

AGE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES FROM THE POZNAŃ POWIAT – RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Małgorzata GAJOWIAK

Department of Enterprises, Investments and Insurance, Institute of Logistics, Faculty of Management Engineering, Poznan University of Technology; malgorzata.gajowiak@put.poznan.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-5631-7758

Purpose: The main aim of the article is to present the concept of age diversity management and selected results of own research study made on SMEs from the Poznań powiat. The choice of the area of interest results from the fact that over the last several decades, both the population and the labor force are aging. Such a situation may lead to a reduction in the total number of people employed, investments through a decrease in savings and an increase in pressure on the pension system and the state budget.

Design/methodology/approach: Fifty SMEs from the Poznań powiat of the Greater Poland voivodeship participated in the study. In addition, enterprises should employ a minimum of 4 people up to 50 and a minimum of 4 over 50 years old. The survey was carried out using the CATI and PAPI methods.

Findings: Based on the research, it can be indicated that the vast majority of SMEs in the analyzed area do not have an age management system in place. Moreover, the needs of the older workers are not realized enough by the managers.

Research limitations/implications: It would be better to conduct a survey on a bigger research trail in next edition.

Practical implications: It is important to encourage enterprises through trainings and co-financing to implement an age management system, in particular when one can observe the demographic changes worldwide.

Originality/value: The originality of the work is sought in an attempt to examine whether SMEs from the Poznań powiat take into account needs of older employees and adapt working conditions to them. Accordingly, the article analyzes the answers made by respondents according to four basic spheres of age management process. What is more, it suggests how to improve the issues badly assessed in the survey.

Keywords: age management, age diversity, demographic crisis.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Terms such as "old age" and "aging" of the population were not in the considerable interest of economists until half a century ago. Although the analyses of economies took into account the number of the population and the rate of its growth, they did not focus on its internal structure (Jurek, 2012). However, the focus on this issue began when it was noticed that the populations of highly developed countries are aging at a very fast pace. This is evidenced by i.a. data on basic demographic aspects. And so, in 1950 the world was inhabited by almost 129 million people aged 65+, in 50 years this number has increased almost six times, and according to the forecast – in 2050 it will be 1.55 billion people. In addition, life expectancy has increased from 53 years in 1950 to 73 in 2020. In turn, in 2050 it is to be at the level of 77.35 years. At the same time, the fertility rate decreased from 5 to 2.4 in the period 1950-2020. It is estimated that in thirty years it will be at 2.18 and till 2070 the number of births will no longer compensate for the number of deaths on a global scale. What's more, between 1950 and 2050, the median age in the world will increase by as much as 13 years (Statista, 2021).

Poland is also experiencing demographic changes and in particular the issue of population ageing. The share of people aged 65+ in 2020 compared to 1960 increased almost 4-times and is now at the level of 18.73%. The fertility rate is at the level of 1.46, which means that our country does not achieve simple replacement of generations (Statista, 2021). What's more, the average inhabitant of our country is currently at the age of 41.6 years, and in 2050 he will already be 50.9 years old (WB, 2021). Therefore, the issue of the aging of the population should be taken into account in the aspect of the functioning and management of a modern enterprise. Therefore, the fear of a labour shortage forces the need to activate people of pre-retirement age (45-64 years) and even extend professional activity beyond the statutory working age. The use of the potential of employees determines building a competitive advantage and can be a source of opportunities for the development of modern organizations. A number of activities carried out by enterprises, focusing on adapting the conditions and workplace to the needs of older people, perfectly fit into the ideas of the age diversity management of employees (or age management).

The above findings became a prerequisite for conducting a quantitative study on a sample of 50 small and medium-sized enterprises from the Poznań powiat. Through its implementation, answers were sought, i.a. to the following research problems, which took the form of the following questions: 1) whether equality due to age is important from the point of view of employees; 2) does the employer recognise the importance of managing diversity due to age? 3) whether the analyzed enterprises have a developed and implemented age management system. In the preparation phase of empirical research, three research hypotheses were therefore adopted. To conduct the study CATI and PAPI techniques were used.

The article consists of four parts. The first characterises the labour market of seniors in Poland based on measures such as the activity rate and the employment rate and making compares to the EU27 average. The second part presents the idea of age management. In turn, in the third - the basic research criteria are presented and in the fourth part the results of research in the above-mentioned area of interest of the article are widely discussed.

2. Senior labour market in Poland

Among many determinants responsible for the competitiveness of the economy as a whole, human capital stands out, including entrepreneurial, creative and innovative attitudes and behaviors of the older generation (Kryk, 2008). As the researchers conclude, "these behaviors predominantly determine the longer maintenance of employment on the labor market, thus contributing to the creation of added value for the whole society" (Urbaniak et al., 2015, p. 76). Activation of seniors, prolonging their professional activity, and thus using their valuable potential in the form of knowledge and experience by the owners of modern enterprises is particularly important in a situation where Polish seniors belong to a group characterized by less activity on the labor market than their average peers from Europe.

Analyzing the activity rate in Poland, it can be concluded that in recent years its value has undoubtedly increased in the age ranges of 55-59 years, 60-64 and over 65 years of age. It is worth noting that this measure in 2020 for the 55-59 year range was as much as 8 p.p. lower than the EU27 average. Selected statistics are presented in the chart below.

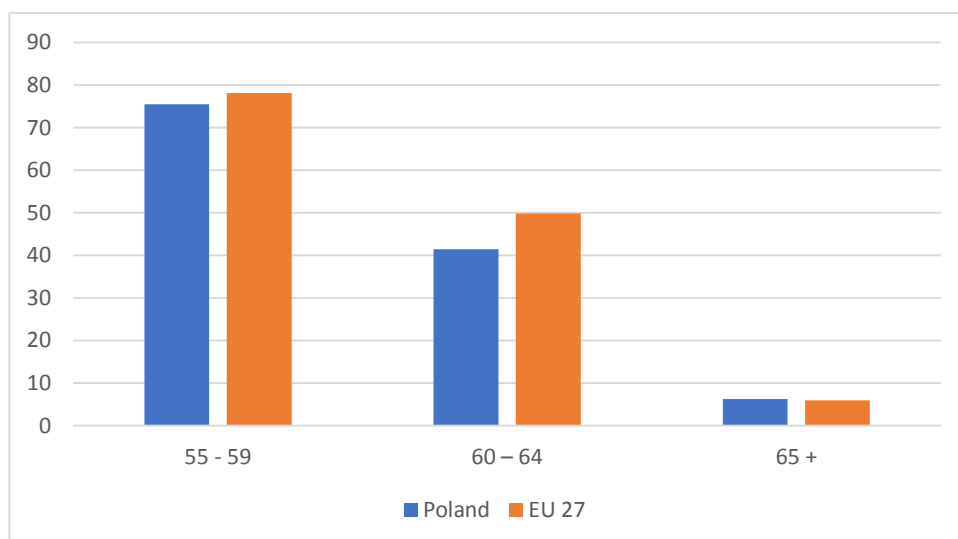


Figure 1. Activity rate for Poland and EU27, third quarter of 2021. Source: (Eurostat, 2022).

The measure considered here was 75.5% for the first age range and was less than 3 percentage points lower than the EU27 average. In 2020, this difference still reached about 6 p.p. Poland currently ranks better compared to such countries as: Belgium (73.8%), Malta (72%), Greece (69.27%), Croatia (69.7%), Italy (69.4%), Luxembourg (69%) and Romania (66.3%). The undisputed leaders in the EU for the 55-59 year range have been the Czech Republic (89.5%) and Sweden (90.5%) for several years now. On the other hand, analyzing the range of 60-64 years, one can observe a lower level of the labor force participation rate, as much as 8 p.p. compared to the EU27 average. In the entire European Union, its highest level in the third quarter 2021 was recorded in countries such as Sweden (72.6%), Estonia (72.0%) and the Netherlands (64.8%). In turn, the value of this measure for people 65+ has been slightly higher than the EU27 average for over a year (Eurostat, 2022).

Analyzing another characteristic of the labor market, i.e. the employment index, it can be concluded that for people aged 55-59, 60-64 and 65+, it was characterized by an increasing trend over the years 2010 - 2019 (only for the period 2012 - 2015 this indicator has not changed in the 65+ group) (Eurostat, 2019b). Currently, for the age range of 55-59 years, Poland with a result of 73.7% is close to the EU27 average of 74%. The undisputed leaders in this group include the Czech Republic (87.3%), Estonia (82%) and Germany (81.2%). On the other hand, for the 60-64 years, our country represents a lower level of almost 7 p.p. than the EU27 average with the result of 47%. For the last age range, the measure is 6.2% for Poland and is slightly higher than the EU27 average of 5.7%. Although our country is far from the results achieved by such countries as: Estonia (15.8%), Sweden (13.4%), Latvia (12.8%) or Lithuania (11.5%), an improvement in the employment of older people on Polish labour market can be noted (Eurostat, 2021). These data are presented below.

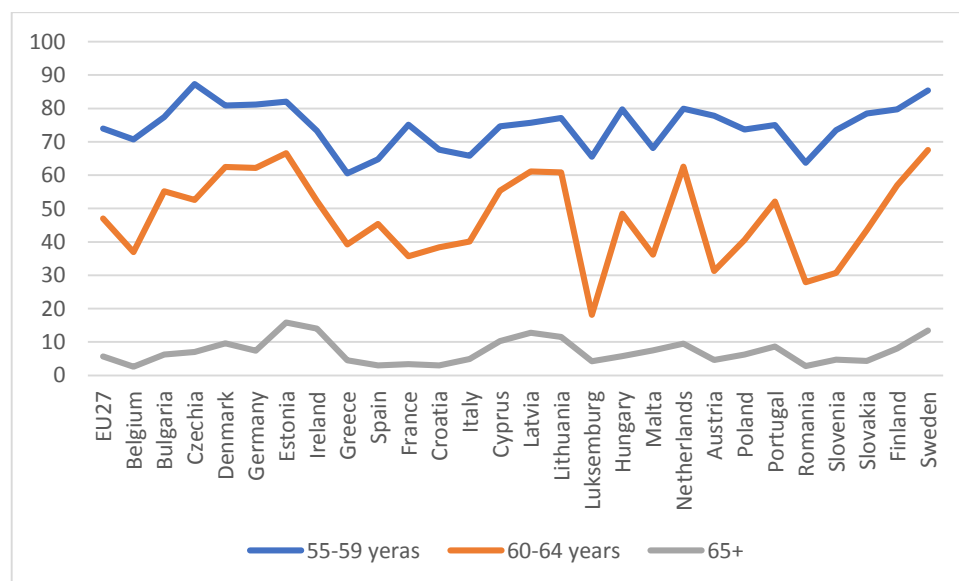


Figure 2. Employment rate in 3 age ranges in EU countries, third quarter 2021. Source: (Eurostat, 2021).

It is not optimistic that Poles are still one of those nations that would like to leave the labor market as soon as possible. In the case of men, it is 58.6 years, while in the case of Polish women, the preferred age of leaving the labor market is 57.3 years. Only residents of Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta would like to leave the labour market even earlier. At the same time, it is worth adding that citizens of countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands would like to work as long as possible of all European residents (on average women up to 66 and men up to 67 years of age) (Eurostat, 2020).

2. Age management in the enterprise

It is generally accepted that age management is a part of diversity management. Age, as the original element of the identity of the individual, is here understood as a distinguishing feature of people employed in the enterprise. In the face of changes in the demographic structure of the population observed in the world and the tendency to ageing populations, this feature is of great interest not only to management theoreticians, but above all to practitioners in enterprises. Although the idea itself is aimed at employees of all ages, in this case, special care is directed at older employees for fear of the availability of labor resources. It is not subject to the issue that "the demographic phenomena taking place will have implications for companies due to the deteriorating prospect of generation replacement and problems in the succession of positions and in ensuring an appropriate competence base" (Borkowska et al., 2016, p. 43).

Note here that the activities that are covered by age management are typical and regular tasks of human resource management. An important difference, however, is that they are aimed at identifying the diverse situation of employees, styles of action and behavior, as well as competences. It is commonly accepted that the management of age diversity enables a more rational and effective use of the labor resources available in the company due to the fact that the area of interest includes the issues of adapting the conditions and place of performing tasks to the needs and capabilities of employees of different ages (Liwiński, Szanderska, 2010).

Age management aimed at maintaining the employment of older people until they reach retirement age or even longer requires a number of actions from the company's management. In the literature, seven basic areas are most frequently distinguished, i.e. recruitment, learning and training, promotion and internal inter-station transfers, flexible forms of employment and retirement, as well as a change in attitude towards older workers (Naegle, Walker, 2006). In addition, some researchers of the organization also postulate the inclusion of wage policy and, in addition to health issues, also those related to the well-being of the employee in the workplace (IBnDiPP, 2013).

It should be added here that the management of age diversity in the macroeconomic approach presented here is becoming a necessity that can bring a number of numerous benefits to the employees themselves, business owners or customers. And so, on the scale of the economic entity, it is indicated here i.a. the possibility of maintaining competences at a sufficiently high level, maintaining the continuity of the company's operations, achieving advantages from diversity due to the age of its employees, increase in labor productivity, decrease in the cost of human resources management. In the individual dimension, the unquestionable benefits for the elderly include i.a. the possibility of maintaining employment at least until the statutory retirement age, achieving satisfaction with the work performed as well as the financial situation and life in general. Another group of benefits is socio-economic in nature and includes for example maintaining or even increasing the stock of economically active people, protecting the pension system and public finances, removing the threat of an increase in tax and para-tax burdens and reducing age discrimination during employment (IBnDiPP, 2013).

In the literature in the field of management, economics or gerontology, numerous causative factors responsible for the success of the implementation of the idea are discussed. Thus, first of all, it is pointed out that it is necessary to raise awareness of issues relating to old age, the ageing of the population, not only among the management of enterprises, but also among all those employed regardless of their age. In addition, it is also important to carefully plan and implement the individual stages of the implementation of the concept and to show special care for improving working conditions. As noted by J. Liwiński and U. Sztauderska, it is necessary to improve working conditions in a situation where the company wants to maintain or improve the health and skills of aging employees (Liwiński, Sztauderska, 2010). The third, most often mentioned here condition is the mutual cooperation of each party expressed by good, effective communication enabling building respect and trust. What's more, pursuing an informed age management strategy requires management to collect and analyze available information about employees. It is also necessary to monitor on an ongoing basis the changes that are taking place in the labour market at the local, national and even international level. As some researchers rightly point out, particular consideration should be given to the migration of refugees, who will have a real impact on the functioning of the labour market in the near future in many countries (Borkowska et al., 2016). In addition, it is also worth gathering knowledge about government programs supporting employment in enterprises (Liwiński, Sztauderska, 2010, p. 17).

3. Research criteria

As part of the project entitled "Methods of shaping the intellectual capital of employees taking into account age diversity" in the period 2021-2022, a study was carried out on a sample of 50 small and medium-sized enterprises from the Poznań poviát. The main research problem was to recognize the extent to which these entities take into account the phenomenon of diversity due to age in the management of the intellectual capital of the enterprise. The author of the project's area of interest included in particular the elderly. The selection of enterprises constituting the research population was deliberate, and the criteria for this selection were:

1. location (Poznań poviát characterized by the largest number of people in non-mobile age (45-59/64), i.e. 86,268 people, the largest number of unemployed aged 55-59 (12.7%) and aged 60+ (8.2%), as well as one of the highest demographic age rates in the voivodship (GUS, 2020b; USwP, 2020a; PUP, 2019);
2. the total number of employees employed (small and medium-sized entities, which are the largest group of enterprises in the Poznań poviát (just behind the city of Poznań), hence their condition and prospects for further development most clearly illustrate the potential of entrepreneurship, innovation and competitiveness) (SWW, 2020);
3. section C according to PKD 2007 (it is classified as one of the key industries of Wielkopolska and develops most strongly in the Poznań poviát (next to the Kalisz and Konin poviáts)) (Dąbrowska et al., 2019);
4. employment of a minimum of 4 people up to 50 years of age and a minimum of 4 people over 50 years of age.

On the basis of the analysis of data from the database purchased from the Statistical Office in Poznań and their correction by research assumptions, a group of 362 entities was distinguished. Fifty companies agreed to participate in the study using the CATI and PAPI techniques, of which 32 were small and 18 medium-sized economic operators. The basic research tool was an interview questionnaire consisting of 20 questions. The implementation of relevant research required terminological findings i. a. in a set of the following terms: age, elderly person, diversity, age diversity management, stereotype, age discrimination.

Respondents represented 64% of small businesses. The average survey respondent was 55.9 years old. The respondents were mostly men (64%), 80% of the respondents had incomplete or full higher education and their average work experience was 30.2 years. 78% of respondents described their health as good or very good.

4. Implementation of the concept in SMEs from the Poznań poviat – conclusions from the research

The basic premise of the study was that adapting management instruments to the age categories of employees creates a high chance of obtaining a number of benefits, described above, in the micro and macroeconomic aspect. Therefore, the study sought to verify i.a. the following research hypotheses:

(H1) Equality on grounds of age is important from the point of view of workers.

(H2) The employer recognises the importance of managing diversity due to age.

(H3) Companies have developed and implemented a system for managing age diversity.

In order to verify the first research hypothesis, in the interview questionnaire was put the question whether equality due to age is important for respondents. For more than 89% of people employed, this is an important issue in their workplace. At the same time, as many as 58% of respondents admitted that they had experienced various manifestations of age discrimination. Their predominant form was disrespect (38%), ridicule (32%) and neglect (28%). This state of affairs can undoubtedly have a negative impact on the performance of work, as well as hinder the intergenerational cooperation itself, and the flow of information, knowledge and experience will then become less effective. Age discrimination (or ageism) may lead to a decrease in the involvement of seniors in their professional activities and even to the earlier deactivation of seniors from the labor market. It is worth adding here that "work is not only a source of income, but also builds prestige, determines the place and role of the individual in society and the family. Work is often the basic, and often the only stimulus to life activity: it gives life meaning, motivates to leave the house, to take care of appearance, physical and mental condition – this dependence is most visible in relation to lonely people who cannot realize themselves in the family, acting as a grandfather or grandmother. Professional responsibilities allow many elderly people to find their own value and usefulness" (Schimanek, 2010, p. 13).

In view of the high rank given by respondents to the issue of equality on the basis of age, it seems expedient to verify the second hypothesis. Therefore, the through the survey questionnaire workers were asked, whether they considered that their employer saw the importance of managing diversity due to age. 67% of respondents answered this question negatively, which allows to reject this research hypothesis. What's more, in the opinion of respondents, business owners do not pay enough attention to such issues as: care for developing cultural sensitivity, managing and motivating employees to exchange knowledge and experience, care for respecting the rights and differences of others (including attitudes, views, age) and using different ways of thinking and acting employees from different age ranges. A compilation of the answers given by the respondents is provided on the figure below.

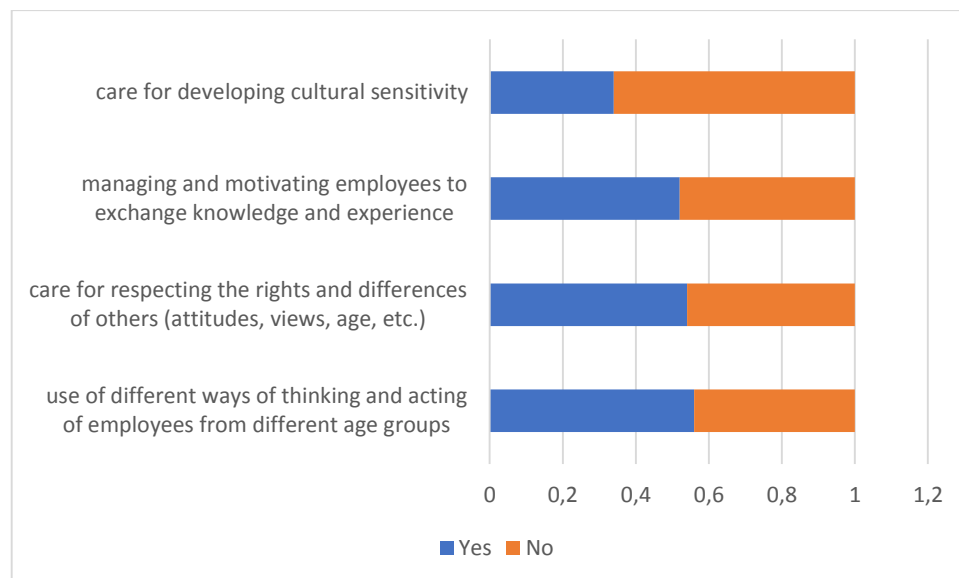


Figure 3. Attitudes and behaviors of the company's management in the opinion of respondents. Source: own study.

In view of observed by the respondents the low concern of managers over the issue of age diversity of employees, it becomes important to verify the last hypothesis. Therefore, through the interview questionnaire, respondents were asked, whether the age diversity management system is not only implemented in their enterprises, but also fully realized. Only in 6 surveyed companies the system is implemented, but – as indicated by respondents – in only 3 it is fully used. These results prove that hypothesis 3 should be rejected. What's more, 27 out of 50 respondents indicated that the approach to the issue of multigenerational employees and potential difficulties is only intuitive, ad hoc on the part of the company's management. There are no formalized procedures on issues such as age discrimination or the fight against stereotypes. At the same time, it is worth adding here that the respondents themselves pointed to numerous benefits that the age management system could bring, both in the individual aspect, as well as for the enterprise and the economy as a whole. The greatest benefits that an employee can gain include: 1) an increase in satisfaction with life and work; 2) reducing intergenerational conflict and 3) improving working conditions. On the other hand, the benefits that the company itself can gain are: 1) reducing the risk of losing capital of knowledge, skills and experience; 2) improving the image in the eyes of the client; 3) improving the competitive position of the company. The group of benefits for the economy and society included: 1) protection of the pension system and public finances against excessive burden; 2) dismiss the threat of a drastic increase in taxes and 3) reduce digital and social exclusion.

What is more, the lack of both written support systems for the elderly and a broader institutionalized care for the elderly can also be seen when analyzing selected areas of age management proposed by J. Jaworska (Jaworska, 2010). Only in a few of their sub-areas one can observe the interest of entrepreneurs in the needs of older people (i.a. issues of flexible forms of work, ergonomics of work or integration meetings). The basic areas analyzed in the

survey, along with a set of questions and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers are presented in the table below.

Table 1.
Selected areas of age management

ACTIVITIES IN THE ENTERPRISE	QUESTION IN THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	NUMBER OF INDICATIONS (%)	
		YES	NO
organization of the workplace	Does the company use flexible forms of work organization (e.g. mobile work, remote work, etc.)?	YES	64
		NO	36
	Does the company delegate an employee to help an elderly person?	YES	36
		NO	64
	Does the company use so-called mixed teams?	YES	32
		NO	68
Does the company agree to work part-time?	YES	18	
	NO	82	
improving qualifications and transferring knowledge	Does the company invest in lifelong learning and training (basic or advanced)?	YES	58
		NO	42
	Does the company care about the transfer of knowledge between younger and older employees?	YES	46
		NO	54
taking care of health, increasing the availability of care services	Does the company offer employees free of charge or co-finance preventive examinations in part?	YES	48
		NO	52
	Does the company organize sports activities to improve its physical fitness?	YES	36
		NO	64
	Does the company care about the ergonomics of the workplace?	YES	70
		NO	30
elimination of negative attitude to work	Does the company organize integration meetings?	YES	78
		NO	22
	Does the company recognize and counteract age discrimination?	YES	58
		NO	42

Source: own study.

The responses of the respondents collected above make it possible to draw some valuable conclusions. Firstly, in the first of the analyzed areas, i.e. "workplace organization", 64% of respondents indicated the possibility of using flexible forms of performing their work (including remote or mobile work). Undoubtedly, the pandemic and related precautionary measures taken in enterprises could have contributed to this possibility. It is also worth adding here that such an option is also strictly dependent on the nature of the work performed. In the case of the surveyed companies, there was undoubtedly such a possibility, because only five of the surveyed people are production workers who have to perform their activities in the workplace. The rest of the survey respondents are white-collar workers (9 department managers, 13 office workers, 23 employees responsible for orders and working directly with the company's customers). Unfortunately, only in every third enterprise another employee is delegated to help an elderly person in a situation when he or she has difficulties with performing official tasks. However - importantly - such action could strengthen cooperation between the two generations by faster and more effective transfer of both knowledge, skills and professional experience. Such involvement could also positively influence employees' trust in management. As A. Klimczuk states, "trust mobilizes subjectivity, spontaneity, openness and unrestrained action towards other people. It also reduces feelings of insecurity and risk, and makes it easier

to initiate interactions and maintain lasting relationships with others. Mutual trust allows one to use other people's resources. Trust is associated with attitudes such as optimism, a sense of influence, kindness and tolerance. Trusting others is conducive to increasing social capital [...], gives a sense of recognition and acceptance from others, opens up a chance for additional benefits, is conducive to receiving additional information, goods or other values" (Klimczuk, 2012, p. 79). Moreover, in only 16 enterprises the respondents of the survey indicated that the management cares about the transfer of knowledge between the younger and older generations. As Ł. Jurek emphasizes, "each generation of employees is different – it has its own strengths and weaknesses. The main idea of age management is not to homogenize staff, but to use differences. It is about achieving a synergy effect from the cooperation of employees of different ages. The main advantage of young people is the current theoretical knowledge and the ability to use modern technologies. In turn, the main advantage of older people is experience and practical skills. Competences of young and old employees are complementary. Their cooperation generates added value, which increases the effect of the work of the entire team. Moreover, such cooperation leads to the clash of various ideas and ideas, which results in an increase in creativity" (Jurek, 2012, p. 154). Moreover, in the surveyed area as many as 82% of company management do not agree to work part-time.

On the other hand, when analyzing the second area, it can be indicated that more than half of the companies (62% of positive responses) invest in lifelong education and in basic or advanced training. This situation is optimistic as it indicates that SMEs appreciate the importance of courses and training for the development of both employees and enterprises in a competitive market. Investments in human capital increase the value of older people in the labor market. As Ł. Jurek notices, "dynamic scientific progress causes that the qualifications obtained once become obsolete. Nowadays, it is assumed that obtaining a school diploma is not the end of the education process, but only the end of the first stage of education and a starting point for further education. Education should be a lifelong process" (Jurek, 2012, p. 150). In addition, what is important, such state does not confirm the common stereotype in Poland that it is not worth investing in people aged 50+ (Gajowiak, 2014b). As K. Turek concludes, "there is a belief among employers that older workers are inferior, have lower competences, are less efficient, less prepared for work, it is more difficult for them to adapt to new solutions and learn new technologies" (Turek, 2013, p. 87). At the same time, the quoted researcher emphasizes that "disregarding the extent to which this belief is wrong and whether it is supported by the experience of specific employers, maintaining such an opinion may have disastrous consequences for both parties to the employment contract. Lack of interest in the development and working conditions of older workers, pressure to retire as early as possible may have a negative impact on productivity and commitment at work, arouse reluctance to continue working and accelerate the decision to retire. For employers, the lack of commitment and low productivity of employees means potential costs and losses. A different nature of this relationship may backfire" (Turek, 2013, p. 87).

When analyzing the area of "caring for one's health", it can be indicated that only half of enterprises (52%) offer their employees free or partially subsidized preventive examinations. This situation requires improvement, as research shows that health problems are, in the opinion of older people in Poland, the most common reason for their early professional deactivation. At the same time, it is worth adding that the health condition of a mature person depends on a number of factors, including the record of the human genome, living conditions, lifestyle, education, level of health care or workplace conditions (Gajowiak, 2014a). In addition, only 18 companies organize sports activities to improve the physical fitness of employees. It is worth emphasizing that promoting physical activity in modern enterprises can undoubtedly contribute to reducing sickness absenteeism and, consequently, its costs for the enterprise. Unfortunately – according to Eurostat surveys – Poles aged 20-64 currently belong to the group of nationalities characterized by one of the highest sickness absences during the working week in the entire EU27 (Eurostat, 2019d). It is worth adding here, however, that as many as 70% of enterprises care about the ergonomics of the workplace, and thus adapt it to the physical and mental properties of their employees. There is no doubt that the conditions in which a person works may not lead to a deterioration of his health, i.e. due to inadequate lighting, the need to carry heavy loads or maintain an incorrect body posture for a long time (Schimanek, 2010). This care will affect both the productivity, effectiveness of the tasks performed, as well as the comfort of work itself, and further motivation to perform it.

The answers obtained to the question concerning the last area, i.e. "elimination of negative attitudes towards work", prove that every third company organizes integration meetings aimed at creating and maintaining bonds between employees. It is worth adding here that 29 respondents 50+ take part in this form of activity, of which 9 very often, and 17 often. Unfortunately, according to the responses, only 54% of respondents say that company management recognizes and counteracts age discrimination. Preventing discriminatory practices in the surveyed companies is particularly important in a situation where as many as 78% of the surveyed people experience the existence and reproduction of stereotypes about old age and the elderly. The predominant three negative statements concerned: too high individualism in action, weakened physical and mental condition and workaholism.

5. Conclusion

Numerous statistical data confirm the fact that there is a tendency to age the population on a global scale, as well as to a decrease in the number of births. This raises concerns about the future of the smooth functioning of the labour market, as the ratio of economically active to inactive people is changing very quickly in favour of the second group. This forces both the state and companies to take action to extend the professional activity of seniors. What's more,

the issue of multigenerationality of employees and the need to take into account the differences between them in the functioning of the company is also of interest, because "generational affiliation also has a significant impact on the approach to work, the way of motivation, communication styles, the level of competence, professional experience, the ability to use technology, as well as the formation of their own professional and life goals and implementation strategies" (Smolbik-Jęczmień, 2019, p. 96).

It should be noted that adaptation to the contemporary trends of the global labor market is visible through the focus of the owners of enterprises on managing the age diversity of employees, i.e. a system of activities in the area of creating a friendly work environment and division of professional tasks, the main goal of which is to maximize the potential of employees, as well as ensuring them effective cooperation regardless of the age difference of the staff. The implementation of this goal requires a series of activities aimed at maintaining professional activity and increasing the effectiveness of work performed. "These activities should be based on a multidimensional strategy, the key elements of which are: prevention (preventing age-related problems, such as knowledge obsolescence or occupational diseases), coherence of activities (integration of all entities and tools ensuring high effectiveness of activities), education (informing about the needs and benefits resulting from age diversity) and evaluation (verifying the effectiveness of actions taken) (Jurek, 2012, p. 155).

What is not optimistic is the fact that in Poland this idea is not very popular. This is also confirmed by studies conducted in small and medium-sized enterprises from the Poznań poviat. Out of 50 surveyed companies, only 6 had an age management system implemented, although – as the respondents underlined – only in 3 did it function fully (which made it impossible to accept hypothesis 2). Only in a few of the analyzed sub-areas, i.e. flexible forms of employment, workplace ergonomics and integration meetings, the respondents positively assessed the activities of enterprises. Therefore, it is recommended in the first of the analyzed areas (workplace organization) to segregate tasks (depending on the type of position and production cycle) that an older person could perform for a shorter period, even for a lower salary, determined at the time of employment. Moreover, in the analyzed enterprises there is an urgent need to ensure a specific succession of organizational knowledge. In the event of a longer sickness absence or retirement of an employee, there is concern about "brain drain", which threatens the continuity of business tasks. Therefore, it is recommended to implement such activities as: mentoring, shadowing and creating the so-called mixed teams. These three proposals are intended to facilitate a better transfer of knowledge, skills and experience. Moreover, directing activities to create a community between the younger and older generation may both inhibit the reproduction of stereotypes, but also encourage – when they are based on actual observation – to change attitudes and behavior. In the longer term, they may also strengthen the motivation to extend professional activity and increase the satisfaction of the younger and older generation with their work and life. On the other hand, in the area of "taking care of health", employers could define a top-down list of tasks that could be performed jointly

by representatives of the younger and older generation. In the case of heavy physical work, it would be worth commissioning them to people with much better physical and health condition. In addition, companies could conduct regular employee surveys to identify problems between generations (e.g. discrimination against older people as well as duplicated stereotypes). One solution could also be the creation of an internal code of ethics.

The above-mentioned recommendations may contribute to the improvement of the existing situation in enterprises. As the research shows, for as many as 89% of the surveyed employees the issue of equal treatment regardless of age is important (confirmed hypothesis number 1), especially when more than half of them (58%) experience discrimination on the basis of age in the workplace. Moreover, these employees expect greater involvement of their superiors in issues related to personnel management in the context of multi-generations. In the opinion of 67% of respondents, company managers do not perceive its value. Therefore, on the basis of the respondents' answers, the hypothesis number 3 was rejected. In turn, the respondents themselves indicated in the interview questionnaire numerous undisputed benefits of age management for themselves, the organization, as well as the economy and society.

References

1. Borkowska, S. et al. (2016). *Kształtowanie zaangażowania pracowników w kontekście zarządzania różnorodnością*. Warszawa: IPiSS.
2. Dąbrowska, A. et al. (2019). *Ekspertyza z zakresu branż dominujących w gospodarce regionu w ramach identyfikacji specjalizacji gospodarczej Wielkopolski*. Warszawa.
3. Eurostat (2020). Statuary pension ages and average age. Derived from: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=spr_exp_pens&lang=en.
4. Eurostat (2021). Employment rates by sex, age and educational attainment level. Derived from: http://www.appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction+lfsa_urgand&lang=en.
5. Eurostat (2022). Activity rates by sex, age and citizenship (%). Derived from: <http://www.appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>.
6. Gajowiak, M. (2014a). Age management concept as an instrument reinforcing the vocational potential of seniors In: M. Szczepański, T. Brzęczek, M. Gajowiak (Eds.), *Systemy zabezpieczenia społecznego wobec wyzwań demograficznych i rynkowych*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Poznańskiej.
7. Gajowiak, M. (2014b). Causes and consequences of low employment activity of seniors – selected aspects. In: M. Szczepański, T. Brzęczek, M. Gajowiak (Eds.), *Systemy zabezpieczenia społecznego wobec wyzwań demograficznych i rynkowych*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Poznańskiej.

8. GUS (2020). Ludność. Stan i struktura ludności oraz ruch naturalny w przekroju terytorialnym (stan w dniu 31.12.2020), Warszawa. Derived from: <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ludnosc/ludnosc/ludnosc-stand-i-struktura-ludnosc-i-ruch-naturalny-w-przekroju-terytorialnym-stand-w-dniu-31-12-2020,6,29.html>.
9. IBnDiPP (2013). *Dobre praktyki w zarządzaniu wiekiem i zasobami ludzkimi ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem pracowników 50+*. Warszawa: IBnDiPP.
10. Jaworska, J. (2010). Rola pracodawców w strategiach wydłużania aktywności zawodowej osób 50+. In: *Zarządzanie wiekiem i nie tylko*. Warszawa: Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce.
11. Jurek, Ł. (2012). *Ekonomia starzejącego się społeczeństwa*. Warszawa: Difin.
12. Klimczuk, A. (2012). *Kapitał społeczny ludzi starych na przykładzie miasta Białystok*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Wiedza i Edukacja.
13. Liwiński, J., Sztanderska, U. (2010). *Wstępne standardy zarządzania wiekiem w przedsiębiorstwach*. Warszawa: PARP.
14. Naegle, G., Walker, A. (2006). *A guide to good practice in age management*. Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.
15. PUP (2019). Rynek pracy w Poznaniu i powiecie poznańskim. Poznań. Derived from: <https://www.bip.powiat.poznan.pl/plik,31248,rynek-pracy-w-poznaniu-i-powiecie-poznanskim-w-2019-roku.pdf>.
16. Schimanek, T. (2010). Społeczne uwarunkowania i konsekwencje niskiej aktywności zawodowej osób 50+ oraz rozwiązana służące jej zwiększeniu. In: *Zarządzanie wiekiem i nie tylko*. Warszawa: Akademia Rozwoju Filantropii w Polsce.
17. Smolbik-Jęczmień, A. (2019). Różnorodność pracowników w wymiarze wielopokoleniowości. In: S. Przytuła (Ed.), *Zarządzanie różnorodności pracowników. Perspektywa globalnej mobilności i migracji*. Warszawa: PWN.
18. Statista (2021). Total fertility rate in Europe in 2021 by country. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/612074/fertility-rates-in-european-countries/>.
19. SWW (2020). Znaczenie sektora MSP w kontekście zmian wielkopolskiego rynku pracy. Poznań: Samorząd Województwa Wielkopolskiego.
20. Turek K. (2013). Starzenie się ludności jako wyzwanie dla gospodarki, rynku pracy, polityki i obywateli. In: J. Górnica J. (Ed.), *Młodość czy doświadczenie? Kapitał ludzki w Polsce. Raport podsumowujący III edycję badań BKL z 2012 roku*. Warszawa: PARP.
21. Urbaniak, B. et al. (2015). *Socjoekonomika starzenia się współczesnych społeczeństw*, Warszawa: CeDeWu Sp. z o.o.
22. USwP (2020). *Sytuacja demograficzna województwa wielkopolskiego w 2019 r. Analizy statystyczne*. Poznań. Derived from: <https://poznan.stat.gov.pl/publikacje-i-foldery/ludnosc/sytuacja-demograficzna-wojewodztwa-wielkopolskiego-w-2019-r-,6,2.html>.
23. World Bank (2021). Median age by country. Derived from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.1564.TO.ZS>.