permanent need to improve qualifications, and thus—the lack of free time which could be devoted to family, social life and leisure. The employers' perspective, though, is different. Intensive competition may trigger the necessity to reduce costs, extend the working hours for those who comply with such decisions, fearing the consequences of losing their job. The predominant role of professional activities in employees' life leads to many negative phenomena and organizational pathologies: overloaded, stressed, inefficient and unsuccessful employees, a decrease in motivation for work and commitment. Hence, a deep and long-term violation of work-life balance is unfavorable for both employees and employers.

Therefore, numerous enterprises decide to introduce specialist programmes to prevent the imbalance between the sphere of professional and private life. Work-life balance programmes are sets of purposefully selected tools that help to reduce conflicts between work and personal duties and support long-term balance building. They consist of educational, advisory and support activities undertaken by employers for the benefit of the employed.

An evolution of the following WLB tools can be observed among Polish companies:

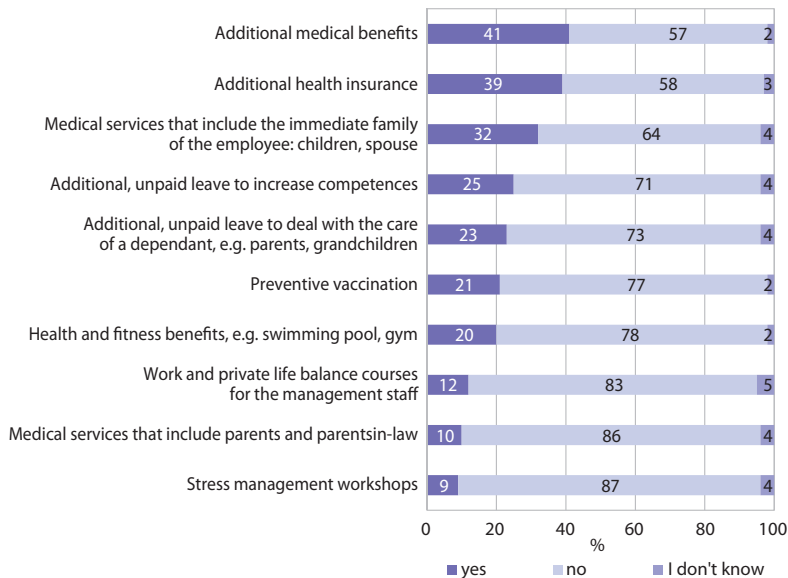
- working at home and teleworking possibility,
- introduction of special bonuses if the employee follows the recommendation in the field of health prevention, proper nutrition, physical activity,
- extending the offer of health insurance financed by the employer and covering all the members of the employee's immediate family—including the spouse and children, parents and parents-in-law as well as the partner,
- leaves related to supplementing or validating competences (leaves related to raising competences, e.g. at post-graduate studies, sabbatical leave—holidays up to half a year, related to sightseeing, rest, hobby),
- enabling a gradual labor market leaving together with paying contributions for group insurance with an investment fund.

Analyzing the application dimension of work-life balance programmes, it can be pointed out that the culture that supports the balance is very important. Does the manager who always works overtime pose a good example for subordinates? Will exclusion of people with disabilities or young parents' needs in the design of tools allow employees of the groups to maintain the balance equal to others?

The main benefits of WLB are primarily: reduced employee absences and reduced staff turnover, reduction of employees' stress, development of employees' competences, effective attracting the best candidates to the company, creating suitable working conditions, building the image of a company friendly to employees and their families, reducing recruitment and apprenticeship of newly hired employees' costs (Warwas, 2016).

When asked about components of WLB packages, such as: trainings, workshops, additional free leaves, insurance or other benefits addressed to employees, the vast majority of respondents noticed no such offer in their companies. Nearly one-fourth of small and medium-sized enterprises use none of the discussed WLB instruments and one-third applies a maximum of two solutions from the group (Figure 12).

Figure 12. WLB tools in SMEs in Poland (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

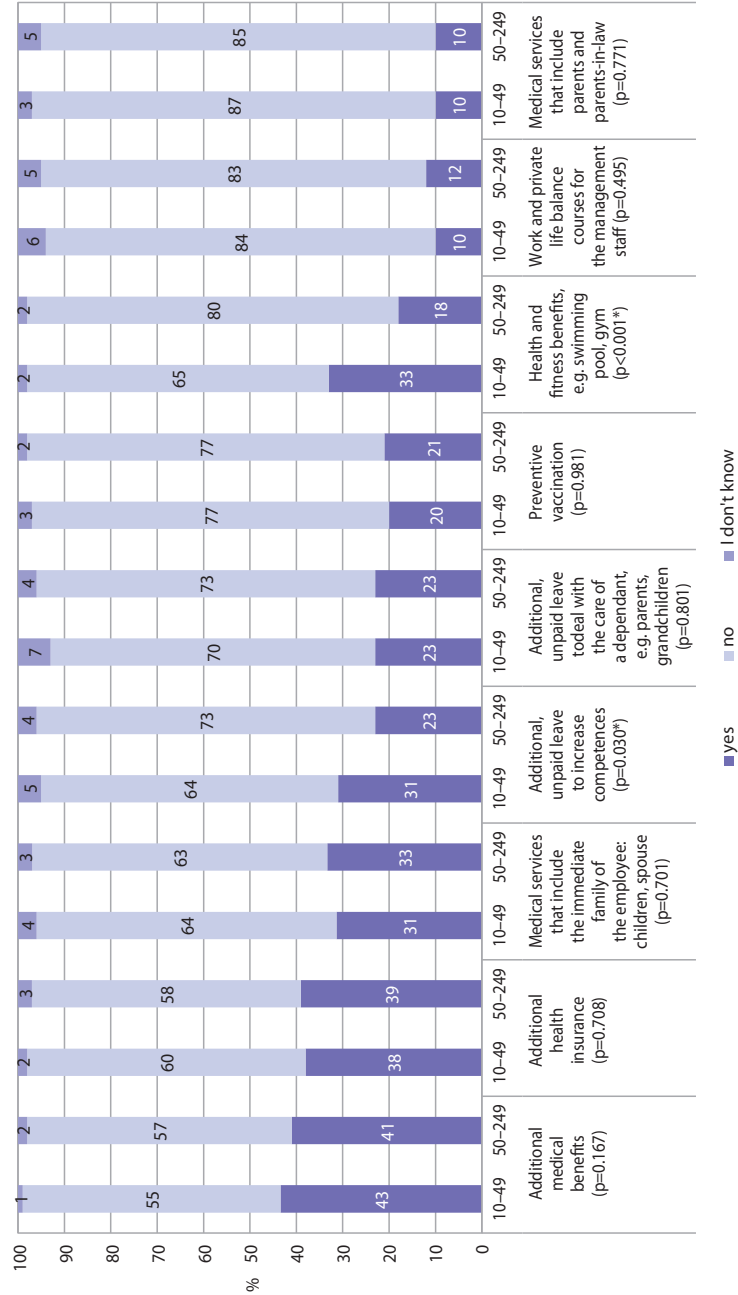
Trainings in the area of the reconciliation of professional and private roles designed for managers, as well as workshops in coping with stress for employees and medical services including parents, parents-in-law as well as employees received the same scant attention—over 80% of people (representatives of both smaller and larger companies) pointed to the absence of such benefits in their company. The practices in the field of creating a balance between work and private life in the workplace are used by every tenth employer from the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises (Figure 12).

In turn, additional benefits most frequently used in SMEs comprise health insurance (indicated by about 40% of employers), including medical services including the employee's closest family (32%). About 40% of the representatives of enterprises (both small and medium-sized) confirmed that their company offers additional health insurance and medical services covering the immediate family of an employee, spouses and children (33% of small and 31% of medium-sized entities)—Figure 13.

In the context of maintaining economic activity, benefits supporting the acquisition of new or supplementing and updating the already possessed competencies are a very important element of WLB packages. An additional holiday for the purpose is offered by 31% of employers employing from 50 to 249 employees and more than every fourth (23%) of those employing between 10 and 49 people.

In the long-term perspective, employers offering benefits related to maintaining health and well-being, such as leisure benefits, a swimming pool or gym, find it easier to take care of the work and private life balance. Smaller enterprises can be characterized by a greater distance when it comes to such benefits (found in 18% of them) when compared to employers employing between 50 and 249 people. More than one third of medium-sized companies implemented such services (33%).

Figure 13. WLB tools in enterprises and the employment size (%)

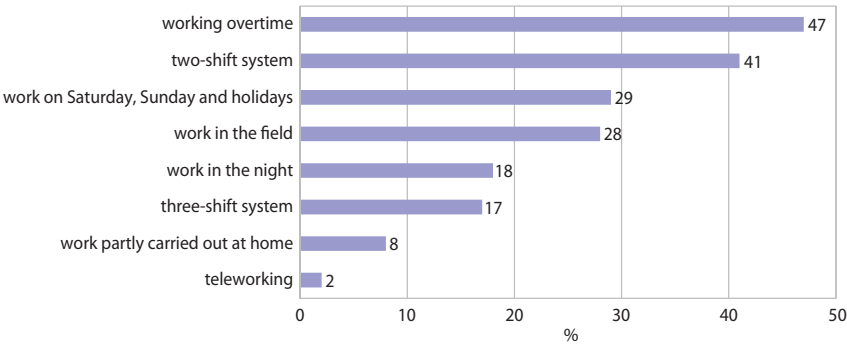


p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test (excluding the “I don’t know” response); * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Work Organization in the Context of Mature Employees’ Employment

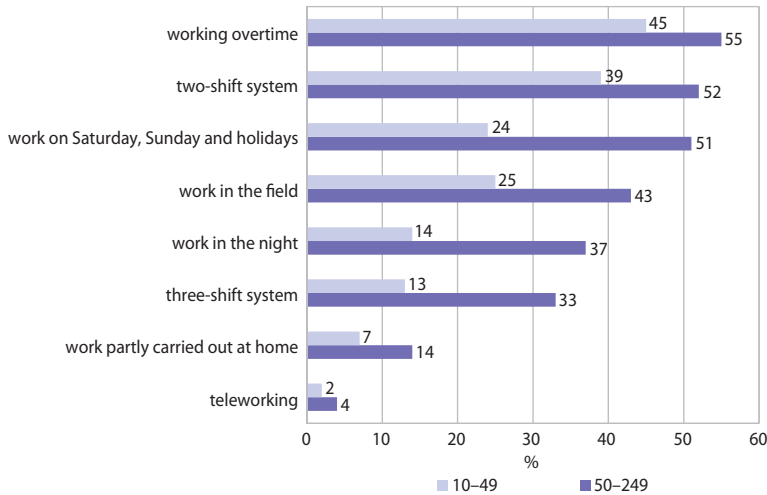
Flexibility of employment is another age management area related to maintaining the balance between work and private life, but also in line with the reactive and proactive age management. In this context, representatives of SMEs were asked about the versatile forms of their work organization. Half of the enterprises can be characterized by working overtime and in two out of five entities—a two-shift system may be found. Moreover, roughly three out of ten companies require work on Saturday, Sunday and holidays and/or in the field. Rarely (2%) are the remote work or the performance of work at home allowed (8%)—Figure 14.

Figure 14. Selected work organization types in SMEs in Poland (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

In most enterprises employing from 50 to 249 people a two-shift work system was introduced (52%) (Figure 15). Working on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays as well as overtime are popular solutions found in these companies (51% and 55% respectively). Moreover, a two-shift system (39%) and working overtime (45%) are equally common in smaller enterprises. Interestingly, the responses provided also show that the overwhelming majority of companies did not implement a teleworking system. A little common turns out to be the work partly carried out at home and, in the case of enterprises employing from 10 to 49 people—night work (86% of responses to “no”), three shift system (87%), fieldwork (75%) and work on Saturday, Sunday and holidays (76%). In the majority of enterprises employing from 50 to 249 people, the absence of three-shift working system (67%) and night work (63%) can be noted.

Figure 15. Work systems found in SMEs in Poland by employment size (%)

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" response);
 * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

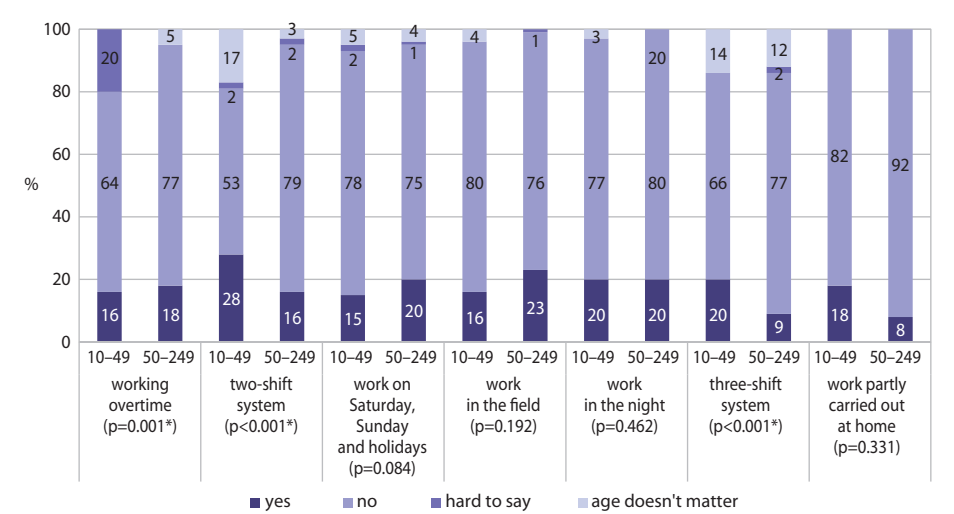
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Labor systems employed in the enterprises of the SME sector can be a sign of a relatively reactive approach to the management sphere. It is used when there is a need to work overtime, on Sundays and holidays, in shifts or in the field as these are required by the specificity of the company. However, telework—a solution perfectly fitting the trend of reconciling professional and family roles and proactive age management strategies in organizations—is almost absent.

According to the majority of respondents representing companies with employment sizes from 10 to 49, but also from 50 to 249, no clearly lower interest from the generation 50+ in the indicated work system (e.g. telework, work in a two-shift system, work overtime, etc.) was observed (Figure 16). Nevertheless, in the case of a question about a two-shift work system, 28% of respondents representing companies employing from 10 to 49 people claim that they have noticed much less interest in the above-mentioned among employees from the 50+ generation. In turn, 23% of respondents from larger companies observed such a lack of interest in a given group of employees in the case of fieldwork. It may suggest that employers notice the mature people's lowering readiness to work in the field.

Working outside the place of employment may be found not only particularly hard but also tiresome and certainly not everyone can undertake it. At the same time, 19% of the respondents (representatives of companies

Figure 16. 50+ employees’ interest in the work system by employment size (%)



p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test (excluding the “I don’t know” response);
* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$. The question targeted at the respondents who previously indicated the presence of the given form of work organization

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

with an employment size of 10 to 49 people) stated that in the case of overtime work—age is unimportant (Figure 16). Such a response seems to constitute the need to work overtime, previously indicated among the most common forms of work time organization.

According to the responses of the majority SMEs’ representatives (69%), the age is of little importance when it comes to working overtime—72% in the case of the larger companies and 68%—in the smaller ones. What’s more, 20% of workforce from enterprises employing from 10 to 49 people noticed the absence of after-hours work. A similar response was given by 16% of the respondents representing companies with the employment size from 50 to 250 people. In turn, if such a necessity occurs, 6% of all the respondents claimed that employees from generation X are considered, 4% pointed to 50+ generation and only 2%—to the Millennials (Table 25). If SME employers reach for workers from a particular generation, then they are the employees in their prime. It would be interesting to learn the employers’ motives of their least interest in the youngest representatives of the internal labor market when faced with the necessity of working overtime. It may only be assumed that the age group pays significant attention to WLB and thus is reluctant to accept overtime work.

Table 25. Response distribution with regard to the question: employees from which generation are taken into consideration first when it comes to working overtime by the employment size and form of ownership (% , n = 1000)

Specification	Total	Employment size (p = 0.422)		Form of ownership (p = 0.549)	
		10 to 49	50 to 249	Public	Private
From the 50+ generation	3.9	3.8	4.2	7.1	3.6
From generation X	5.7	6.0	4.2	5.9	5.7
From Millennials	1.8	1.6	3.0	1.2	1.9
Age is unimportant in this respect	69.1	68.5	72.3	69.4	69.1
The absence of the work overtime	19.5	20.1	16.3	16.5	19.8

p – probability in the Fisher's exact test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

When determining dates of holidays, the order of groups of employees is not considered (92% of total respondents confirmed the fact). Nevertheless, 7% of the surveyed companies with from 10 to 49 employees stated that parents with young children have a priority when setting holiday dates (5% of such responses were obtained from persons representing larger enterprises) (Table 26). The solution is obvious due to summer and winter holidays which take place in a fixed time, independent of parents' wish. On the other hand, an egalitarian approach to determining holiday times denies positive discrimination against mature workers.

Table 26. Employees given priority when determining dates of holidays by the employment size and form of ownership (% , n = 1000)

Specification	Total	Employment size (p = 0.312)		Form of ownership (p = 0.549)	
		10 to 49	50 to 249	Public	Private
Parents with young children	6.4	6.6	5.4	5.9	6.4
The disabled	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.2
50+ people	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.9
Other	0.2	0.1	0.6	0.0	0.2
Everyone is treated equally	92.4	92.3	92.8	94.1	92.2

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Employee Volunteering

An intensified discourse on volunteering can be noticed in recent years. Volunteering comprises a constituent of every civilization bringing numerous benefits to individual people or institutions (Danielak-Chomać et al., 2010, p. 9). Modern organizations can actively develop the idea of volunteering thanks to the implementation of corporate volunteering which consists in undertaking and supporting by the enterprise a charitable activity for the selected entities carried out with the voluntary cooperation of employees. Three main goals of employee volunteering are the following: (1) social goal based on building good social relationships with local communities, public and private institutions, various organizations and entities; (2) building a positive image of the company in the environment, which consists in creating a positive image of the company as an institution supporting valuable initiatives and may also contribute to the increase of brand recognition among clients and other stakeholders; (3) shaping good employee relationships since every employee has the chance to realize their ambitions, interests and develop passions with the help of co-workers and management which in the long-term will have a positive effect on the quality of cooperation (Wiktorowicz & Warwas, 2016, p. 220).

Employee volunteering can bring versatile benefits:

- integration of employees during the implementation of social projects;
- active inclusion of employees in social activities implemented by the company;
- providing employees with opportunities for social involvement;
- a sense of responsibility for socially relevant matters;
- acquiring human resources to implement projects;
- creating professional management patterns.

Despite the indisputable benefits outlined above, companies representing the SME sector in Poland are uninterested in implementing employee volunteering. Virtually it can be found in almost none of the companies (97%). In this light, the question about the perceived benefits of volunteering seems to be important. Due to the small number of responses (only the companies with volunteering programs were asked, $n = 31$), conclusions in this respect should only be approached in a poll manner since it is highly difficult to generalize in this situation. Most of the respondents, that is three-fourths, pointed to the benefits of 50+ employees volunteering in the form of gaining community involvement in projects. 20 out of 31 people also noticed the increasing public awareness of the organization or the issue covered by the project, and almost two-thirds—the opportunities for developing employees' hard and soft skills, as well as increasing staff morale, job satisfaction and

commitment together with strengthening leadership skills and team building (Figure 17). In the case of other generations, the first situation is not so strongly emphasized (17 out of 31 responses). The employee volunteering is also less important in order to strengthen employee morale and their involvement (19 responses). Inclusion of other generations contributes to the increasing number of volunteers (16 responses against 13 for 50+).

Figure 17. Employee volunteering benefits from the generations' perspective (number of respondents)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Entrepreneurs' responses indicate the benefits of volunteering and therefore an image of a medium-sized organization which more often identifies benefits emerges. Significant differences can be noted concerning:

- Noticing that volunteering allows the development of employees' hard and soft skills;
- Perception of an increased employee morale, job satisfaction or commitment;
- Strengthening leadership skills and team building;
- Achieving significant community involvement in projects;
- Facilitated access to finance and other resources.

Employee volunteering is a valuable and interesting form of cooperation between non-governmental organizations and business that brings mutual benefits. Other business benefits, yet not encompassed by the research, include:

active employees’ involvement in social activities undertaken by the company, the possibility to prove oneself in new situations, strengthening the employee’s sense of attachment with the company, staff integration during social projects, improving interpersonal communication between workers, increasing the loyalty and motivation of employees.

Therefore, if entrepreneurs realize multidimensional benefits of volunteering yet still fail to introduce it in their enterprise, it seems substantial to investigate the reasons for the state of affairs. A barrier that is often noticed by small entities is the lack of knowledge about volunteering (lack of time to become familiar with the essence and conditions of volunteering), whereas in medium-sized organizations the absence of employees willing to practice it seems crucial (59%) (Table 27). Among other reasons, the lack of such a need was most often mentioned (especially in small private companies), as well as difficult opportunities connected with the location of the company, other forms of social activity of the company or private assistance to those in need (private entities).

Table 27. Reasons for not applying volunteering by employment size and ownership (%)

Specification	Total (n = 969)	Employment size		Form of ownership	
		10 to 49 (n = 812)	50 to 249 (n = 157)	Public (n = 80)	Private (n = 889)
We lack the time to become familiar with the essence and conditions of volunteering	45.5	46.6	40.1	27.5	47.1
There are no employees interested in this form of activity	50.9	49.3	59.2	61.3	49.9
Instead of their basic duties the employees will be preoccupied with volunteering	8.6	8.9	7.0	7.5	8.7
Other reasons, what?	2.8	2.7	3.2	6.3	2.5

* The percentages do not add up to 100%. More than one response was possible.
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

The barriers identified by Polish companies representing SME sector do not significantly differentiate them. The slow development and dissemination of the volunteering idea seem obvious. Volunteering brings multiple benefits to all the participants and parties interested in the process and in addition, it has “no age”. It is equally useful and valuable for all the generations. It can be an appreciated complement to the creation of values, ethical conduct or corporate social responsibility. Moreover, it fits into modern age management.

Chapter 6.

Age Management in SMEs

Specificity of Age in Versatile HRM Fields

The main areas that both refer to human resources management and include the specifics of particular age groups are (Figure 18):

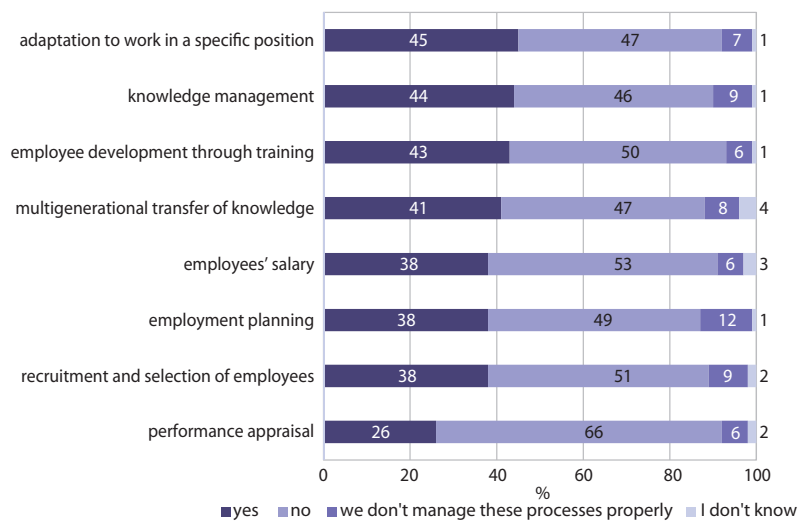
- adaptation at a workplace (45%),
- knowledge management (44%),
- employee training (43%),
- knowledge transfer (41%).

Adaptation to a position largely depends on the experience at work and/or in a similar position. Likewise, in the case of knowledge management and transfer, the length of work experience may be important in assigning and assuming roles in the process, the scope of responsibility of its participants or the range of knowledge to be transferred. Employee training also seems to be a very specific field depending on employees' age. Almost all of the stages of the training process can differ—from the methods aimed at identifying training needs, through the training process itself to the evaluation of the training results. In the least is the specificity of age groups taken into account during the performance appraisal in Polish SMEs (66% of entities ignore it). Almost an equal number of entities fail to recognize the age specificity in the amount of the salary—slightly more than a half of companies (53%). It may stem from the application of objective criteria when determining basic salaries and the premium.

Considering the enterprise's form of ownership criterion, not many new conclusions can be drawn—differences between public and non-public entities are usually statistically insignificant (Table 28). Only employment

planning poses a different case here—specificity of age is significantly more often taken into account at the stage when it comes to public entities (51%) rather than in the case of non-public ones (37%). Noteworthy, the response “we do not manage the processes properly, so we do not take into account the specificity of the age” was given more often in private SMEs than in the public ones. Every eighth private small or medium-sized enterprise fails to manage employment planning, every tenth—employees’ recruitment and selection as well as knowledge. It certainly provides great opportunities for further improvement of HR management processes in Polish SMEs.

Figure 18. Including specifics of different age groups in particular (sub)processes of human resources management (%)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Several processes significantly differentiate some small and medium-sized employers. 36% of small enterprises and almost half (48%) of medium-sized companies use different approach and/or instruments ($p = 0.014^*$) during the employees’ recruitment and selection. Similarly, 41% of small and over a half (55%) of medium-sized enterprises ($p = 0.001^*$) distinguish their actions within the realm of employee development through training including their age. However, considering the performance appraisal, 68% of small and slightly more than a half (56%) of medium-sized enterprises ($p = 0.021^*$) see no need to differentiate their approach due to the age of their employees.

Table 28. Considering specificity of different age groups in particular HRM (sub)processes and the employment size (%)

Specification		Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Employment planning	Yes	37.9	36.7	44.0	0.161	50.6	36.7	0.004*
	No	48.7	49.4	45.2		45.9	49.0	
	Actually, no	11.7	12.2	9.0		2.4	12.6	
	Don't know	1.7	1.7	1.8		1.2	1.7	
Recruitment and selection of employees	Yes	37.9	35.9	48.2	0.014*	40.0	37.7	0.100
	No	51.2	52.9	42.8		51.8	51.1	
	Actually, no	8.9	9.1	7.8		2.4	9.5	
	Don't know	2.0	2.2	1.2		5.9	1.6	
Adaptation to work in a specific position	Yes	44.7	43.3	51.8	0.098	42.4	44.9	0.443
	No	47.4	48.6	41.6		50.6	47.1	
	Actually, no	6.6	7.0	4.8		3.5	6.9	
	Don't know	1.3	1.2	1.8		3.5	1.1	
Employee development through training	Yes	43.2	40.8	55.4	0.001*	37.6	43.7	0.533
	No	49.7	51.8	39.2		55.3	49.2	
	Actually, no	6.1	6.6	3.6		5.9	6.1	
	Don't know	1.0	0.8	1.8		1.2	1.0	
Knowledge management	Yes	43.9	43.6	45.2	0.809	47.1	43.6	0.756
	No	46.4	47.0	43.4		45.9	46.4	
	Actually, no	8.9	8.9	9.0		7.1	9.1	
	Don't know	0.8	0.5	2.4		0.0	0.9	
Knowledge transfer between the oldest and youngest employees	Yes	41.4	40.9	44.0	0.204	38.8	41.6	0.287
	No	47.0	46.6	48.8		54.1	46.3	
	Actually, no	8.2	8.9	4.8		4.7	8.5	
	Don't know	3.4	3.6	2.4		2.4	3.5	
Employees' salary	Yes	38.1	38.2	37.3	0.869	43.5	37.6	0.558
	No	53.2	53.0	54.2		48.2	53.7	
	Actually, no	5.6	5.8	4.8		5.9	5.6	
	Don't know	3.1	3.0	3.6		2.4	3.2	

Table 28. (cont.)

Specification		Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Performance appraisal	Yes	25.6	24.1	33.1	0.021*	20.0	26.1	0.346
	No	65.6	67.5	56.0		74.1	64.8	
	Actually, no	6.5	6.2	7.8		5.9	6.6	
	Don't know	2.3	2.2	3.0		0.0	2.5	

Note. Actually, we do not manage the processes properly, so we do not take into account the specificity of the age;
p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test (excluding the “I don’t know” response);
* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

The perception of performance appraisal as a human management area in view of the lack of the need to use a different approach may seem surprising. First of all, employees’ evaluation has been noticed among Polish organizations as one of the first HRM practice and has been applied almost from the beginning of the socio-economic transformation. It could indicate a potential tendency for modification—supported by the experience—depending on the observed functionality or the effectiveness of the process. Employers do not show such a tendency, and regardless of the employees’ age, they choose the same or similar methods and techniques of assessment, as well as the frequency and actors for their formal evaluation.

Activities Related to Older Workers Entering and Leaving the Organizations

Employees’ age structure monitoring should comprise the starting point of the age management implementation. It may be found in nearly one-third of SMEs in Poland and only in the case of 14% of them on an ongoing basis, and 69% SMEs don’t monitor the age structure of employees.

Age structure monitoring is significantly more frequent ($p < 0.001^*$) in medium-sized (46%) than small enterprises (28%) and done on an ongoing basis in 13% of entities employing 50–249 employees and 15% of those employing from 10 to 49 people. No significant differences can be noticed between public and non-public entities ($p = 0.529$). It may confirm the thesis that monitoring the age structure of the staff employed in

small organizations is rather intuitive. Nearly seventy percent of small and medium-sized enterprises see no need to monitor the age of their employees, thus the age diagnosis can be the starting point for designing and conscious implementation of age management.

In addition to planning and analyzing employment, recruitment opens versatile HRM processes and simultaneously begins employees' careers in companies yet also providing a highly stressful situation for the people aged 50+ who are convinced that their competences are lower than those of younger employees and that companies avoid employing people of the age. Meanwhile, the Labor Code prohibits discrimination of employees, also due to age (including recruitment advertisements). Therefore, how do SMEs recruit employees and/or take into account their preferences while remaining in accordance with the Labor Code provisions? The specificity of recruitment processes can be obtained in various ways. The aspects selected for the study were connected with the preparation of ads without candidates' age discriminatory content. Such advertisements are significantly more often ($p < 0.001^*$) placed by employers from medium-sized (49%) rather than small companies employing from 10 to 49 people (31%). Similarly, significant differences occur in the case of recruitment interviews which are a very important part of the selection process ($p < 0.001^*$). Professionally conducted interviews increase the probability of the employment of the right candidate, reduces the risk and costs associated with a missed choice. Hence, interviews should be conducted by professionally prepared recruiters who do not ask questions that discriminate against candidates because of their mature age. Certainly, it would be desirable for recruiters to be trained in age management. Yet, the types of training are more often offered to employees from enterprises employing more than 50 people (14%) rather than the small ones (9%) – $p = 0.009^*$. Interestingly, it is an uncommon practice among the Polish SMEs (Table 29).

The creation of image advertisements containing photographs of employees of different ages can be considered more advanced recruitment practice. In this area, Polish small and medium-sized organizations do not differ significantly—almost no such ads are used. As a standard practice, 14% of Polish companies claim to apply such advertisements that can still be seen as a positive notion. It is worth adding that the activities in the field carried out by private entities do not differ significantly from those carried out by the public ones.

Table 29. Recruitment and selection processes according to the employment size and form of ownership (%)

Specification		Total	Employment size		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p
Recruitment ads without a content discriminating on the grounds of age	Yes, it is a standard practice	34	31	49	<0.001*
	Yes, but rarely	16	18	8	
	No	42	43	37	
	I don't know/It's hard to say	7	8	5	
Recruitment interview without any questions discriminating on the grounds of age	Yes, it is a standard practice	37	34	50	<0.001*
	Yes, but rarely	15	16	10	
	No	41	44	30	
	I don't know/It's hard to say	7	7	10	
Recruitment ads with photographs of people of all ages	Yes, it is a standard practice	14	14	14	0.229
	Yes, but rarely	13	14	10	
	No	62	63	61	
	I don't know/It's hard to say	11	10	14	
Recruitment led by people trained in age management	Yes, it is a standard practice	10	9	14	0.009*
	Yes, but rarely	16	17	8	
	No	65	65	65	
	I don't know/It's hard to say	10	9	13	

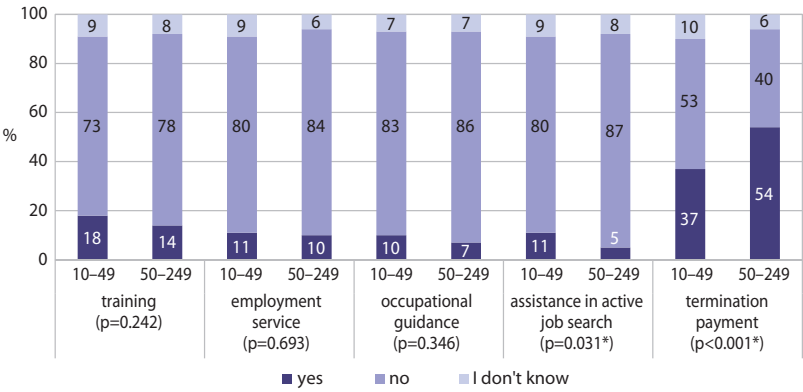
p – probability in chi-square test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

In turn, the process of leaving an organization closes the employment cycle. Offered by the employer, voluntary support belongs to higher-level practices. Application of outplacement solutions requires not only the employers' high awareness, but also their possession of specific knowledge. Undoubtedly, leaving employment in a friendly manner is a sign of a subjective approach, respect, recognition and friendly interpersonal relationships.

Yet, for the vast majority of SMEs, no tools are offered to employees aged 50+ to support the process of leaving employment (training, employment service, occupational guidance and/or assistance in active job search)—Figure 19.

Figure 19. Outplacement activities targeted at a group of 50+ employees leaving employment by the employment size (%)



p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher’s exact test (excluding the “I don’t know” response);
* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Multigenerational Transfer of Knowledge

Importance of Multigenerational Transfer of Knowledge in an Organization

Multigenerational learning, multigenerational transfer of knowledge comprises one of the most important paths of exploiting the potential of 50+ employees. Multigenerational transfer of knowledge is defined as the transfer of knowledge between the older and the younger generation (Cavallisforza & Feldman, 1981). It is any one-on-one, group or communicator-based interaction through which facts, context, relationships, processes and other observations are transmitted between two generations (Haron et al., 2014). It constitutes a central element of the second level of proactive age management—multigenerational learning strategy. Thanks to its application, companies draw on the skills and experience of older employees, at the same time giving 50+ employees a clear sign that they are highly appreciated and valued. Organizations need older workers more than ever as they transfer knowledge between generations, pass on company values to younger employees, perform well as mentors, and provide employees able to deal with specialized tasks (Capelli & Noveli, 2010). Mature employees can usually be described in terms of long professional and life experience as well as specialist knowledge, often going far beyond their current position

and organization. As a result, they are a valuable source of knowledge, but nevertheless they themselves are less eager to search for it seeing no such need. In addition, older people attach more importance to interpersonal relationships, identify with the organization more strongly (Ng & Feldman, 2008) and are more emotionally stable (Mroczek & Spiro, 2005), thus they are more willing to help, answer questions or give advice. It should result in (as shown by the theory of generativity) their stronger willingness to share knowledge than in the case of younger employees (Stam, 2010).

Importance of older employees in the context of transfer of knowledge is particularly evident in the following areas (Leonard et al., 2014):

- relationships—built for many years, allow an experienced employee to get the desired information from a client or other expert, for example by the phone—pursuant to the words, “Wise people know other wise people”. Even if a retiring expert will give successors a contact book of their clients and associates, such pieces of information are of little use to the organization without their knowledge. The social capital of a departing employee is important, especially the developed networks;
- reputation that an organization may lose unless the successors demonstrate enough experience and skills;
- *re-work*—maintaining the current status-quo is not desirable, a fresh look is very valuable. Nevertheless, resources of an organization are wasted unless a smooth transfer of tasks is provided—successors may find it far more difficult to implement in a given position, understand production processes, critical points, learn informal norms, etc., and then the entire learning process becomes very time-consuming and, therefore, cost-intensive;
- ability to reproduce—probably the most problematic issue. Despite the fact that innovations require creativity, without knowledge of current processes, sources of failures, etc., implementing innovations involves a repetition of the previous mistakes. It particularly applies to very complex products and processes.

The large scale of retirement is currently associated with a shortage of talents. Although more frequent in the case of younger workers, employee turnover also applies to the most experienced and key to the organization people who are often hired away by other enterprises which face general difficulties in finding appropriate staff. Moreover, they frequently decide to change their employer or start their own business. It applies in particular to the technologically advanced industries, though not only (Franco & Filson, 2006). Therefore, ignoring older employees at the stage of talent management is one of the most serious mistakes, especially in the case of managers and knowledge workers.

Agreeing with the generativity theory, numerous scientists are of the opinion that older employees are willing to share their knowledge. Many experts believe that their “deep wisdom” is strongly associated with their identification with the organization, and thus remaining in it. Not only do they find the fact that colleagues seek their assistance in solving problems gratifying, but they also feel appreciated. Nevertheless, older employees are often afraid that transferring knowledge to younger employees will lower their rank in the organization. Managers, however, should counteract the creation of *know-how* “monopoly” designing a management system that would prevent monopolization of knowledge long before the employee retires—knowledge of the individual should become the knowledge of the organization. In some enterprises, incentive systems include mentoring activities and make the assessment dependent on both the quality of their professional, but also their teaching performance. In others, teamwork rather than individual work is rewarded, thereby forcing mutual help and (multigenerational) transfer of knowledge.

In some companies, the growing number of retiring people results in a knowledge gap that weakens the ability of the organization to compete on a dynamic market while others face the problem of maintaining an appropriate level of employment challenged by the shrinking labor resources and increasing mobility of the younger generation of employees. Loss of knowledge along with the retirement of employees weakens the organization, innovation, effectiveness of its operation, competitiveness and may result in the lack of mentors for younger employees (DeLong, 2004). As a result, not only the potential but also the company profit decreases.

From the social point of view, there are versatile benefits that should strengthen the investment in employees’ lifelong learning. First, required to acquire knowledge throughout their lives, regardless of their age, people are open to both change as well as innovation. The lifelong learning process comprises a part of active ageing and improves the personal and professional development of not only employees but also the organization as a whole. In the digital era, lifelong learning opportunities appear to be unlimited as knowledge becomes more and more available to a wider audience. Multigenerational transfer of knowledge supports the process of lifelong learning by deepening the exchange of knowledge and ideas between people from different generations. Thanks to the participation in multigenerational programs, older employees update their knowledge, are offered an entirely fresh perspective, and further develop their communication skills.

Providing knowledge and professional experience in companies by older employees is a good way to ensure continuity of a company development

and the ability to pass on their knowledge and professional experience builds a sense of respect and appreciation among mature employees. In addition, cooperation between older and younger employees prevents multigenerational tensions (Richert-Kaźmierska, 2012).

Such actions are expected to lead to the improvement of the flow of both knowledge and information within the organization, and thus to strengthen the internal communication system. It contributes to the faster onboarding and new employees can take over responsibilities and competences. It also enables them to acquire new, thorough and “priceless” knowledge that stems from previous experience. Moreover, relationships between employees and their integration are bettered. The development aspect, the expected improvement in efficiency and quality of work, increase in know-how, possibilities for good preparation of successors, and, as a result, faster development of the entire company also need to be emphasized (IBnDiPP, 2009, pp. 17–24). Ageing of labor resources may, paradoxically, contribute to increasing the assessment of the older employees’ potential and their contribution to the development of the organization.

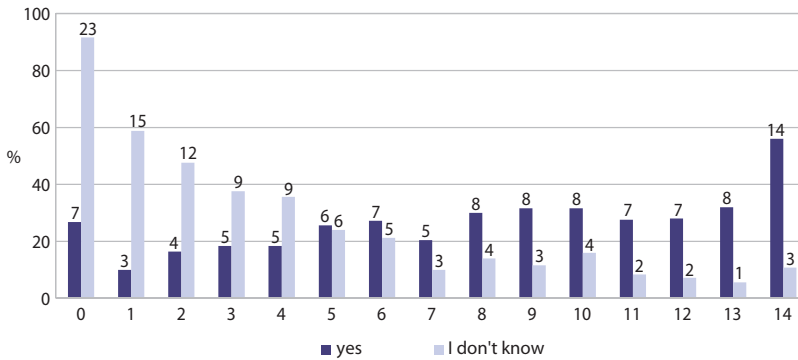
As emphasized earlier, SME employers already notice the opportunities related to the older employees’ potential and the multigenerational transfer of knowledge. Due to the mature employees’ experience and knowledge, employers are not afraid of a drop in their productivity despite their weakening health condition. Furthermore, they believe that combining the experience of older employees with the enthusiasm of the young will create new opportunities for the company’s development. Let us now answer the question *how do they do it?*

Multigenerational Transfer of Knowledge Instruments in SMEs in Poland

SMEs’ employers were asked in CATI survey (within project STAY, 2017) to point to the specific multigenerational transfer of knowledge instruments which can be found in their companies. At the same time, they clarified whether they are used only occasionally or have already fit well into the functioning rules of a given company. Results seem optimistic. In the case of small and medium-sized enterprises in Poland, only 6.7% of the examined entities use none of the fourteen instruments studied (let us add, selected based on literature review as the most important from the multigenerational transfer of knowledge point of view), and 14% practice all of them (Figure 20). Nevertheless, they occur rather occasionally instead of being permanently inscribed in the company’s

operation—by less than 3% of the companies use all of the tested instruments as a standard practice, and about 23% of them apply none of them in this respect. Half of the companies can be described by the employment of no more than nine instruments, 25%—no more than 5 and 25%—at least 12. On average, 8.2 instruments out of fourteen (standard deviation $SD = 4.35$) are used in the enterprises. Half of the companies apply no more than 2 multigenerational transfer of knowledge instruments as a standard practice, 25%—no more than 1, and 25%—at least 6. In this perspective the average is 3.76 solutions (with a very high dispersion degree – $SD = 3.84$).

Figure 20. Number of the applied multigenerational transfer of knowledge tools (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

The degree of multigenerational transfer of knowledge implementation is greater in medium-sized companies (Figure 21) which becomes especially clear when the strategic approach to the issue is considered—small companies use an average of 3.6 instruments ($SD = 3.81$) as a standard practice and medium—on average 4.57 ($SD = 3.89$). In turn, comparing public and non-public entities, a more comprehensive approach of public entities can be noted—they use 9.22 ($SD = 3.74$) on average against 8.12 ($SD = 4.39$) for private companies ($p = 0.013^*$). As a standard practice, public entities use on average 4.35 instruments ($SD = 3.50$), and non-public ones—3.71 ($SD = 3.87$). However, the duration of the company's operation is not relevant in this respect. SMEs with a higher significance of 50+ employees decide to use the greater scope of multigenerational transfer of knowledge tools, i.e. those which employ more 50+ employees and therefore their share in total employment is larger (for the general indicator $r = 0.130$, $p < 0.001^*$ relative to the number of 50+ employees, $r = 0.085$, $p = 0.007^*$ for their share).

Figure 21. Average number of the applied multigenerational transfer of knowledge tools by the employment size and form of ownership (%)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

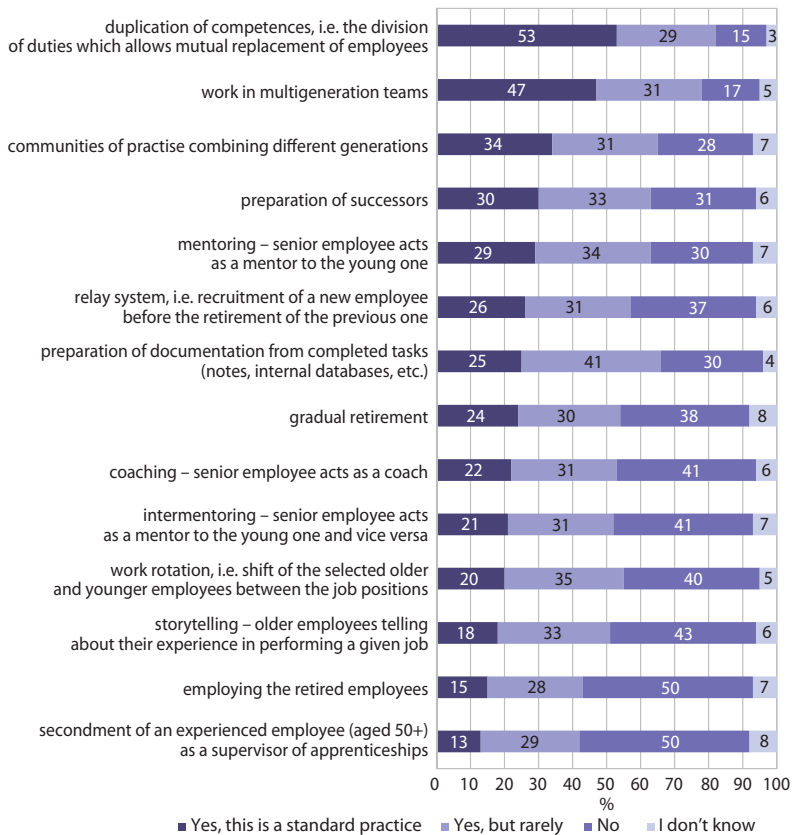
Among the analyzed instruments serving the multigenerational transfer of knowledge (Figure 22), employers most often indicated two: duplication of competencies, that is a division of duties that enables mutual replacement of employees and work in teams differentiated in terms of age—used in approximately eight out of ten SMEs, a standard practice in more than a half of them. About two out of three companies use documentation of completed tasks which allows other employees to identify procedures applicable in specific situations. The solution, however, occurs rather occasionally than as a standard practice.

The most frequently mentioned methods in the context of transfer of knowledge—mentoring, intermentoring and coaching, can also be found in SMEs. The first of the three solutions are used by 63% of enterprises (29% indicated it as a standard practice) whereas coaching and intermentoring—in about a half of the enterprises (about one in every five usually includes them in their practice). The 50+ employee is relatively rarely delegated as a supervisor of apprenticeships—it is a standard practice of only 13% of small and medium-sized enterprises, another 29% admit to occasionally employ the solution. The case of the retired employees looks similarly—15% and 28%, correspondingly.

There are, however, some differences between small and medium-sized enterprises (Table 30). Overall, more various solutions in the area of multigenerational transfer of knowledge can be noticed in medium-sized companies. The differences are particularly marked in the case of mentoring, coaching and the preparation of successors (the difference

in favor of the medium-sized companies of 7–10 percentage points). In turn, taking into account the inclusion of the analyzed activities into the practice of the functioning of companies (as a standard), small and medium-sized enterprises are differentiated especially in the case of two solutions: working in multigeneration teams (61% of medium-sized enterprises against 45% of small ones), preparing successors (41% against 28%), preparation of documentation (35% against 23%) and duplication of competences (63% against 51%). Only storytelling (older employees telling about their experience in performing a given job) is slightly more often included as a standard practice of small rather than medium-sized companies (Table 30).

Figure 22. Employment of the multigenerational transfer of knowledge tools
(%, n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Table 30. Instruments of multigenerational transfer of knowledge by the employment size and form of ownership (%)

Specification		Employment size			Form of ownership		
		10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Duplication of competences, i.e. the division of duties which allows mutual replacement of employees	Yes, this is a standard practice	51.4	62.7	0.006*	58.8	52.8	0.433
	Yes, but rarely	29.9	21.7		21.2	29.2	
	No	15.7	11.4		16.5	14.9	
	I don't know	3.0	4.2		3.5	3.2	
Preparation of documentation from completed tasks (notes, internal databases, etc.)	Yes, this is a standard practice	22.7	34.9	0.016*	37.6	23.5	0.002*
	Yes, but rarely	42.7	34.3		42.4	41.2	
	No	30.3	27.1		18.8	30.8	
	I don't know	4.3	3.6		1.2	4.5	
Relay system, i.e. recruitment of a new employee before the retirement of the previous one	Yes, this is a standard practice	24.7	30.1	0.018*	28.2	25.4	0.102
	Yes, but rarely	29.9	34.3		42.4	29.5	
	No	38.2	28.3		27.1	37.5	
	I don't know	7.2	7.2		2.4	7.7	
Preparation of successors	Yes, this is a standard practice	27.8	41.0	0.001*	30.6	29.9	0.268
	Yes, but rarely	33.8	27.7		44.7	31.7	
	No	32.3	23.5		22.4	31.6	
	I don't know	6.1	7.8		2.4	6.8	
Storytelling – older employees telling about their experience in performing a given job	Yes, this is a standard practice	18.1	17.5	0.917	18.8	17.9	0.174
	Yes, but rarely	33.1	33.7		44.7	32.1	
	No	43.6	42.2		36.5	44.0	
	I don't know	5.2	6.6			5.9	
Mentoring – senior employee acts as a mentor to the young one	Yes, this is a standard practice	28.4	33.7	0.039*	38.8	28.4	0.114
	Yes, but rarely	32.9	38.0		30.6	34.0	
	No	31.8	23.5		27.1	30.7	
	I don't know	7.0	4.8		3.5	6.9	

Table 30. (cont.)

Specification		Employment size			Form of ownership		
		10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Intermentoring – senior employee acts as a mentor to the young one and vice versa	Yes, this is a standard practice	20.6	21.1	0.882	25.9	20.2	0.032*
	Yes, but rarely	31.3	30.7		37.6	30.6	
	No	41.7	41.0		30.6	42.6	
	I don't know	6.4	7.2		5.9	6.6	
Coaching – senior employee acts as a coach	Yes, this is a standard practice	21.1	25.3	0.068	31.8	20.9	0.014*
	Yes, but rarely	30.3	33.1		32.9	30.6	
	No	42.6	34.9		31.8	42.2	
	I don't know	6.0	6.6		3.5	6.3	
Work rotation, i.e. shift of the selected older and younger employees between the job positions	Yes, this is a standard practice	19.5	21.1	0.273	22.4	19.6	0.822
	Yes, but rarely	33.8	38.6		34.1	34.6	
	No	40.8	36.1		41.2	39.9	
	I don't know	5.9	4.2		2.4	5.9	
Gradual retirement	Yes, this is a standard practice	22.3	31.9	0.020*	35.3	22.8	0.018*
	Yes, but rarely	30.1	26.5		29.4	29.5	
	No	39.4	33.1		30.6	39.1	
	I don't know	8.2	8.4		4.7	8.5	
Work in multigeneration teams	Yes, this is a standard practice	44.7	60.8	0.002*	58.8	46.3	0.180
	Yes, but rarely	32.7	20.5		23.5	31.4	
	No	17.1	15.1		17.6	16.7	
	I don't know	5.4	3.6			5.6	
Community of practice combining different generations	Yes, this is a standard practice	32.0	42.2	0.004*	30.6	34.0	0.400
	Yes, but rarely	31.4	27.1		34.1	30.4	
	No	29.6	21.1		31.8	27.9	
	I don't know	7.0	9.6		3.5	7.8	

Table 30. (cont.)

Specification		Employment size			Form of ownership		
		10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Secondment of an experienced employee (aged 50+) as a supervisor of apprenticeships	Yes, this is a standard practice	11.4	19.9	0.344	9.4	13.1	0.278
	Yes, but rarely	30.5	22.9		29.4	29.2	
	No	50.1	50.6		56.5	49.6	
	I don't know	8.0	6.6		4.7	8.1	
Employing the retired employees	Yes, this is a standard practice	15.5	15.1	0.195	8.2	16.1	0.558
	Yes, but rarely	27.1	33.7		38.8	27.2	
	No	50.7	43.4		51.8	49.3	
	I don't know	6.7	7.8		1.2	7.4	

p – probability in the Mann-Whitney test (excluding the “I don’t know/It’s hard to say” responses);

* – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

In turn, comparing public and private entities, several differences should be particularly emphasized, especially the significance of intermentoring, mentoring and coaching, as well as preparation of documentation, work in multigeneration teams, gradual retirement as they are suggestively more often used as a standard practice in public entities. On the other hand, private companies are clearly more often employing their retired employees (16% vs. 8%)—not surprisingly since they are more flexible in this respect than public entities (similar findings from earlier surveys—see Wiktorowicz, 2016, pp. 245–246). Moreover, 50+ employees performing as the mentors of internships (13% vs. 9%) and the so-called community of practice (34% vs. 31%) can also be found here more often. The result may surprise a bit since such solutions might seem less popular, but perhaps employers perceived the possibility more intuitively. Communities of practice appear next to tools supporting communication and group work. They are tools that implement the concept of employee knowledge networks, groupware and work ow, all communication channels, such as e-mail, forums, chat, remote conferences, etc. (Kłak, 2010, p. 154).

Age Management Benefits

Assessing age management in SMEs at the functional level, the perception of the benefits of its implementation should also be considered. Majority of the responses to the question whether age management understood as mature employees' management enables a specific process to be launched, e.g. profiting from the mature employees' competence, improving employees' overall effectiveness as well as effective implementation of strategies, goals etc. was affirmative, yet the number of respondents definitely convinced is low—they constitute a maximum of 24%, and in some areas—only about 10%.

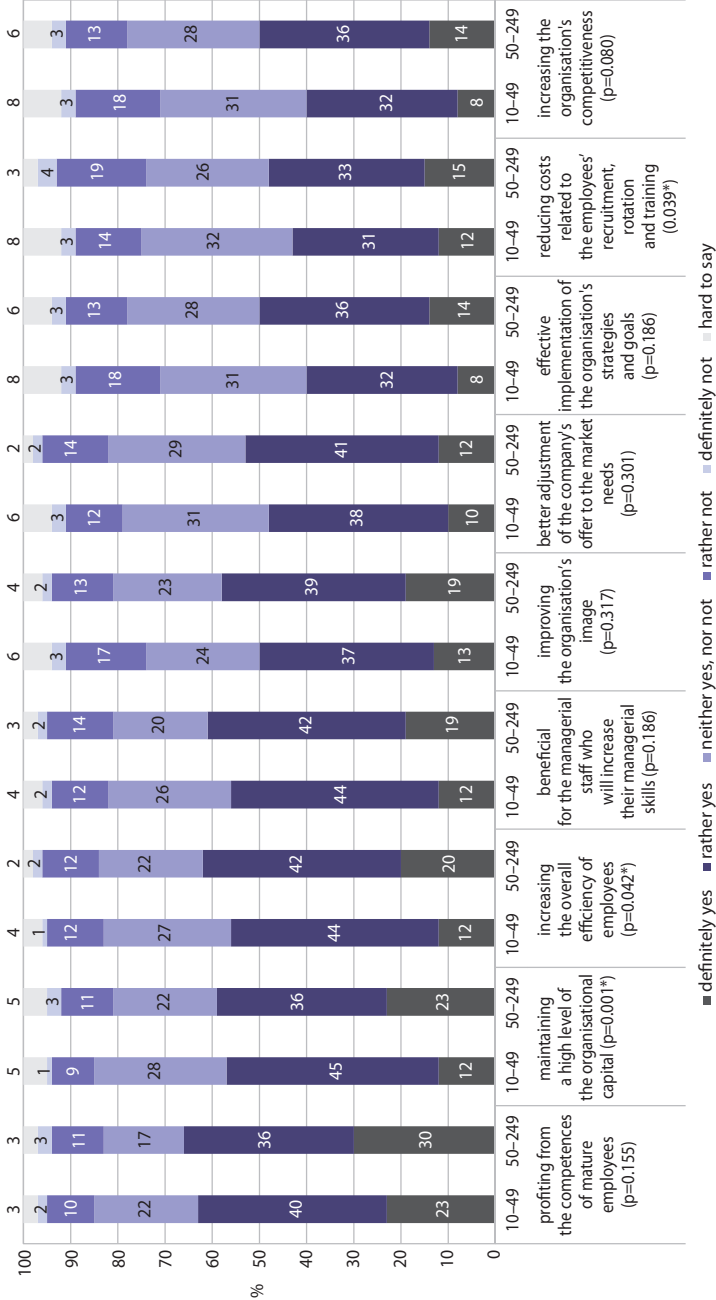
Benefits of age management are perceived in many areas, but the most important is profiting from competences of mature employees (almost two-thirds of responses), and thus—maintaining a high level of the organizational capital (about 60%). It will also be beneficial for the managerial staff who will increase their managerial skills and increase the overall efficiency of the company (also around 60%). Benefits such as increasing the organization competitiveness, reducing costs related to the employees' recruitment and adaptation as well as the effective implementation of the organization strategies and goals are rated as relatively weakest (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Evaluation of the age management benefits in SME in Poland (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Figure 24. Evaluation of the age management benefits by employment size (%)



p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Generally, managers in medium firms often than in small definitely confirm benefits of age management (Figure 24). Statistically differences were found with respect to three areas: maintaining the high level of an organizational capital, increasing the overall employees' effectiveness and reducing the costs related to recruitment, employee turnover and training. Representatives of companies employing from 50 to 250 employees argue that age management understood as mature workforce management significantly contributes to benefiting from the mature workers' competence (30% of respondents claimed definitely yes, 36% probably yes), maintaining the high level of an organizational capital (23% claimed definitely yes, 36% probably yes) and increasing the overall employees' effectiveness (20% claimed definitely yes, 42% probably yes). From the other side, approx. 23% of larger enterprises' representatives stated that age management is not conducive to reducing costs related to recruitment, employee turnover and training. In turn, 23% of people representing smaller enterprises definitely argued that age management may contribute to profits from mature employees' competences (it is the most important benefit in their opinion). Additionally, 57% of them believe that age management can lead to maintaining a high level of organizational capital, and over 55% of them note that such a system will not only increase the overall effectiveness of employees but also contribute to increased management knowledge and skills in the field of team management. On the other hand, about 20% of individuals representing smaller enterprises claimed that age management is unlikely to reduce costs associated with recruitment, employee turnover and training, neither contribute to the effective implementation of both objectives and strategies nor increase competitiveness of the organization, as well as has no influence over improving the image of the company in the environment.

Monitoring HRM processes is carried out only in several SMEs—about 13%, including one in four medium enterprises and 11% of the small ones (Table 31). A company ownership structure plays no significant role in this respect ($p = 0.775$).

Considering SMEs where HRM processes are monitored, it may be noticed that only every fourth company differentiates indicators with respect to the mature age, more or less every third—with respect to the generation. The indicators shall not be differentiated in smaller enterprises (approx. 2/3 small firms and 83% medium ones).

Table 31. Monitoring HRM processes by the employment size and form of ownership (%)

Specification		Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p	Public	Private	p
Monitoring human resources management processes is carried out	yes	13.3	11.2	24.1	<0.001*	14.1	13.2	0.775
	no	78.5	80.9	66.3		76.5	78.7	
	don't know	8.2	7.9	9.6		9.4	8.1	

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" response);
 * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Table 32. Indicators in the monitoring HRM processes by the employment size and form of ownership (%)

Specification		Total	Employment size			Form of ownership		
			10 to 49	50 to 249	p	public	private	p
Indicators differ in relation to the mature age of employees	yes	25.6	31.2	12.5	0.024*	0.0	28.1	0.036*
	no	69.9	64.5	82.5		91.7	67.8	
	don't know	4.5	4.3	5.0		8.3	4.1	
Indicators differ in terms of employee generation	yes	30.4	37.9	12.5	0.003*	14.3	32.2	0.224
	no	5.2	57.9	82.5		78.6	63.6	
	don't know	4.4	4.2	5.0		7.1	4.1	

p – probability in chi-square test or Fisher's exact test (excluding the "I don't know" response);
 * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Reactive or Proactive Age Management?

Awareness of the challenges associated with an effective age management process comprises its basis. It, in turn, shapes the strategy and personnel strategy as well as individual age management tools. But, the key is the vision of such management which forms all the planned and implemented activities intended to improve efficiency of the enterprise. As already mentioned, Wallin and Hussi (2011) have thus distinguished a reactive and proactive approach to age management including the five types of age management strategies: *solving the problems of scarce resources, decreasing work demands, enhancing individual resources, intergenerational learning and life-course approach*. The classification is an important point in the assessment of the degree of age management development in SMEs in Poland.

Taking cognizance of the above discussed classification, the following points concern the results of the CATI SME survey which then allows the evaluation of the degree of age management development among this group of enterprises. Next, a reference to the Wallin and Hussi's (2011) classification will be made to assess the development status of proactive and reactive age management strategies.

From the perspective of active ageing, particular emphasis should be placed on the last three levels of the age management development which should be directed towards proactive strategies in SMEs. Only age management strategies referring to the potential of employees aged 50+ and perceiving them in terms of opportunities instead of threats to the smooth functioning of SMEs can bring measurable long-term benefits to an organization. In the CATI survey, SMEs were asked to identify with a (randomly chosen) approach to human resource management in the context of ageing labor resources.

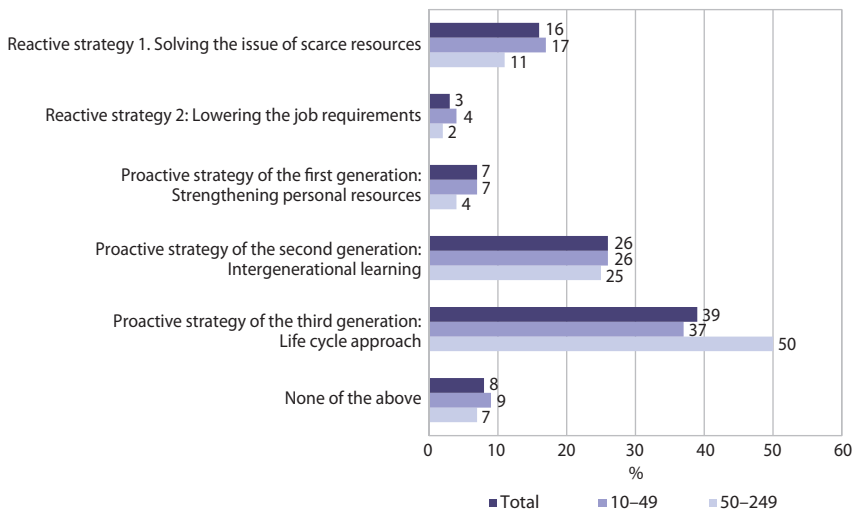
The question was: "I will now read five descriptions delineating the approach to management in the context of ageing workers. Please tell me which one best describes your organization?" (also, a reference to Wallin and Hussi's classification is provided here, but no such information was given to the respondents):

1. "We employ older works mainly when we have difficulties with employing the younger ones" (*1st Degree Reactive Strategy. Solving the Problem of Scarce Resources*).
2. "We use high competences, experience and knowledge of mature employees, also in teaching younger ones, entrusting them with the role of a mentor, a mentor of internships" (*2nd Degree Proactive Strategy: Intergenerational Learning*).

3. “Based on the assumption that all generations are valuable for the development of the company, we try to draw from this diversity by conducting activities that serve to strengthen the involvement of employees from different generations” (*3rd Degree Proactive Strategy: Life-course Approach*).
4. “We adapt the workplace to the needs and capabilities of older employees who change with age” (*1st Degree Proactive Strategy: Enhancing Individual Resources*).
5. “We try to keep mature people in employment, we support health prevention and physical activity” (*2nd Degree Reactive Strategy: Decreasing the Demands of Work*).
6. “None of the above”.

Based on SME representatives’ statements, it can be concluded that Polish enterprises employing people over the age of 50 quite often apply proactive age management—3 out of 4 of the entities. The enhancing individual resources strategy is acknowledged by 7% of SMEs. In turn, every fourth enterprise indicated the intergenerational learning strategy. The approach based on the life-course applies to as many as 40% of entities (Figure 25). The results instill optimism.

Figure 25. Reactive or proactive age management strategies in SMEs in Poland (% , n = 1000)



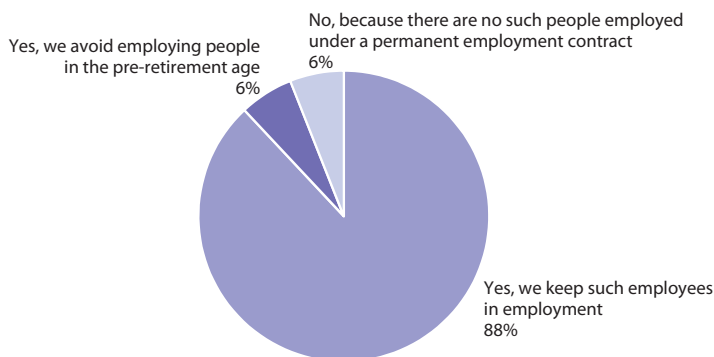
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Proactive strategies are significantly more often implemented by medium-sized enterprises than in the case of small companies—in the former it applies to 71% of entities, and in the latter—80% ($p = 0.038^*$). Not only is the employment size important, but also the turnover of the enterprise ($p < 0.001^*$)—half of the economically weakest companies (with a turnover below PLN 100,000 for the entire 2015) use the first of the reactive age management strategies, the percentage reaches 32% among the enterprises with a turnover of PLN 100,000–500,000 and 9–15%—above PLN 500,000. The second of the reactive strategies also concerns mainly enterprises with a turnover of up to PLN 500,000. Reactive strategies are assumed by companies with strong debts—one third of entities against approximately 20% with an average or low debt level. On the other hand, proactive strategies of the second and third degree are used more often in companies with a low or average level of debt whereas the first degree—more frequently in the case of high debt level ($p < 0.001^*$). Importance of the highest degrees of proactive age management is clearly marked in enterprises that already experience problems with personnel ageing and difficulties in recruiting employees from the open market—especially in energy, health service and social care, housing and catering. Importantly, reactive strategies can be found in particular in companies with low employment of 50+ employees (both in absolute and relative terms) and, on the other hand, companies with high staff turnover—their most important area of age management deals with taking steps aimed at retaining employees in the company (level one). The intergenerational learning strategy is clearly the least used by the enterprises with a relatively short period of operation while the oldest companies usually lower work requirements or strengthen the personal resources of 50+ employees. Furthermore, higher social capital does not determine the choice of proactive age management strategies in Polish conditions. On the contrary, such companies oftener tend to use reactive strategies. In turn, human capital influences the choice of proactive strategies of the second or third degree, while low levels of social capital influence a reactive strategy related to solving the problem of scarce resources, i.e. the emerging lack of hands to work.

Support for Maintaining Economic Activity of 50+ Employees

In Poland the 4-year-long protection period for people in pre-retirement age is obligated for all employers. The CATI survey among SMEs shows that the solution fulfils its task—most employers keep such employees in employment (Figure 26).

Figure 26. Protection period and approach to employing people aged 50+ (% , n = 1000)



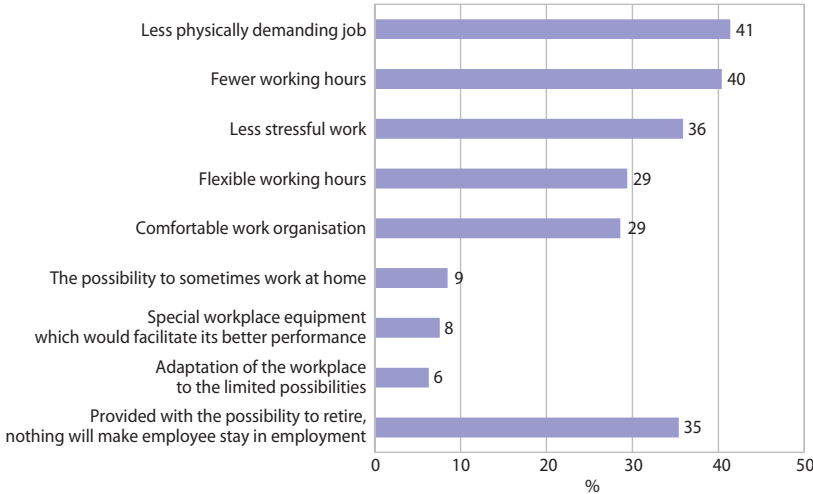
Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Nevertheless, 6% of SMEs find its influence contrary to the expected—supposing it protects the existing employees of the company, it limits the new employment of people over the age of 50. As a result, in the situation of a job loss, the already low chances of people in pre-retirement age further decline. And it is a regularity independent of the size of the company, its business sector (industry and ownership form) or location.

Employers of SMEs were also enquired about the specific solutions they believe could contribute to extending the professional life of their employees. The shift to less physically (41.4%) and mentally (35.9%) demanding work was noted as the most important here as well as solutions related to the flexible work organization—a reduction in the number of working hours (40.4%) and flexible working hours (29.4%) (Figure 27).

Among the flexible forms of work organization, the most important were both flexible working hours and its overall more convenient organization. However, every third employer is of the opinion that such activities will be ineffective since if employees can retire, nothing will persuade them to remain employed.

Figure 27. Main changes which in the opinion of employers would encourage their employees who have reached the retirement age to continue working according (% , n = 1000)^a



^a Choice of three possible responses.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

The opinions are quite polarized, they only slightly differentiate the size of the enterprise or the form of its ownership (Table 33). Only a shift to less stressful work is indicated significantly more often by medium-sized entities (44.6%) than small ones (34.2%). Moreover, easier physical work as well as more comfortable work organization are specified more frequently by private enterprises than public ones.

The difference in the assessment of the last variant is significant—employers in the public sector clearly (almost twice) more often think it impossible to dissuade employees from retiring if such is their decision. Considering the fact that the structure of SMEs is undoubtedly dominated by non-public entities, this is quite an optimistic conclusion. Especially in the context of greater possibilities of systemic impact on public entities—appropriately designed solutions dedicated to public entities could change the picture.

The responses in this respect are obviously related to the nature of the work performed, and thus to the industry represented. Three out of four employers in the mining industry indicate a shift to a less physically demanding job. About half of those representing industry, construction and trade are of a similar opinion. Less stressful work was indicated by none of the respondents representing agriculture and only one dealing with gastronomy

or hotel industry or financial and insurance activities as opposed to the half of employers of health service and social services, vehicle repairs and construction. A more convenient work organization is particularly important in construction, transport and storage as well as professional and technical activities (4 out of 10 responses), while none of the representatives of health service and social welfare or agriculture specified the area. Special equipment of the workplace was noted mainly in education (1 out of 3 responses), construction and activities related to real estate services (1 out of 8 responses) and trade, information and communication, transport and storage (1 out of 10 responses). Adaptation of the workplace was indicated relatively often in health service and social assistance, gastronomy and hotel industry, real estate services, as well as information and communication as well as professional, scientific and technical activities (indicated by every seventh and eighth person from the industries).

Table 33. Main changes which in the opinion of employers would encourage their employees who have reached the retirement age to continue working according to the employment size and the form of ownership (% , n = 1000)

Specification	Employment size			Form of ownership		
	10 to 49	50 to 249	p	public	private	p
Less physically demanding job	41.2	42.2	0.826	30.6	42.4	0.034*
Less stressful work	34.2	44.6	0.011*	28.2	36.6	0.124
Fewer working hours	39.7	44.0	0.304	31.8	41.2	0.090
Comfortable work organization	29.4	24.7	0.223	10.6	30.3	<0.001*
Flexible working hours	28.7	33.1	0.248	28.2	29.5	0.805
Possibility to sometimes work at home	8.9	6.6	0.343	10.6	8.3	0.470
Special workplace equipment which would facilitate its better performance	7.8	6.6	0.604	8.2	7.5	0.817
Adaptation of the workplace to limited possibilities	6.1	7.2	0.590	3.5	6.6	0.272
Provided with the possibility to retire, nothing will make employee stay in employment	36.3	30.7	0.168	51.8	33.9	0.001*

Note. Choice of three possible responses.

p – probability in chi-square test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

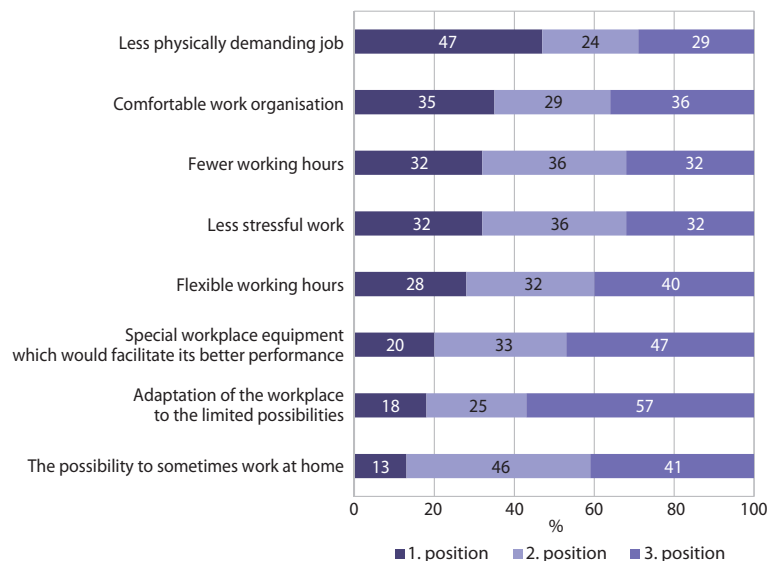
Reduction of the number of working hours was indicated especially in the SME dealing with vehicle repairs (3 out of 4 responses) as well as financial and insurance activities, real estate services, administration services, information and communication, catering and hospitality, health service and social assistance (half of responses). In turn, flexible working hours were indicated primarily by respondents dealing with real estate services, financial and insurance activities, administration (more than a half of responses), as well as health service and social assistance, catering and hospitality (almost half). According to the obtained responses, not in every case is the performance of work at home possible—as claimed by 4 out of 10 employers in the information and communication industry, one-fourth representing education and 2 out of 10 in administration. In many industries such a possibility either remains unnoticed or only single individuals acknowledge it.

On the other hand, as many as 8 respondents out of 10 representing agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, and 7 out of 10 dealing with water supply and sewage and waste management believe that an employee cannot be induced to remain in employment if provided with such an opportunity. Similar opinion may be found in the half of the representatives of mining and extraction, energy, culture, entertainment and leisure activities, gastronomy, housing and other service activities as well as among 4 out of 10 people representing health service and social assistance together with transport and warehouse management.

Analyzing further the rank of a given solution in sustaining professional activity of mature people yet assigned by employers, work that is less physically challenging comes to the foreground—almost half of the respondents who pointed to the factor put it in the first place (Figure 28).

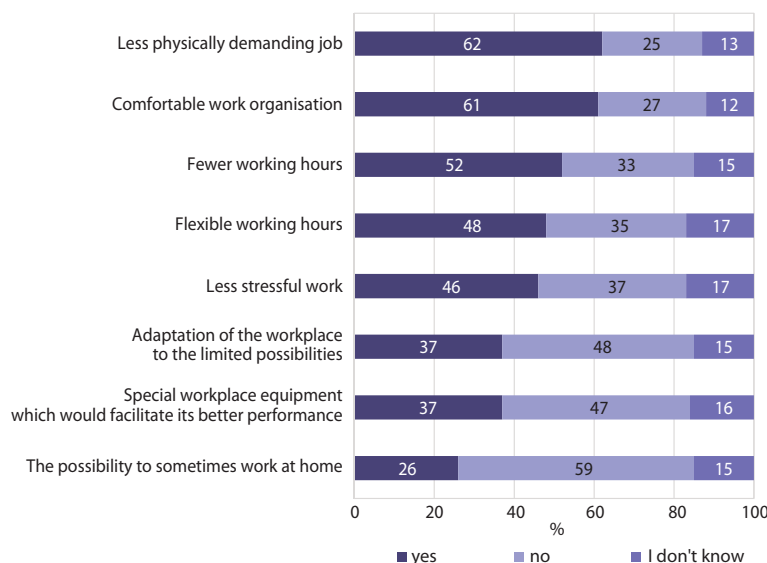
Great importance is also attached to a more convenient work organization (35% of people who previously indicated the importance of the factor put it in first place) and less working hours as well as less mental strain (32% each). The ability to work at home, adaptation of the workplace and special retrofitting were indicated the least frequently (Figure 28), and moreover, they were presented as rather tertiary factors (Figure 29). There are no significant differences in this respect from the employment size or the SME property sector point of view.

Figure 28. Ranking the main changes which in the opinion of employers would encourage their employees who have reached the retirement age to continue working (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Figure 29. Changes employers would be willing to implement to encourage their employees at a retirement age to continue working (% , n = 1000)



Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

Employers are eager to adapt to the needs and abilities of their employees (Figure 29)—every third is willing to move an older employee to less physically demanding or more conveniently organized work, almost half—to introduce flexible working hours and/or shift to less stressful work. Again, specificity of work determines poor opportunities to work at home, although every fourth employer is willing to create such a possibility. The tendency of employers to undertake activities with incurred additional costs (the adaptation of job positions or their special retrofitting) is relatively weak, although roughly every third employer is also willing to take such action.

SMEs in private ownership do not differ much in this respect from public entities (Table 34). In the case of the majority of the proposed changes, their readiness to implement them is more often declared by public entities, nevertheless, should the undecided responses be omitted (hard to say, approximately 15% of private and less than 5% of public entities), significant differences can be noticed only as far as two alternatives are concerned. Flexible working hours are suggestively more likely to be implemented by non-public entities (49.1%) than public ones (40.0%) which is associated with the generally lower flexibility of the entities in terms of their work organization. On the other hand, public SMEs significantly more often declare willingness to adapt their job position (55.0%, as compared to 35.5%). In turn, given the employment size, there is a greater tendency to take measures related to flexible work organization in medium-sized enterprises than in smaller ones. It applies in particular to the possibility of reducing working time, but also generally more convenient work organization. Shift to less stressful work and adaptation of the workstation are also more often preferred by medium than small companies.

The most willing to implement the discussed solutions are those SMEs employers who are already experiencing the strongest effects of ageing labor resources, i.e. health and social services (for each of the discussed activities they were first—the vast majority of the respondents from the group, if not all, declared their usage, it is not applicable only in the case of flexible working hours and the possibility of working at home). Regarding individual solutions, let us note that a shift to a lighter physical work is declared by employers representing health and social services (all of the respondents), education (8 out of 10), construction, vehicle repair, energy, gastronomy and accommodation (3 out of 4) as opposed to just one real estate company. On the other hand, a shift to a less stressful job was indicated primarily by the representatives of education (8 out of 10), administration, health service and social care (3 out of 4). Agricultural companies (1 out of 4) can be found at the other extreme in this respect. In particular, employers from health and

social care services (all respondents) who deal with real estate services (9 out of 10), financial and insurance activities, gastronomy and accommodation as well as cultural, recreation and entertainment activities agree to reduce the number of working hours (3 out of 4) as opposed to every third employer in agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing industry. A more convenient work organization is declared by all the respondents representing health service and social care as well as education whereas the least willing to implement them are the companies in the field of energy and mining (only one in every three).

Table 34. Changes employers would be willing to implement to encourage their employees at a retirement age to continue working according to the employment size and the form of ownership (%)

Specification	Employment size			Form of ownership		
	10 to 49	50 to 249	p	public	private	p
Shift to less physically demanding job	60.7	65.2	0.991	63.3	61.3	0.209
Shift to less stressful work	43.1	60.9	0.003*	61.7	44.9	0.091
Fewer working hours	49.6	64.5	0.015*	58.3	51.7	0.775
Comfortable work organization	58.4	70.3	0.014*	68.3	59.8	0.932
Flexible working hours	47.0	55.1	0.148	40.0	49.1	0.005*
Possibility to sometimes work at home	26.5	24.6	0.425	38.3	25.2	0.146
Special workplace equipment which would facilitate its better performance	36.2	39.9	0.373	45.0	36.1	0.645
Adaptation of the workplace to the limited possibilities	35.6	43.5	0.043*	55.0	35.5	0.046*

Note. Choice of three possible responses.

p – probability in chi-square test; * – differences statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on CATI survey among SME employers in Poland (STAY project).

The surveyed entrepreneurs from the small and medium-sized enterprises' sector in our country notice various methods to sustain the professional activity of mature employees. It would also be interesting to see how respondents perceive the management of 50+ employees in both a broader perspective and a multi-dimensional environment related to the age management issue.

To sum up the assessment of the functional dimension of age management, it can be noticed that barely one third of enterprises perceive their

competitive advantage in material resources (29%), and their vast majority sees it in intangible resources. Such development profile is in line with development trends. It certainly provides a good foundation for using the latest technologies. Most companies have developed their own website (around 86%), built an internal computer network (about 75%) and used specialized computer programs (about 73%).

Strategic management first of all manifests itself in the development strategy (official document—17%, unwritten guidelines—30%) as well as in the personnel strategy (10% of all the enterprises, 17%—unwritten). The mission remains in close relation with the strategies yet only 42% of the entities have it developed—it refers to a company's clients (83%), employees (79%) and ethics (74%).

Benefits of age management are perceived especially in relation to profiting from mature employees' competences (almost 2 out of 3 responses), and thus maintaining an organizational capital at a high level (about 60%). Certainly, no monitoring for human resources management processes hinders anticipating potential benefits—it is only carried out in about 13% of SMEs.

Summing up, analyzing small companies structures a key person responsible for shaping personnel issues is primarily a board member or company owner, in middle-sized organizations the priority shifts to the lower levels of management.

Instead of a Summary

Human capital management, including aspects of diversity and age management of employees, is a major challenge for organizations, and for small and medium-sized companies in particular. Among the determinants of development and important factors for the success of small and medium-sized companies, intellectual capital is a sustainable as well as building a competitive advantage. Modern organizations not only need diverse resources, but very often take an inclusive, proactive approach. Aware of the numerous benefits of diversity management in companies, they are implementing it, including age-diverse employees.

The research of two complementary research projects provides results on topics that are topical, important and still gaining importance in today's socio-economic realities. The following results seem to be key in this regard:

- in addition to the right leadership, entrepreneurial competence, and technical aspects, innovation can be understood as one of the key success factors for SME profitability and growth;
- entrepreneurial competence is seen as an accelerator for SME success, as a competitive business environment requires SMEs to seek new opportunities for survival;
- for small enterprises operating in Poland, issues such as employee honesty, employee reliability, employee skills, employee involvement and health are very important and significant for organizational development among human capital factors;
- as far as medium-sized companies are concerned, respondents point to the aspect of employees' honesty and integrity, their skills, knowledge, and reliability as factors of human capital important for the development of the organization;
- for SME companies, the technical infrastructure, management processes and methods, information resources/systems, databases and organizational culture for small and medium companies were indicated as important and very important;

- relational capital as reputation and image of the enterprise on the market as well as loyalty and satisfaction of customers are very important and significant for the development of small, medium large enterprises;
- companies of all sizes perceive the benefits that diversity management can bring to an organization, and they mainly include improved communication between employees, improved quality and effectiveness of teamwork, and increased motivation and commitment;
- small, medium-sized, and large companies operating in Poland perceive only basic differences between employees (age, disability, and gender);
- characteristics such as national and ethnic origin, cultural differences, race, religion, or talents have no significant impact on building their intellectual capital;
- small and medium-sized Polish enterprises commonly employ technological achievements to a large extent for small, medium and large companies in Poland;
- less than one third of enterprises perceive their competitive advantage in material resources;
- nearly half of the surveyed enterprises have an established development strategy (in the form of an official document or unwritten guidelines);
- only less than half of analyzed companies have developed a mission;
- in Polish SMEs mostly top-level decision-makers are responsible for personnel matters' place in the organizational structure;
- one in ten organizations has trade unions;
- research confirms the traditional nature of performance appraisal in the SME sector;
- bonuses applied in SMEs most often depend on the results of work. Training is a popular form of motivational instruments;
- by creating WLB programs, companies offer additional health insurance and medical services covering the immediate family of an employee, spouses and children;
- half of the enterprises can be characterized by working overtime and in two out of five entities—a two-shift system may be found;
- companies are uninterested in implementing employee volunteering;
- the main areas that both refer to human resources management and include the specifics of particular age groups are: (1) adaptation at a workplace, (2) knowledge management, (3) employee training, (4) knowledge transfer (in all cases more than 40%);
- three-quarters of companies do not monitor don't monitor the age structure of employees;

- companies use multigenerational knowledge transfer tools but occasionally, among instruments serving the multigenerational transfer of knowledge, employers most often indicated two: duplication of competencies, that is a division of duties that allows mutual replacement of employees and work in teams differentiated in terms of age—used in approximately eight out of ten SMEs, a standard practice in more than a half of them;
- benefits of age management are perceived in many areas, but the most important is profiting from competences of mature employees (almost two-thirds of responses), and thus—maintaining a high level of the organizational capital;
- in sustaining professional activity of mature people, the work that is less physically challenging comes to the foreground—almost half of the respondents who pointed to the factor put it in the first place;
- Polish enterprises employing people over the age of 50 quite often apply proactive age management—3 out of 4 of the entities.

In conclusion, Development Potential of SMEs in Poland – Selected Aspects of Age, Diversity and Intellectual Capital Management certainly does not exhaust all the themes and problems related to the issue of building and managing intellectual capital in small, medium and large companies. It is the hope of the authors that the proposed theoretical discourse together with the empirics and the formulated conclusions will be useful to the readers not only as a source of inspiration for further scientific inquiries or expansion of knowledge. On the other hand, the presented multifaceted perspective on shaping intellectual capital in organizations—related to age management or diversity management—will be used in practice. The publication is dedicated to a wide audience of researchers, policy makers, managers or students—people who work with and/or manage people.

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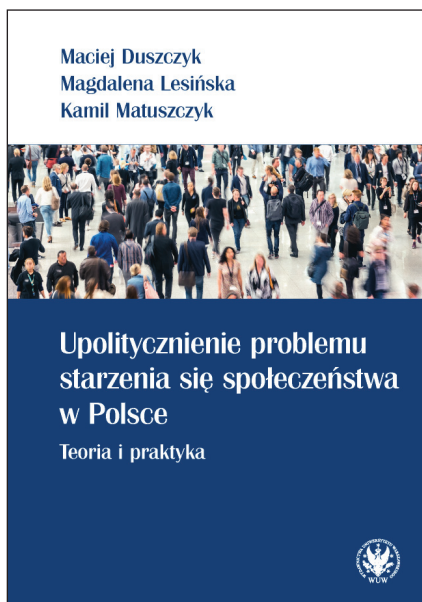
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