

# Flexible Employment of the Labour Force aged 50 to 64 – Opportunities for Development

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**Summary:** The topic about economically active people in the highest age group is becoming more popular during the last two decades in EU member states, United States of America, Japan, as well as in Bulgaria. In long-term perspective the increase in average age of labour force will deepen as a problem in our country. In the present paper are outlined the main concepts and policies for increase in employment of the group of 50-64 year-olds. The results from research on a theme “The Use of the Workers Aged from 50 to 64 years” are introduced. This research was conducted among Bulgarian managers and human resource specialist on the base of specially elaborated for the purpose questionnaires. The perceived advantages and disadvantages of labour force in the studied aged group are revealed and examined. The work of target group on different flexible employment forms is analyzed. The main hardships for initiating flexible employment are introduced as well as the profile of flexible worker.

**Key words:** flexible employment, labour force, employers attitudes, labour market

**JEL:** J21.

## 1. Trends in employment policy for the workforce in the age bracket between 50 and 64

Looking for solutions of the problems of the highest age group workforce and the implementing those represents one of the central components of employment policies on a global scale and the European Union. In many countries the labour market's future development has been systematically studied. So have the problems that are likely to arise as a result of the higher average age of the labour force. Foreign researchers explore various aspects of employment, including barriers to the economic activity of the labour force over 50 years of age, such as discrimination in the search of a job, on the job training and career development, characteristics of employment for this age group, interaction between factors, determining retirement decisions, attitudes towards training, advantages and disadvantages, typical of the employed, etc.<sup>1</sup>.

The retention of workforce over 50 within the labour market and in organizations, improving their employment opportunities, looking for approaches and methods of improving their qualification, preserving and transmitting experience and knowledge to younger generations, development of the idea of lifelong

<sup>1</sup> Factors Affecting the Labour Market Participation of Older Workers: Qualitative Research, The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Research Report No. 281, 2005

training have been the subject of studies of research groups in the European Union and the United States of America.<sup>2</sup>

At the level of the European Union, two main objectives have been set for the solution of the problem of the fall in the coefficient of economic activity of workers and employees in the age group between 55-64 years. **The first objective**, accepted by the Stockholm Council in March 2001, underlines the necessity to face the challenge of aging population by achieving 50 % employment of workforce between 50 and 64 by 2010. **The second objective** /Barcelona, 2000/ is connected with the acceptance of a uniform political approach to higher employment of the highest age group active population, raising the effective retirement age in the European Union by 5 years by 2010.

These objectives are laid down in the European employment strategy and, more specifically, in the strategic priorities for attracting and retaining more economically active persons to the labour market, increasing the adaptivity of workers, employees and employers to changes in the economy, increasing the share of investment in human capital, increasing of the attractiveness of labour activities, offering high-quality jobs, which would largely meet the individual preferences of each worker and employee.<sup>3</sup>

There is growing awareness that the increased length of the economically active life and later retirement of the 50 – 64 age group employees is feasible and justifiable only if the appropriate working conditions, which would contribute to the retention of workforce within the labour market,

are provided. Measures in this field are extremely diverse and cover a wide range of fields: access to on-going education, intensification of activities in organizations to ensure healthy and safe working conditions, introducing flexible and innovative labour organization and flexible employment forms, elimination of incentives for early leaving the labour market, mainly by reforming the retirement and social security schemes.

*Creating opportunities for greater flexibility of the workforce at the age over 50 at the workplace using untraditional contract relations, non-standard and flexible working time, special and functional flexibility, are among the principal approaches applied to attracting and retaining an increased number of individuals of this age group in the labour market.*

Many foreign studies deal with flexible employment, in particular, for workers and employees over 50, including the development of a second career path, change of profession or position before or after retirement, telework, work at home with a computer, part-time employment, employment for a fixed time period and self-employment. An important approach to the retention of the workforce at the pre-retirement age is connected with the application of practices for better combination of work and private life, as well as transmitting accumulated valuable experience to younger workers and employees<sup>4</sup>.

The demand for an appropriate policy and adequate mechanisms for the retention of the higher age bracket workforce in Bulgaria is extremely pressing. Demographic forecasts show that the problem of the average age increase will aggra-

<sup>2</sup> Proage-Facing the Challenge of Demographic Change, [www.proage-online.com](http://www.proage-online.com)

<sup>3</sup> European Employment Strategy, [www.europa.eu.int/employment](http://www.europa.eu.int/employment) and social protection

<sup>4</sup> Arrowsmith, J., McGoldric, A., A Flexile Future for Older Workers, Personnel Review, Vol. 26, N 4, 1997, University Press  
Patrickson, M., Teleworking: Potential Employment Opportunities for Older Workers?, International Journal of Workforce, Vol. 23, N 8, 2002, MCB Up Limited, 2002

The Role of Flexible Employment for Older Workers, Findings, [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)

Christencen, .L, Catsopuhes, M., Accommodating Older Workers' Needs for Flexible Work Options, Ivey Business Journal, July/August, 2005

vate in the future. According to Eurostat data, in 2050, the average coefficient of dependence of older population /calculated as a ratio between the total number of persons at the age over 65 and the number of active persons at the age between 50 and 64/ in the twenty five countries of the European Union will be 52.8, and for our country in the same year it will equal 60.9 percent<sup>5</sup>. Documents of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy emphasize the increasing need for more active use of population in active age because of the growing number of the individuals aged 50 – 64, which, according to forecasts, will stand at 20 % of the available labour resources in Bulgaria in 2007<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. General characteristic of the study “Employment of workforce from 50 to 64”

The study on the topic “Employment of workforce from 50 to 64” investigates the degree to which the labour force in the target group is used in different types of flexible employment. The functional relationship between the age of the workforce and management policies and practices has been studied. The results uncover facts and trends providing the feedback to draw recommendations for the improvement of the higher age bracket workforce retention policy.

22 questions were included in the questionnaire. They were structured in such a way as to make gathering, processing, and interpretation of information easier, and concentrate on the following main topics:

- Advantages and disadvantages of the employed aged 50 to 64 as a component of the workforce in the organizations;

- Recruitment, selection, retention, development and dismissal of the human resources from the target group;
- Using different types of flexible employment for the organization as a whole and for the considered group;
- Profile of the flexible employee;
- Assessment of the future changes in human resources management at the organization level as a result of the demographic trends in the country

The functional relationships between manager’s preferences as to the usage of employees in the highest age groups are explored through a survey on the topic “Employment of workforce from 50 to 64”, conducted in the period 07 July 2006 – 15 September 2006.

The study of employers’ and managers’ opinions involved in human resources management (HRM) has been made because of their importance in decision-making for the employment and retention of the highest age group workforce. The respondents in the study are managers, specialists and HRM consultants, company owners and directors.

Although the study is not representative of the country because of the volume of the sample (60 surveys), it contains valuable information on policies and practices used in the HR management of the 50 – 64 age bracket and attitudes of HRM to recruitment, retention and use of different types of flexible employment for the studied group.

At the same time, interviews with workers and employees in different organizations have been conducted to cover a wider circle of respondents and to make an in-depth analysis of employment

<sup>5</sup> Table Old-age-dependency ratio, <http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/>

<sup>6</sup> Employment strategy 2004-2010, Ministry of labour and social policy, Adopted by the Council of Ministers 6.11.2003, [www.mlsp.government.bg](http://www.mlsp.government.bg)

problems concerning the 50 – 64 age bracket and attitudes to their utilization in organizations.

Attitudes to individuals of the 50 – 64 age brackets have been explored to outline their distinctive features compared to younger groups of the active population. This target group still has high chances of integration in employment and real opportunities to extend their working life.

The respondents are mainly specialists, experts, managers, HRM consultants, i.e. opinions studied mainly from the perspective of the demand for labour. The respondents' answers allow making a conclusion that they are well familiar with labour market trends.

Table № 1 shows the key characteristics of the respondents according to specific items:

The study takes into account the fact that age-driven changes are strictly individual; the workforce's biological aging does not have the same impact on workers and employees of different occupations, work career and individual features. In many cases factors additional to age are experience, level of work presentation, motivation for lifelong learning

and work motivation, educational level, health status, etc.<sup>7</sup>.

One of the main questions concerns the age, at which the respective worker or employee is perceived as aged for the industry or organization. The results show that 70 % the respondents perceive 50 – 55 years of age as such an age (See figure 1).

This chart shows the diverse opinions of survey participants. The respondents from commercial organizations tend to lower the age limit beyond which workers and employees are considered aged (over 40 or 45 years).

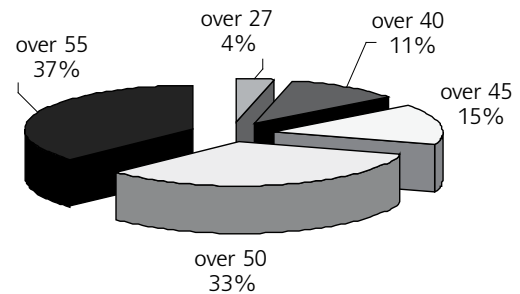


Figure 1. Age at which the worker or employee is perceived as aged in the industry and organization

Table 1. Main characteristics of respondents in the survey "Employment of workforce aged 50 – 64 "

Main characteristics				
Economic sectors	Industry	Services	Others	
	24 %	58 %	18 %	
Gender	men		women	
	33 %		67 %	
Number of company employees	up to 10 employees	11-50 employees	50-500 employees	over 500 employees
Position in the organization	21 %	37 %	24 %	18 %
	Manager	HR manager	Expert	Company director
	27 %	31 %	30 %	12 %

<sup>7</sup> Knapp, K., Muller, C., Productive Lives: Paid and Unpaid Activities of Older Americans, International Longevity Center-USA, New York, 2000

According to foreign studies, together with the increase of the average age of population in a given country, the age limit, beyond which people are perceived as belonging to the category of the aged, has risen, as the idea itself is a matter of perceptions<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it can be expected that the higher the average age of the population in Bulgaria, the higher the age limit, related to workers' and employees' perception of the highest age group.

### 3. Advantages and disadvantages of the employed aged 50 – 64

Within the study, the respondents were submitted a detailed list of potential

characteristics; they had to choose all characteristics they thought were relevant to individuals aged 50 – 64. On the basis of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the workforce aged 50 – 64, its profile was built.

Studies in this field have been carried out by the Society for Human Resource Management, the US Association of Retired Persons, the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce at the University of Surrey<sup>9</sup>.

These and other studies emphasize some advantages of the workforce in the highest age groups as: higher stability of work commitment, good work organization, efficient use of technical skills, manifestation of useful creativity in specific

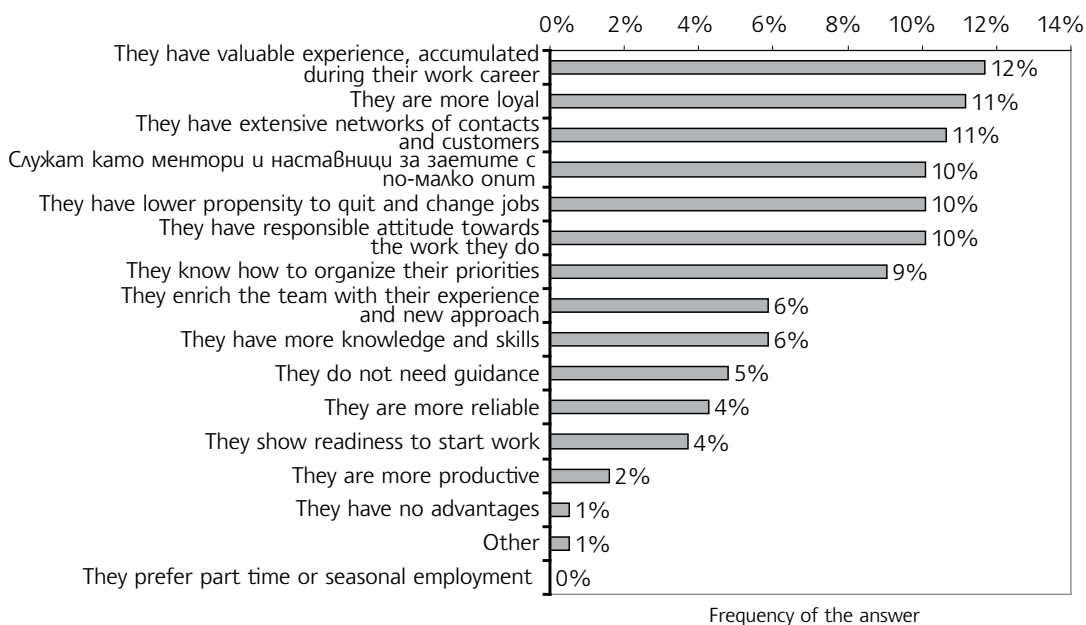


Figure 2. Positive characteristics of workers and employees at the age from 50 to 64

<sup>8</sup> Chassard, Y., What Policy Approach to Active Ageing, A Lifelong Strategy for Active Ageing, edited by Jepsen M., Foden, D., Hutsebaut, M., European Trade Union Institute, Brussels, 2003

<sup>9</sup> Collison, J., Older Workers Survey, Society for Human Resource Management Survey Program, June 2003, [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)  
American Association of Retired Persons, [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

McNair, S., Flynn, M., Owen, L., Humphreys, C., Woodfield, S., Changing Work in Later Life: A Study of Job Transitions, University of Surrey, Centre for Research into the Older Workforce University of Surrey, March 2004

situations at the workplace, ability to predict the future developments, wisdom and ability to be mediators in conflict situations<sup>10</sup>. As for the workforce over 50 years of age, they were found to offer high-quality service, attributable to their high ethical standards, greater experience and higher personal expectations as customers<sup>11</sup>.

Figure 2 presents the advantages of the workforce in the age group 50-64, classified according to the opinions of survey participants in Bulgaria. The first seven qualities of the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age, considered to be most valuable according to the respondents, are the following: **valuable experience, stronger loyalty, availability of an extensive networks of contacts and customers, their function**

**as mentors and tutors for less experienced employees, lower propensity to quit and change jobs, responsibility to work and ability to organize their priorities.**

There is a correlation between answers of survey participants and their individual age. For the purposes of the study, the respondents have been split into two age groups, so that the differences in their responses could be recorded. Table № 2 presents data on the frequency, for the survey participants in both subgroups, of acknowledgment of different advantages of the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age by survey participants.

The frequency of acknowledgement of the indicated advantages of workers and employees

*Table 2. Data about the indicated advantages of the workforce at the age from 50 to 64 depending on the individual age of respondents*

Advantages of the workforce at the age from 50 to 64	Respondents' subgroups:	
	from 20 to 40	over 40
They are more loyal	63 %	65 %
They have valuable experience, accumulated during their work career	56 %	76 %
They have extensive networks of contacts and customers	50 %	71 %
They act as mentors to less experienced employees	50 %	65 %
They have responsible attitude towards the work they do	50 %	65 %
They have lower propensity to leave and change jobs	44 %	71 %
They add experience and new approach in the team	38 %	29 %
They know how to organize their priorities	31 %	71 %
They have more knowledge and skills	25 %	41 %
They are more loyal	25 %	24 %
They do not need guidance	13 %	41 %
They show readiness in starting work	13 %	29 %
They have no advantages	6 %	0 %
They are more productive	0 %	18 %
Other	0 %	6 %

<sup>10</sup> Edited by Maria Jepsen, David Foden and Martin Hutsebaut, A lifelong Strategy for Active Ageing, European Trade Union Institute, Brussels, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Arrowsmith, J., McGoldrick, A., A Flexible Future for Older Workers? University of Warwick, Coventry, UK, and Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK, Personnel Review, Vol. 26, N 4, 1997, University Press, pp.258-273.

from 50 to 64 years is over 20 % lower for the younger age group in comparison with older one. At the same time, the alleged disadvantages and the degree of their perceived importance is 12 % higher for the younger age group. The data in table № 2 demonstrate that survey participants in the younger age group indicate the following as most important advantages of the considered age group: **loyalty, professional experience, responsible attitude to work, mentors' and tutors' functions, extensive networks of contacts and customers.**

The second subgroup of respondents of over 40 acknowledges more advantages to the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age. Four of these advantages are indicated with a highest frequency: **experience, extensive networks of contacts and customers, lower propensity to leave and change jobs, ability of organizing their priorities.**

Advantages of employees from 50 to 64 years of age should be considered in close relation to their disadvantages. The literature on these issues classifies them in the following groups:

- **the perceived efficiency of the highest age bracket workforce** (despite the lack of empirical justification, this group of the workforce is perceived as having lower efficiency than the younger one, which influences employers' attitudes to hiring and retention of workers and employees in the higher age groups);
- **employees' attitudes** (they have a feeling of insecurity and anxiety for not being in line with changes, especially in the field of new technologies, and need to be persuaded);
- **desire for work at a certain speed and for social interaction** (employees from 50 to 64 years of age do not like to be hassled at the workplace, they wish to be respected and appreciated members of the team);

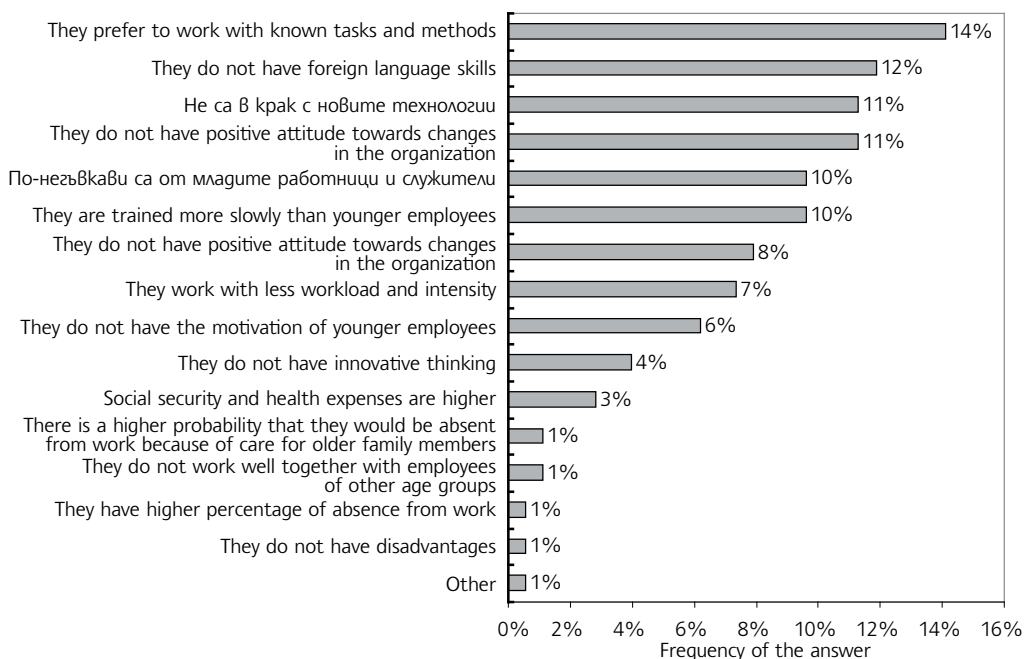


Figure 3. Negative features of the workers and employees from 50 to 64 years of age

- **attitude towards organizational changes** (they show scepticism towards organizational changes as they have gone through such changes and have realistic assessment of their weaknesses);
- **on-the-job training** (they feel intimidated by the speed of the necessary acquisition of knowledge and skills or consider themselves too old to change in line with changes at the workplace<sup>12</sup>).

Figure 3 presents characteristics of the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age, which are rated as most negative in terms of the degree of importance.

Analyzing results of the study and comparing it with foreign studies, the conclusion can be drawn that there is a similar attitude to the studied group of between respondents' attitudes from the group of managers and HRM professionals, irrespective of nationality. Answers of respondents in the Bulgarian study should not be taken as absolute neither be considered typical of all 50 – 64 age bracket workers and employees. Nevertheless, these answers demonstrate respondents' attitudes,

which in its turn influences their strategies of selection, retention and development of workers and employees in this age group.

Disadvantages indicated by respondents can be classified in two groups. **The first group includes** the low level of knowledge of foreign languages and computer skills of workers and employees from 50 to 64 years of age. Other priorities were present in the foreign languages education of this generation. However, as language and computer skills are present as constant requirement in job ads, such a low level limits the opportunities of paid employment of workers and employees in the studied age group.

Technological developments in the last years have resulted in the massive use of information technologies (Internet, Intranet, electronic mail, distance conference connection, integrated business information systems, professional programs with analytical electronic functions and aids, etc.). The use of software products is now more often maximally simplified to make them user-friendly. Therefore, computer use skills can be acquired relatively quickly. Computer skills

*Table 3. Reasons for hiring workforce in the age group from 50 to 64 years*

Answer	Percentage
When you need an experienced workers or employee with a specific qualification	25 %
When you want to hire experienced workers and employees, because they have qualities that the younger workforce lack	20 %
When you want to ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills from the older employees to younger ones to increase the company competitiveness	17 %
When they are better at serving your customers, because they show better communicative abilities and patience	11 %
When you want to boost the team's capacities, enriching it with the knowledge and skills of an older employee	10 %
When you have a vacancy that you cannot fill by younger candidates	9 %
When the introductory training is too costly for your organization	4 %
Because of the anti-discrimination legislation	3 %

<sup>12</sup> McNair, S., Flynn, M., Owen, L., Humphreys, C., Woodfield, S., Changing Work in Later Life: A Study of Job Transitions, University of Surrey, Centre for Research into the Older Workforce University of Surrey, March 2004.

should not be considered by employers as an absolute barrier to hiring a worker or employee in the target age group.

**The second group of disadvantages**, indicated by respondents, is related to organizational changes and attitudes of the employed persons of the higher age group – from 50 to 64 – to the improvement of organizational working methods. The older age bracket members feel threatened to a higher degree by organizational changes; they are reserved to them because they worry about redundancies.

In practice, the above mentioned attitudes are characteristic not only for the highest age group. Also, they do not represent the main barriers to the pursuit of changes in organizations. The main barriers concern efficient communication and support to employees on the part of management in the implementation of such changes and opportunities, provided for additional training in relation to re-evaluation of processes and structure, etc.

#### 4. Practices of hiring and development of employees from 50 to 64 years of age

To the question, Which characteristics of the workforce in the studied age group have a stronger impact on attitudes to these workers and employees – their most valuable advantages or their perceived disadvantages, and their level of influence on employers' behaviour with respect to recruitment, retention, and admission for training of workers and employees, the answer can be given using the comparison between the above mentioned results from the study and the analyzed information on practices, applied in HRM in the respondents' organizations and their attitudes to hiring workforce from the target group.

The results from answers to the question 'Under what conditions would you hire workforce from 50 to 64 years of age?' are presented in Table 3.

Anti-discrimination legislation is ranked at the lowest, which is a signal for its low impact on

*Table 4. Practices used for management of human resources at the age from 50 to 64*

Answer	Percentage
Utilization of the capacity of this type of workforce	16 %
Hiring and keeping workers and employees	10 %
Human resources planning	10 %
Work performance management	10 %
Safe and healthy work conditions	10 %
Labour remuneration	9 %
Retirement	9 %
Knowledge management	8 %
Balance between work and private life	8 %
Training and development	6 %
Initial and further education	5 %
Career and development planning	3 %

<sup>13</sup> The knowledge /explicit and implicit/, which is valuable for the organization, is owned by its workers and employees. knowledge management is based on development, gathering, sharing and applying knowledge in the organization with the purpose to preserve and increase its competitiveness.

employer's behaviour, because of insufficient acquaintance with it and the lack of efficient sanctions ensuring the implementation of its requirements. The highest frequency concerns factors related to company competitiveness. If the necessary workers and employees are missing, the employers start looking for new alternatives and tend to hire older workers and employees. This tendency to look for appropriate workforce amongst the higher age brackets may intensify, if the country's educational system does not generate specialists in the necessary fields, while human resource needs of organizations grow rapidly.

The study shows that training practices (when they start working in the organization and follow-up qualification) and career planning is less typical of the 50 – 64 age bracket workforce. According to the study results, organizations attach the highest importance to the utilization of skills of this type of human resources, followed by policies of recruitment and retention, planning, managing of the work performance and ensuring safe and healthy working conditions. Table № 4 shows the main HRM practices and their use with respect to the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age.

It is interesting to analyze the views of the interviewees-managers and HRM specialists, accord-

ing to which their organizations apply individual approaches to motivate each employee and seek to use maximally the knowledge and skills of older workforce, including by the introduction of knowledge management systems<sup>13</sup>. Eventually, the increasing interest of employers to the active population from 50 to 64 years of age would contribute to broadening the spectrum of HRM practices applied with respect to the workforce in this age group.

The decisions of managers and HRM specialists are likely to be influenced by the re-evaluation of advantages of the workforce aged 50 – 64 (loyalty to the organization, relatively lower risk for them to leave within 10-15 years period before retirement) and by the necessity of making investments in professional development on the job (also providing opportunities to update knowledge and skills).

Directing the attention towards skills of this group of the workforce depends on the evaluation of the impact of a higher share of the higher age group employees on the organization. Table № 5 shows the general distribution of answers to the mentioned question and its comparison with the share of the studied age group employees in the respondents' organizations. Over 60 % of

*Table 5. Influence of the increasing average age of employees in the organizations on HRM*

Share of workforce at the age from 50 to 64 in the organization	Percentage distribution of answers					
	to a high degree	to a certain degree	to a very low degree	it will not bring about any changes	I don't know	total
10 %	14 %	71 %	-	15 %	-	100 %
15 %	-	83 %	17 %	-	-	100 %
20 %	37 %	50 %	13 %	0 %	-	100 %
30 %	-	67 %	-	33 %	-	100 %
40 %	-	100 %	-	-	-	100 %
under 5 %	16 %	17 %	50 %	17 %	-	100 %

respondents express the opinion that this fact will influence HRM to a certain degree.

In organizations, where employees from 50 to 64 years of age have the highest share (more than 40 percent), the opinion is that changes in HRM will be made to a certain degree; however they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the workforce. Considerable changes in HRM as

a consequence of aging of the workforce in the organization are possible only according to 15 % of all respondents. This opinion is expressed by questioned persons, whose organizations have a high share of workers and employees from 50 to 64 years of age (20 percent), but also those, where this share is relatively low (10 and 5 percent).

*Table 6. Types of flexible employment used for the workforce in organizations and in particular for employed at the age between 50 and 64*

Types of flexible employment	Types of flexible employment used for employees aged 50 – 64	Types of flexible employment used for all employees
fixed term contracts	9 %	8 %
civil contracts	10 %	9 %
part time contracts	1 %	3 %
seasonal contracts	3 %	1 %
using self-employed persons and subcontractors	3 %	4 %
working with a computer in a telecenter	2 %	3 %
working with a computer at home	3 %	2 %
working at home	1 %	0 %
working on different jobs	5 %	2 %
no fixed workplace	1 %	2 %
flexible working time	7 %	6 %
extra work	5 %	5 %
working upon availability/at call	4 %	3 %
reduced working time	2 %	3 %
yearly fixed working hours	1 %	1 %
shift work	4 %	6 %
work over the weekend	2 %	2 %
working at non-standard working time /night work, work during some hourly intervals during the day/night /	2 %	1 %
workplace rotation	1 %	2 %
position shared between 2 persons	2 %	1 %
positions with wide and diverse functions	6 %	8 %
specialized positions with a high degree of self-control and work planning	6 %	5 %
Need-based frequent change of roles and functions in the organization	1 %	3 %
Team work during most part of the working time	6 %	10 %
Work on projects	11 %	11 %
We do not use it	3 %	0 %
Total	100 %	100 %

As a whole, the answers show that the organizations still do not have a clear understanding of the process of aging of the workforce. This could be attributed to the high unemployment rate in the late 20<sup>th</sup> C. At the same time, initial interest can be observed to this aspect of company management and, in particular, to HRM.

### 5. Types of flexible employment used in organizations for the considered age group

The approach applied is flexibility in terms of: contract of employment, space, working hours and company positions. Such a distinction will facilitate the respondents' assessment of the different flexibility types and their comparison.

The results of the survey show that diverse **types of flexible employment are used in organizations, but the following options have the highest frequency of usage for all employees**, according to survey participants: work on projects, team work during most part of working time, employment and fixed term contracts and positions with wide and diversified functions.

Three of the above mentioned options represent internal functional flexibility, required for work on projects, for positions that are diversified

and broadened, and for team work. Using employment and fixed term contracts represents external numerical flexibility. It provides for exercising control over the number of employees depending on the company specific employment needs.

Table 6 presents data on the incidence of different types of flexible employment for all the employed and those used only for the 50 – 64 age bracket.

Based on a comparison of the answers to the two questions, it is possible to conclude that the external numerical flexibility (working on fixed term contracts) is prevalent for the workforce in the studied group. At the same time, younger workers and employees are more often offered part-time employment, work for a tele-center or distance computer work. Non-standard working time such as night shifts and working in definite time intervals is more often used with the older workforce.

**Survey participants would be willing to hire more actively workforce from 50 to 64 years of age, using respectively: flexible working time, fixed term contracts, part-time work, shift work, seasonal work and work at non-standard working time.** Flexible working time is ranked highest by respondents; it is currently the most popular form of flexible employment in the private sector. Its advantages are the

*Table 7. Question: In your opinion, which are the most important obstacles to the introduction of different types of flexible employment?*

Answer	Percentage
Lack of commitment from the part of employed persons	24 %
Lack of knowledge and commitment on the part of higher management	19 %
Team fragmentation	19 %
Workers and employees are not independent enough to be presented with flexible employment opportunities	19 %
High costs of introduction and maintenance	18 %
Total	100 %

high level of efficiency of using human resources during periods of intensive workload in the companies. It is not related to additional costs of hiring, training, or dismissal of workers and employees.

The preferences of survey participants are oriented mainly towards the use of the workforce in the studied group for more peripheral types of employment such as fixed term contracts, part-time and non-standard time employment, seasonal work or employment on equal terms with other workers and employees in the case of flexible working time or shift work.

**The attitudes of employers, managers and HRM specialists to the possibilities of introducing flexible employment and its use by employees in different age groups are also important for the prevalence of different types of flexible employment.** The respondents indicate the following barriers to the introduction of flexible employment in the organization.

The ordering of answers about obstacles to the introduction of different flexible employment types shows respondents' attitude. It does not reflect preferences for diversity of tasks assigned to the workforce and for greater self-control in performing their daily work duties, or the opportunities that the characteristics of work provides for the use of different types of flexible employment.

The first and foremost condition for the distribution of different types of flexible employment is the good knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, the evaluation of company limitations, as well as the information about workers' and employees' preferences. The lack of an in-depth knowledge of these aspects and the top

management's insufficient commitment are key obstacles to the introduction of such practices.

**Fears that employees are less committed, that the team would become fragmented, and also that workers and employees are not independent and, therefore, they should not be offered flexible employment opportunities, represent an assessment showing the low degree of confidence in capacities of the workforce.**

The barriers, indicated by respondents, are more readily overcome by the 50 – 64 age bracket workers and employees. The main advantages of this group are well-developed working habits, which means also lower necessity of direct supervision and control of the work performed. According to international studies, the highest age group workforce prefers to work more independently and determine the intensity and changes in work speed<sup>14</sup>. In addition, some commentaries can be found in the survey study that the 50 – 64 age bracket workers and employees are more sensitive to work performance evaluation made at the workplace. Therefore, when this group's work performance is too strictly controlled, there is a higher likelihood of possible negative effects, such as, for example, the lack of satisfaction with the performed work or lack of motivation.

In order to be efficient, HRM for the 50- 64 age group should be based on delegating responsibilities, providing more freedom in setting the order of tasks to be performed, in planning work and exerting control. The style of workforce management for higher age groups should create feelings of independence, equal standing and confidence, thus contributing to a higher level of motivation.

<sup>14</sup> McNair, S., Flynn, M., Owen, L., Humphreys, C., Woodfield, S., Changing Work in Later Life: A Study of Job Transitions, University of Surrey, Centre for Research into the Older Workforce University of Surrey, March 2004.

The probability of team fragmentation is lower, where more workers and employees in the studied age group are included in flexible employment, because of the social and communicative skills they have, the ability of working in a team and their loyalty to colleagues. These qualities of the employees aged 50 to 64 are a prerequisite for lessening the tensions and conflicts at the workplace. Their loyalty, lower propensity to quit and change jobs, and lower absenteeism create a sense of team stability and consistency.

**Respondents emphasize the following most important qualities, which the flexible employee must have: good organization (25 percent), independence (20 percent), and professional self-confidence (17 percent).**

Good computer training and communication skills are ranked fourth and fifth by managers and HRM specialists, i.e. these are not considered essential for the work capacity in different types of flexible employment. This may be attributed to the fact that flexible employment is perceived as demanding personal capabilities to a higher degree and is related to task assignment defined in advance; the indicated characteristics are considered as necessary for any type of work.

When these results are compared to the advantages of the workforce aged 50 to 64, such as the ability to organize work priorities, a realistic evaluation of situations and independent decisions, the conclusion can be made that the profile of workers and employees in the studied group meets two key requirements of the flexible worker profile – good organization and independence.

The results of the presented study provide an adequate basis for exploring and generating different options for the use of the workforce at the age of 50 to 64, as well as approaches to compensate its disadvantages. The solutions in this field will be especially relevant for organizations with a high share of 50 – 64 age bracket workforce,

especially in view of the fact that demographic processes are likely to limit its replacement by the younger age group workforce.

## **6. Main aspects of improving the use of flexible employment forms for the workforce in the age group 50 – 64 years**

The economically active individuals, aged 50 – 64, share certain specific features. Although not universal in nature, these characteristics have left an imprint on attitudes with respect to their hiring and retention in the organizations. To utilize their knowledge, skills and experience in the most appropriate way, a realistic evaluation of their input for the company economic development has to be made. First of all, their disadvantages, as perceived by respondents in both foreign studies and the present study, are not an absolute barrier to the utilization of their knowledge and skills.

Governmental policies in the above mentioned field should cover a wide range of lifelong learning activities and legislative amendments to facilitate the use of different types of flexible employment. It should include the elaboration of employee professional qualification programs, flexibility in the retirement model, contribution to the educational system and breaking the routine sequence of lifecycle stages /education, employment and retirement/.

Campaigns, presenting the advantages of diverse workforce and launched to raise information and fight discrimination targeted at both the public and the employers, should emphasize the problems with higher age groups and their possible solutions; such campaigns may prove essential for the equal treatment of the workforce from 50 to 64 years of age. The policies of improving labour conditions (to meet to the needs of older workforce) and promoting

the active interaction of partners in industrial relations are both obligatory prerequisites for ensuring flexibility and balancing the distribution of responsibilities for the development of flexible employment of the workforce in the explored age group.

The role of entrepreneurs, managers and HRM specialists at company level is related to HRM practices in the following fields:

- intensifying participation of higher age group workforce in training and development programs and introducing training methods, which focus on the needs of this age group;
- adopting a policy of managing differences in the organization /diversity management/ to create equal terms and conditions, so that every member can feel valuable with his/her individual characteristics;
- broadening the opportunities for flexibility at the workplace and increasing the access to a growing number of employees to these practices;
- emphasizing the importance of efficient performance on the workplace and reorganizing job tasks in accordance with the qualification and the advantages of workforce from 50 to 64 years of age;
- creating opportunities for the combination of work and personal life so that the individual period of work in the organization would be longer and the workforce with necessary qualification would remain in the organization;
- developing practices of knowledge management and team work of employees at a different age, broadening the used sources and approaches in workforce recruitment and selection, providing bonuses for loyalty to the organization, etc.

To be pro-active and subject to equal treatment on the labour market, the 50 – 64 aged employees should make efforts to upgrade their qualification. They should readily take advantage

of the opportunities to attend training course on equal terms with their younger colleagues. They should actively seek information campaigns on employment opportunities, including flexible employment, diverse approaches to looking for a job and advertising their own knowledge and skills.

The opportunities in this respect are related to establishing associations of the highest age group employees /such as the American Association of retired persons/. The main goal of such an association is to provide support and information to workforce in the age of retirement about specific employment prospects, qualification, and legislative amendments, organizing an internet employment agency and specialized job fairs for its members, raising the awareness of both the general public and employers to the advantages of the highest age bracket workforce.

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