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Nadpis článku: Occupational health and safety (OHS) and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labour market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors – part 7

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Last article from this series, which presents results from Occupational Safety Research Institute's project "Occupational health and safety and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labor market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors", introduces results from qualitative survey from small and medium enterprises. The aim of this research work was to get an overview of the relationships between employers and older employees, including some facts on the situation of the target group in the workplace

BEZPEČNOST A OCHRANA ZDRAVÍ PŘI PRÁCI (BOZP) A RIZIKOVÉ FAKTORY PRACOVNÍKŮ NAD 50 LET – UPLATNĚNÍ STARŠÍCH OSOB V PRACOVNÍM PROCESU S NÁVRHY NA OPATŘENÍ NA ÚROVNI ODVĚTVÍ A PODNIKU – 7. ČÁST

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Abstract

Last article from this series, which presents results from Occupational Safety Research Institute's project "Occupational health and safety and risk factors of workers

over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labor market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors", introduces results from qualitative survey from small and medium enterprises. The aim of this research work was to get an overview of the relationships between employers and older employees, including some facts on the situation of the target group in the workplace

Keywords: elderly worker, employers over 50 years, quality of working life, working conditions, safety and health at work, risk prevention, labor market, qualitative surveys, small and medium enterprises, management, employees, projects, results, Occupational Safety Research Institute

Abstrakt

Poslední ze série článků, které prezentovaly informace o výsledcích projektu *"BOZP a rizikové faktory pracovníků nad 50 let – uplatnění starších osob v pracovním procesu s návrhy na opatření na úrovni odvětví a podniku"*, představuje zjištění kvalitativního šetření v malých a středních podnicích. Cílem této studie bylo získat přehled o vztazích mezi zaměstnavateli a staršími zaměstnanci, včetně získání fakt o situaci starších pracovníků na pracovištích.

Klíčová slova: starší pracovníci, zaměstnanci ve věku 50+, kvalita pracovního života, pracovní podmínky, trh práce, bezpečnost a ochrana zdraví, prevence rizik, pracovní trh, projekty, kvalitativní šetření, malé a střední podniky, management, zaměstnanci, projekty, výsledky, Výzkumný ústav bezpečnosti práce

The article presents results from empirical survey *"OHS and risk factors of workers over 50 - a quantitative survey among workers between 50 and 65"*.

The aim of this research work was to get an overview of the relationships between employers and older employees, including some facts on the situation of the target group in the workplace, perceiving and understanding the influence the differences between them may have on their behaviour at work, including experience with effective communication and cooperation amongst generationally mixed teams within the firm.

OVERALL RESULTS AND EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH OF SME

A mutual comparison of all six surveyed SME was not carried out as this was not the point of the research. Therefore an overall evaluation is not included.

EMPLOYEES

The field research included 127 respondents in total (60% men, 40% women; 82% reached vocational or secondary education; 86% have traditional employment of an indefinite period). A majority of respondents were blue-collar workers (knitters, needlewomen, mechanics, vendors, drivers, maintenance workers etc.) The research was aimed at a general evaluation of the working conditions of workers over 50 (50+) and finding out the attitudes towards the field of employing people of this age category.

- **How employees assess and perceive their firms (questionnaires "25 Views of My Job" and "Short Profile of Our Firm" – SPOF)**

The so-called "Czech mentality", which is rooted in its own customs, dislikes of extremes and is generally quite sceptical and conservative, gives us grounds to state that it has a certain amount of influence on the assessment. This is why many respondents answered a series of questions with an average response (up to 40%).

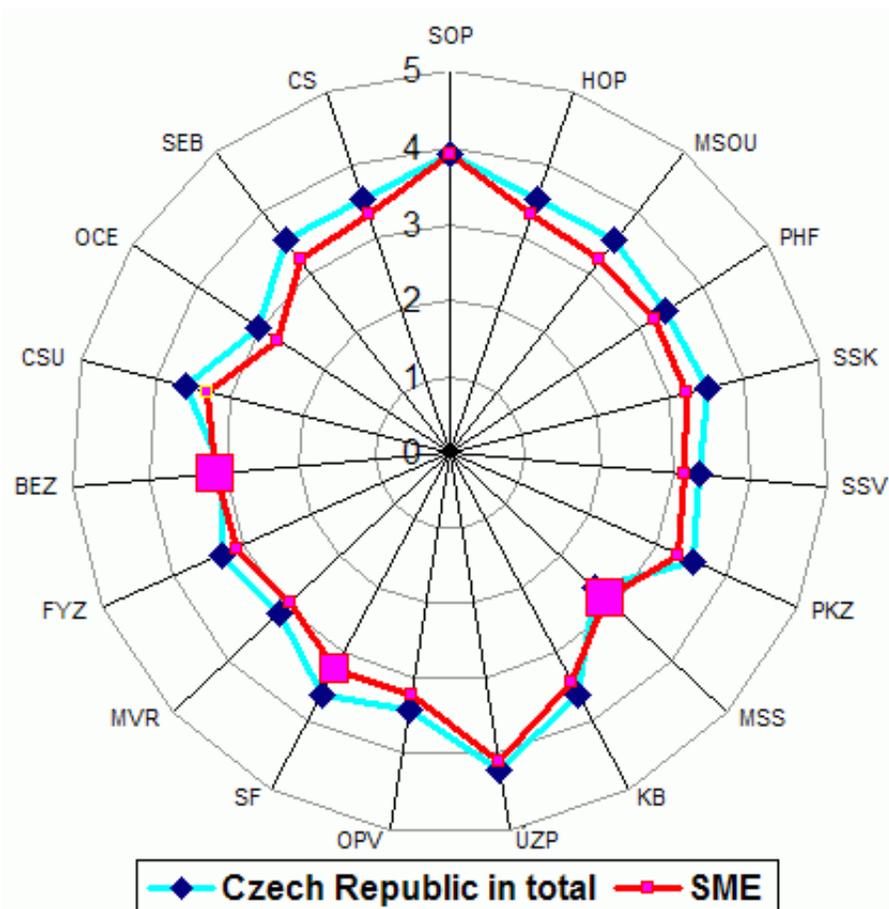
A majority of them more or less evaluated their firm relatively positively. The largest percentage found their firm responsible (82.4%), trustworthy (79.4%), fair (74%) and friendly (72.8%). Among the predominant negative responses were perceptions of the firm as static (24.8%), unfriendly (16.4%) and as not motivating its employees (16.8%). The largest number of people attached importance to the questions dealing with the fulfilment of obligations (90.4%), accuracy and precision (88.8%) and also respecting agreed upon procedures (88.8%).

What is important for employees is to see that their firm prospers and is able to maintain their jobs and earnings. It is clear from their positive attitude to the firm, however, that a certain tension and anxiety from possible job loss are hidden there as well. Respondents try subconsciously not to admit to themselves that their firm could have difficulties that could also have an impact on their personal life. They are mostly satisfied in their job and those conflicts that appear, which they do, are not too for the firm's management to successfully deal with. Though respondents do not tend to praise their firm extremely, they are also not interested in saying any bad things about it.

When doing research in SMEs, the integrated index "Compliance with the firm" showed, in comparison to the total average of Czech firms, the highest value of variation (by 0.4 points).

- **How employees evaluate their work and working conditions (25 Views of My Job – integrated indices, a questionnaire studying the working conditions of SME's employees)**

Respondents are more or less satisfied with their job and the job is, first and foremost, their main source of income and existential security. However, the employees of surveyed SMEs evaluated their jobs more negatively in nearly all aspects than do the employees from the total of surveyed firms in the Czech Republic (n=1872 respondents). One exception is with the aspect of safety (referred to as "BEZ"), which has been slightly better evaluated by employees of SMEs, and another is the measure of stress (referred to as "MSS") which has a greater value among employees of SMEs than is the total average for the Czech Republic.



Graph 1: Comparison of integrated indices of overall and surveyed samples

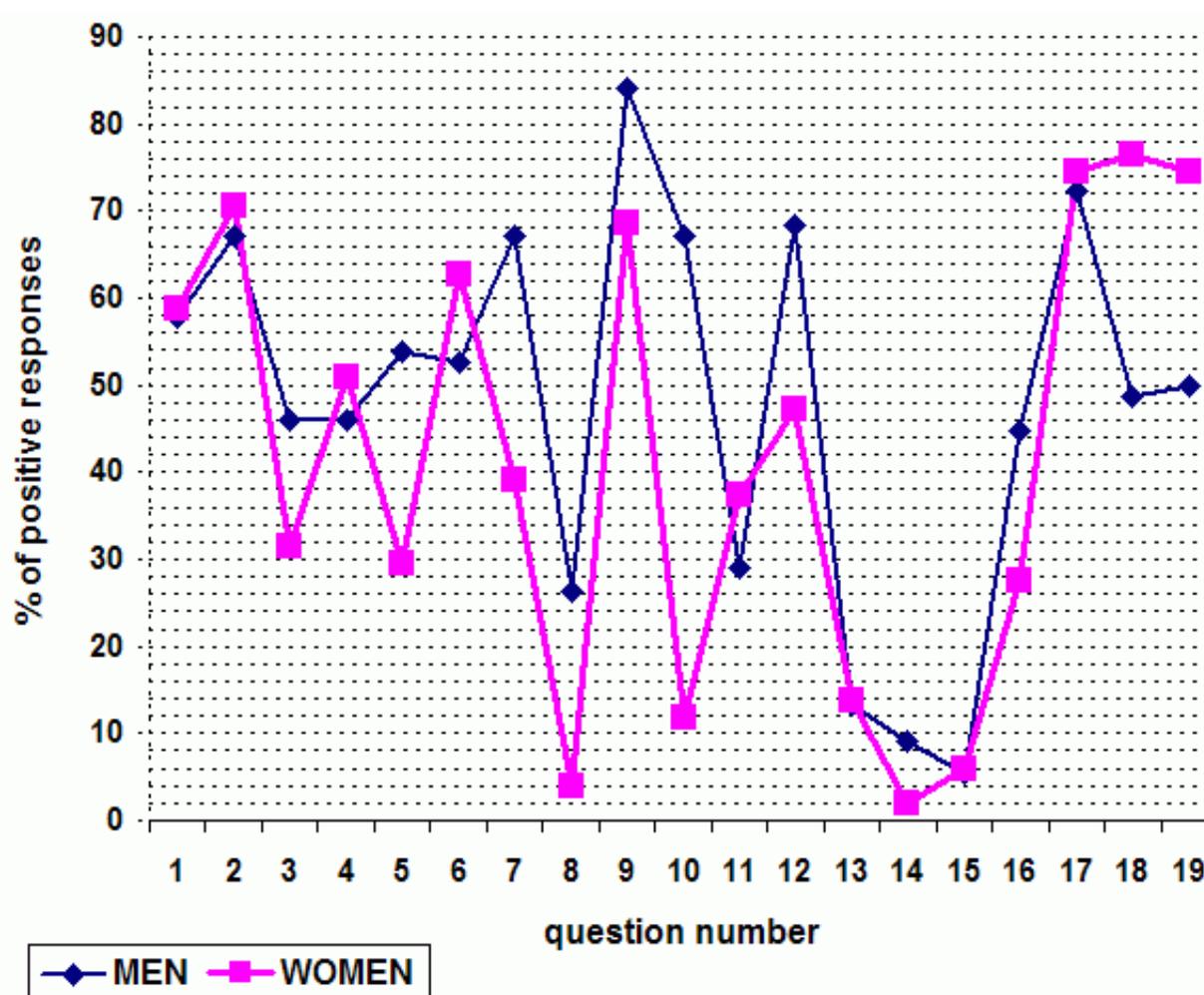
Character of work

40% of respondents found their job to be physically demanding and 48% (especially women) as mentally demanding.

Work environment and work conditions

The evaluation of the questionnaire for the research of employee work conditions - positive responses of men and women are marked in the following Graph 2 in which the numbers of questions 1 – 19 in the short version stand for:

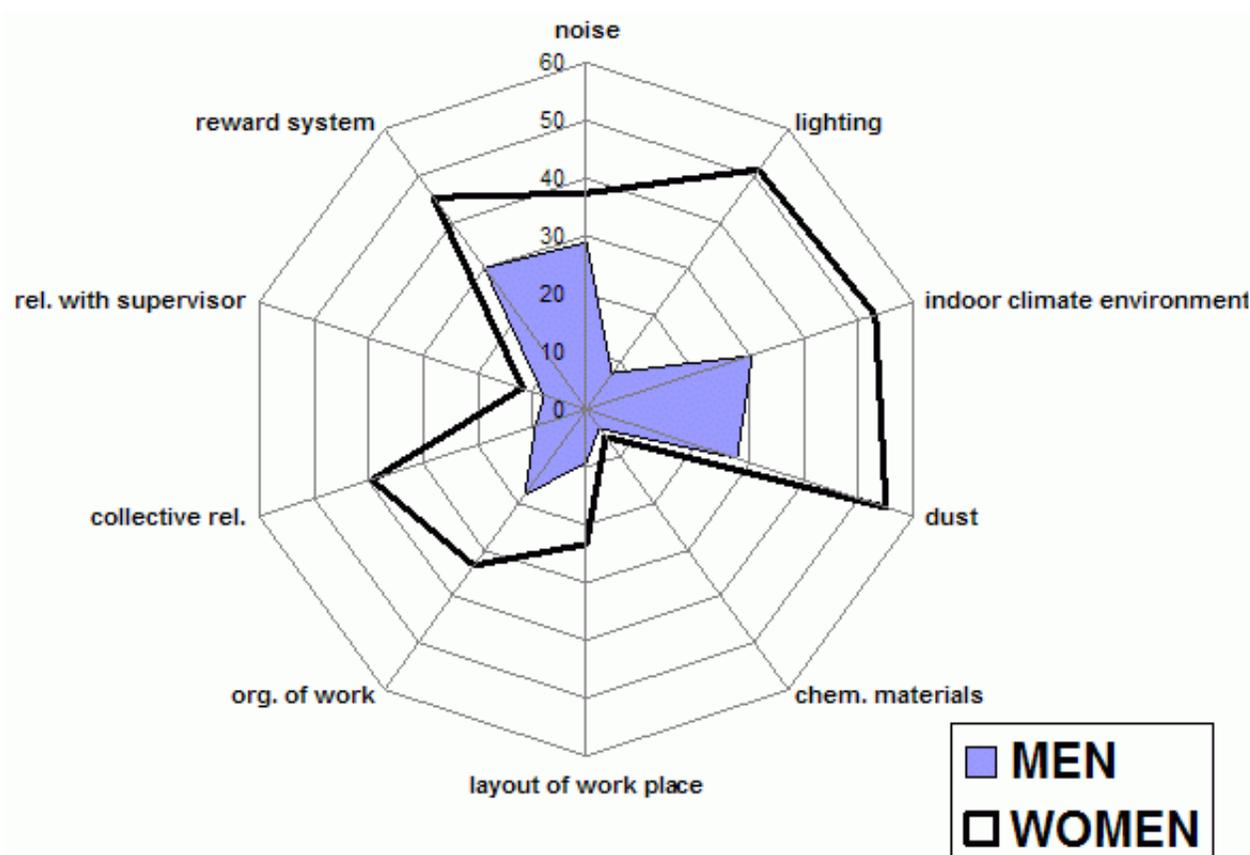
1 – overall satisfaction with the job; **2** – the job as a necessity and source of income; **3** – physical effort; **4** – mental effort; **5** – decision-making speed and time pressure; **6** – adaptation; **7**- use of experience and knowledge; **8** – advancement and career; **9** – willingness to learn; **10** – educational support; **11** – change of job; **12** – communication and cooperation; **13** – generational friction; **14** – advantages of younger workers; **15** – advantages of older workers; **16** – fair reward system; **17** – work load; **18** – working hours; **19** – agreeable to changes in work load and working hours.



Graph 2: Evaluation of employee working conditions – positive responses of men and women in %

The evaluation of the work environment and work conditions showed considerably tolerant attitudes (employees consider noise and dust to be a normal part of production). Our research has shown that women tend to be much more critical of their work environment and work conditions than men in particular firms. They are not satisfied with the lighting, the amount of dust and the indoor climate environment (connected to the nature of the work and the technology used) in the work place.

It is worth paying attention to the evaluation of the presence of chemical materials in the work place. Neither gender expressed nearly any worries about their impact. There is very little probability that they are not used at all. Of course, this is connected with a general lack of knowledge about the negative impact chemical materials have on the human organism.



Graph 3: Evaluation of the work place (percent of positive responses from men and women)

Education and career

It is evident that the character of the respondents' work positions does not give any opportunities for career growth or any opportunity for certain prospects in the future. More than 60% of respondents have eliminated such opportunities without any doubts. The question of whether their current employer supports women in participating in educational activities (courses, training and other) shows an absolutely huge and abysmal difference. Such support has been claimed by 67.1% of men and by only 11.8% of women (a difference of 55.3%). The nature and character of work (women working in textile production or in services) plays a significant role in this evaluation.

Another significant difference (positive responses of women are about 30 percentage points lower than men's) is found in the responses to the question "Does your manager use your experience and knowledge of a specific field?" (e.g. "Do they ask you for advice?" or "Do they respect your opinion?" etc.).

Next, men have also mentioned much wider opportunities and prospects for advancing in their career (lineal promotion) – positive answers were given by 26.3% of men and only 3.9% of women. Men assess the mutual communication in their firm as much better than women. Men also perceive their job as more demanding; from the perspective of the necessity of fast decision-making under time constraints (53.9% of men versus 29.4% of women).

Overwhelming majority claim an interest and willingness to learn new things, participate in further education and acquire new skills. We have found, however, that there is a fundamental difference between employees (stating high interest) and their managers, who have mentioned that among the most significant drawbacks in regards to older employees' little interest in further growth in a specific field and their willingness to participate in further education; a long period of time is needed for acquiring new skills and knowledge, and for learning new work procedures. At the same time, 30.2% of respondents say that they have no opportunity to learn new things and no opportunity for further development. The research also revealed obvious dissatisfaction of respondents with the reward system for their work. Only 23.1% of respondents were either praised or rewarded within the last week.

Work load and working hours

As to their work loads, it is clear that respondents are satisfied with their current levels (73%). Working hours show similar findings (60%). In both cases it is probable that respondents do not want to change their work routines. If we compare responses of men and women we find out that a higher percentage of women (by 28 percentage points) say that their working hours suit them and that their current employer satisfies their requests to have a different work load or work schedules (by almost 25 percentage points more than men)

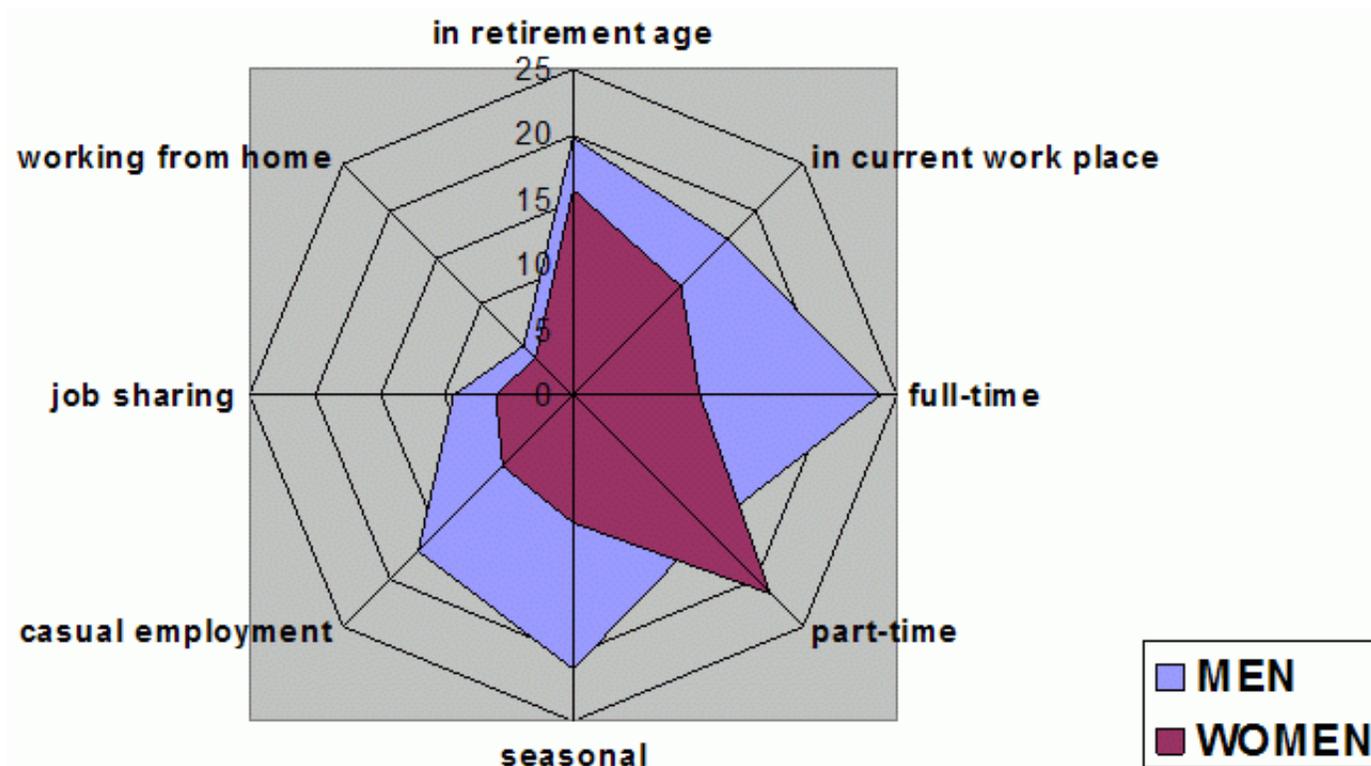
Older and younger employees

The research results have not shown any significant evidence of intergenerational rivalry or favouritism carried out by the management. The summary values have not, however, disproved that there would be any friction between younger and older employees. In contrast to men, women tend to have much bigger problems with relationships in a particular work team (stated as such by 40% of women and only 9.2% of men). Women also mind organizing their work on their own more than men.

Working in retirement age

In response to the question of whether respondents would like to continue working even after they reach retirement age, there is a quite high percentage of those who have not yet decided (26.8%) and what is especially interesting is that the overwhelming opinion about working during retirement is absolutely negative. **Only 18% of employees from our sample want to continue working after reaching their retirement age.** Retired people mostly do not want to work. That reality is probably caused by their current feeling of tiredness and a vision of possible rest upon retirement. The emotional level of an individual may also have a fairly big part in such a negative attitude. This attitude may be completely different as soon as retirement becomes a real proposition, however. Once they change their usual rhythm, daily routine and they face the impossibility of self-realization after they retire, such a proclaimed opinion often changes. The nature and specific conditions of the current job obviously play an important role.

In comparison to women, men think about working after retirement more and they do so within a wider range of possible forms of employment (they prefer full-time work, seasonal job or working on call). Women tend to think about getting a part-time job. Only a negligible percentage of respondents are interested in working from home or job sharing. Such forms of employment are not widespread in common practice nor is there a broader awareness of them among both employees and employers. The argument about technological obstructions and the specific nature of work does not always hold up.



Graph 4: Going to work after reaching the retirement age (percentage of positive responses of men and women)

MANAGEMENT

Managers of six relatively successful and stable surveyed SMEs express their opinions on hiring older workers

Relationships

Managers have assessed the relationships between younger and older employees in their firms as good or “normal”, although a negative evaluation of intergenerational behaviour falls a bit onto the older generation.

Sickness rate

All managers have agreed that the sickness rate is more frequent among the younger generation. Generally speaking, we can say that managers feel that younger people are sick more often – sometimes a bit purposely because they have “outside-employment activities, they build a house or look after a sick child and similar things”. Older workers have been assessed as more cautious, they take less risk and take better care of their health.

Employing older people

Responses to specific questions dealing with the causes of low distribution of older employees do not show any fundamental and cogent reasons for why managers

cannot hire potential retired people. Managers claim that the problem is a lack of interest from older applicants and retired people.

Very often it is unsatisfactory health conditions that dissuade older people from being interested in employment, though this is not always the case. The reason may be also an unsatisfactory professional competence or loss of some formal qualifications (expiration of some certificates, documents etc.) Generally the hypothesis that older people are not hired because of discrimination or that management would avoid hiring them has not been confirmed. All surveyed owners of small and mid-sized enterprises are aware of the fact that older people have an enormous potential of experience and acquired skills, however, the aforementioned reasons make it difficult to use them. This expressed lack of interest from the employees can be proved by a very interesting response which says that our people over 50 years of age are not as stigmatised by physical ageing as they are by mental ageing. The above-mentioned fact, if empirically and scientifically proved, can be connected with the societal situation of the past regime, which did not give much opportunity for personal development and basically stratified people even by age, which was not possible in the so-called "free world".

Managers emphasise that the 50+ age group in particular has an aversion to being hired. This fact has its own explanation. It is mostly a desire to be liberated from a tiring routine and for the opportunity to dedicate time to their hobbies, which they do not have so much time for during their productive years (rarely does it happen that a person can have their hobby as their job). This theory is also connected with the desire to change their role in life (women often look forward to looking after their grandchildren). Perhaps a strong motif in many cases is the desire to free themselves from their external life - "not to be pulled into events". By this time people have often already achieved their life's aspirations and are likewise more willing to accept the fact that retirement will also mean a certain amount of material sacrifice. They re-evaluate their hierarchy of values. Instead of material demands and needs, people tend to choose values of a spiritual nature. Work itself no longer has a dominant position in our ranking of values and the opportunity for self-realization in the career ladder also lacks such importance. It is however somewhat different among those who are more intellectually focused. These people are not as physically worn out yet and this is reflected in their mental state as well. They realise now that they have reached a certain degree of knowledge, that they should build upon their experience and learning, and very often they have the need to release their mental potential and project it. They consider this to also be a commitment to themselves. Of course, even here that moment of weariness and the desire to rest eventually arrive, though a bit later.

Creating suitable conditions for older employees

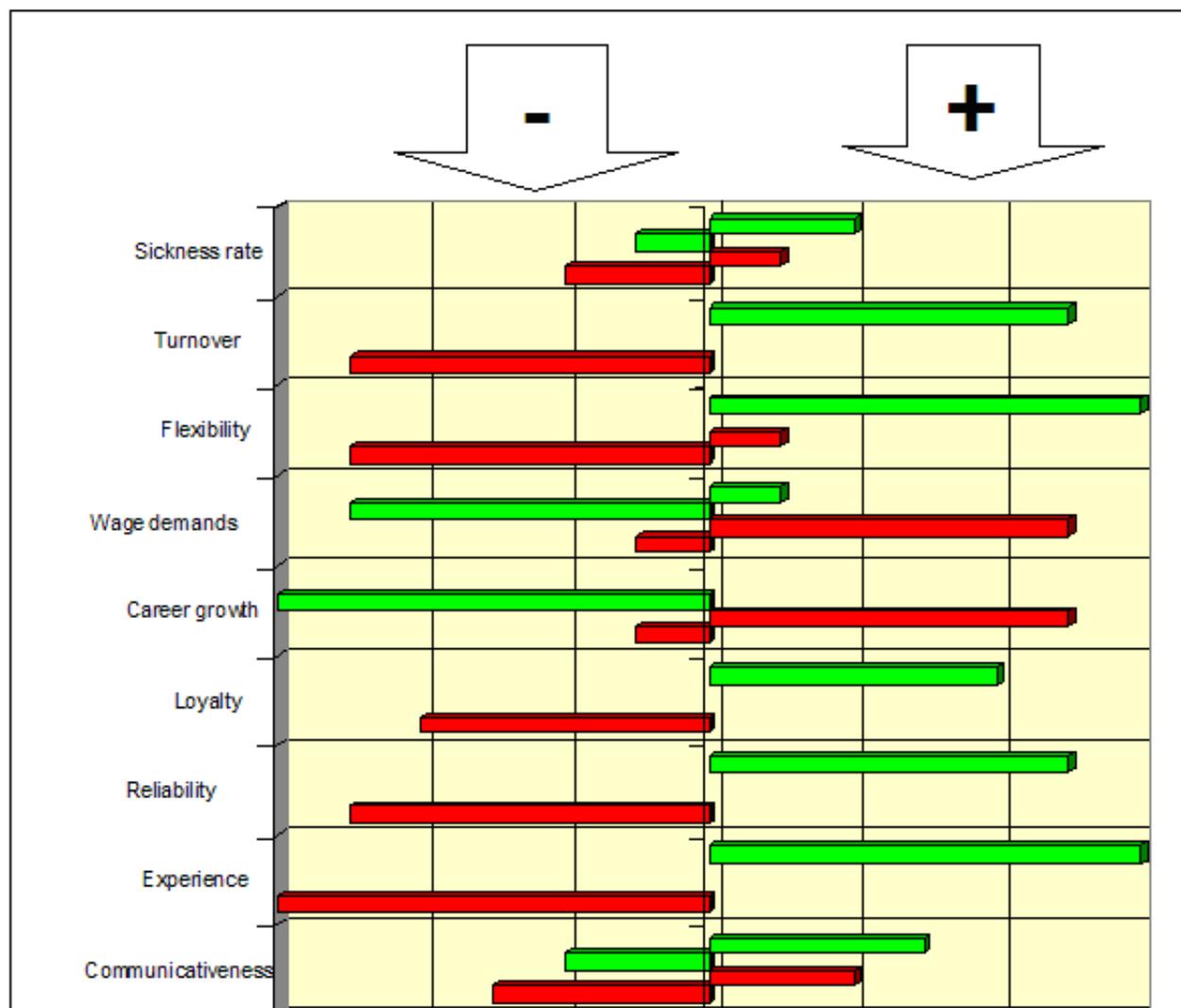
We also asked the managers of companies whether they accommodate older workers, if they make changes in the workplace and working conditions', offer various forms of work loads, etc.

The creation of suitable work conditions for older employees is basically understood by businessmen to be something exceptional and as some kind of special concession. Such an attitude is understood as unacceptably "differential" and they refuse it on principle. That means, however, an obvious lack of understanding of the variability and flexibility of work organization and work conditions. On one hand, employers expect a high amount of flexibility from their employees, on the other hand though, they are unable to create more flexible conditions for the employees' work performance. They are obviously missing a certain amount of creativity and a willingness to change the organization of work, work conditions and previously established rules. The most frequent explanation for their attitude is the technology they have at their disposal: "It is not possible to create different work conditions because the technological procedures are fixed." "No, everyone has to manage to do their given production load within their work shift because technology does not allow provision of any special concessions for anyone."

Evaluation of qualities

Qualities that are considered in the older age category of employees as explicitly positive are experience, maturity, stability, time availability and flexibility. Reliability and a low degree of employee turnover follow next. Loyalty and professional longevity are among the positive qualities evaluated. On the other hand, managers state a lack of interest in further growth in their field, a lack of willingness to learn, length of time it takes to acquire new skills, new knowledge and the mastering of work procedures and, last but not least, career growth as the most significant negative characteristics of older employees.

The overwhelming attitude of employers, who assessed the two age categories (younger and 50+) on a scale of qualities, is that younger employees have more expertness and education essential for a job and manage new technology (including innovative and communication tools) better than older employees, whereas a lifetime of staying in one field without undesired learned habits are more characteristic of the older age group. The conclusion cannot differ from that. Referring to the above-mentioned conclusion, interest in further growth in a specific field and a willingness to receive further education is explicitly on the side of younger people. The fact remains, however, that adaptability is not the sole privilege of younger people, as it could be assumed, but that such an ability exists, though to a smaller extent, among older employees as well. Likewise creativity is virtually the same for both groups. Maturity and stability as well as responsibility, reliability, hard-working, lower mistake-making and last but not least loyalty are clearly in favour of older age group. Older people also, based on their experience, take fewer risks and they are less interested in career advance. In addition, their demands regarding pay and bonuses are lower. What is interesting is that, in contrast to younger people, they are far more flexible. This research has also confirmed the hypothesis that older people change jobs far less than younger ones. Fairly lower sickness and accident rates are connected with this as well; if, of course, we disregard some of the chronic old-age diseases that do not apparently require them to take time off.





Graph 5: Positive and negative assessment of older employees

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