

# Green management as an instrument of activation of employees in the mature age

Dereń A.M.<sup>1</sup>, Kamińska A.M.<sup>1\*</sup>, Rutkowska M.<sup>1</sup>, Skonieczny J.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Management, Wrocław University of Science and Technology, ul. Ignacego Łukasiewicza 5, 50-371 Wrocław, Poland

\*corresponding author: Kamińska A.M.

e-mail: Anna.maria.kaminska@pwr.edu.pl

## Abstract

Green management combines the concepts of environmental management and human resources management in such a way as to develop "green" skills and motivate and ensure pro-ecological activation of employees - by placing sustainable development at the center of the organization's HR processes. The aim of the article is to present the concept of green management as an instrument of activation of the elderly. We conclude that it is necessary to maintain the awareness that work is an important factor affecting the activity of the elderly and determines their place in the social structure. The challenge is to create such employment conditions that employees of mature age (aged 60 and over) have a suitable job that would take into account their aspirations, skills, and health). It is necessary to conduct appropriate policies aimed at activating mature workers and reducing the level of unemployment among them by changing the pension system, as well as health care and granting social benefits, promoting flexible forms of employment, increasing the possibility of undertaking and continuing various activities, ensuring optimal working time and working conditions, implementation of innovative processes, counteracting discriminatory behavior, increasing employability and encouraging lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** green management, green enterprise, mature work, green jobs

## 1. Introduction

The issue of sustainable socio-economic development is an idea that has been appearing in public discourse for several years, but only recently has attention begun to be paid to the role that organizations can play when deciding on sustainable development, an element of which is sustainable human resource management (sustainable HRM). The aim of the latter is to "create economic, social, and ecological value in business processes in relation to HRM policies and practices" (Pocztowski, 2016). It supports the organization's sustainable development strategy, increases the motivation of employees to implement the idea of sustainable development, and helps

to implement environmentally friendly organizational practices. Thanks to proper management of people in the production process, it is easier to achieve goals such as reducing gas emissions, waste, and pollution, protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, increasing the area of green areas, resource efficiency, and saving natural resources (Kozar, 2019). This subject has already been extensively described in the literature. It is emphasized that organizations increasingly care about the impact of environmental issues on their competitiveness and long-term success (Paillé et al., 2014).

In an environmental context, human resource management can facilitate the successful formulation and implementation of environmental management (Daily and Huang, 2001) by aligning practices such as selection, performance evaluation, and training with environmental objectives (Jabbour et al., 2013). They are important factors in gaining an organization's competitive advantage due to their rarity, value, uniqueness, and exclusivity (Barney, 1991; Wright, Dunford, and Snell, 2001). Therefore, there is an increasing need to integrate green concepts with HRM, referred to as green human resource management (GHRM; Mishra, Sarkar, and Kiranmai, 2014).

Green governance is a paradigm that embraces improved environmental awareness. Significantly, where shareholder profit, economic development and income become the leading objectives of traditional management understanding, the dominant objectives of green management are partner welfare, sustainability and quality of life, which concert the environment (Uygur, Musluk, Ilbey, 2015).

Green human resource management is important in achieving the organization's strategic goals, such as cost reduction, strengthening the organization's social responsibility towards stakeholders, and shaping the organization's image as an attractive employer for future employees. The issue of green management in relation to mature employees is not described in detail in the literature. The aim of the article is to present the concept of green management as an instrument for activating mature employees and seniors. We recommend the concept of green management of older employees as a response to the ongoing demographic changes and the

related growing participation of older people in socio-economic life. Green human resource management is about taking action and shaping and promoting environmentally friendly attitudes in the work environment.

## 2. Entrepreneurship of mature workers

In all countries of the European Union, a growing population of so-called healthy older people with skills, experience, finances, and available time and resources could contribute to economic activities by extending their working lives, including through entrepreneurship (OECD/EC, 2012).

The demographic and social diversity of human capital is currently a fact in most organizations. In developed countries, in the workplace, you can meet both men and women, young and old people, and people of national origin from different countries and cultures. Diversity in terms of age is the most visible in employment and sets directions for changes and challenges for employers in terms of creating working conditions that meet the needs of older people. In this situation, green management can be considered an effective instrument for activating mature employees, which should be treated as a component of an organization's strategy based on an inclusive culture (Ferdman, 1995).

This type of activation of employees at a mature age h can bring various benefits to the organization:

- economic - better financial results competitive advantage, better external image increased opportunities reaching different consumer groups, controlling risk and greater capacity to react in the event of a crisis,
- non-economic - more creativity and innovation.
- based on demographic and social characteristics, teams are more creative and innovative than uniform teams because they are based on the complementary knowledge and experience of older employees, their different skills, and overcoming prejudices against others.

Not utilizing the growing economic potential of the aging population, in addition to direct costs, i.e. the growing costs of living and caring for seniors and the decreasing labor supply, will also generate the opportunity cost of unused opportunities, known in economic theory and difficult to estimate (Baszczak, et al., 2021). The European response to the challenges posed by demographic changes is the concept of the "silver economy" referring to all economic activity generated by the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in response to the needs of people aged 50+ (e.g. by creating new jobs or support for supply chains). The American equivalent of these processes is the so-called longevity economy. The American example and selected European initiatives show wide possibilities, and even the need to identify and use the growth potential in many areas, allowing for the creation of a significant added value in national economies. Economic and social activation of older people has also been undertaken by Polish public institutions, both at the central and local government level

and by non-governmental organizations (Jarzabek et al., 2020).

The existing structural barriers are accompanied by behavioral limitations that make it difficult to maintain the economic activity of older people, such as, for example, the impact of negative stereotypes and their internalization, more frequent reliance on simplified inference methods, cognitive overload, not always correctly predicting the impact of retirement on one's own well-being (difficulties with the so-called affective forecasting) or maladjustment of job placement processes to the way of making decisions typical of seniors.

If we assume that employers should treat each employee individually, and choose such solutions that will be appropriately tailored to a given person, then the question of how to deal with an employee aged 60 and over should be answered in order to make the best use of his potential, while respecting his limitations (table 1).t

**Table 1.** The economic activity of people aged 50 and more in Poland in 2020 (data in percent)

	Total	50-54 years	55-59 years	60-64 years	65 years and over
Professionally active people	35	83	73	39	6
Men		85	79	58	9
Women		81	68	24	4
Employment rate	34	81	72	39	6
Unemployment rate*	2,2	2,0	2,4	2,0	na

\* The unemployment rate among the population is 3,1%

Source: Baszczak, Ł., Trojanowska, M., Wincewicz, A., Zyzik, R. (2021), Srebrząca się gospodarka. Jak uwolnić potencjał seniorów?, Policy Paper, nr 3, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa, s. 12. <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/PIE-PP03-2021.pdf> (dostęp: 16.02.2023).

First of all, one should take into account the changes that occur in the period from the age of 60 and above in the physical, social, and psychological areas, as a consequence of which a person becomes a different employee, which does not mean worse. As A. Kucharska, elderly people write, the period of late adulthood, elderly people, and people in the pre-retirement period - these are terms for people aged 60 and more (Kucharska, 2013). Employees aged 60+ feel undervalued much more than younger people when it comes to the scope of knowledge and wisdom - they are somehow pushed to the background - which is not conducive to their development or well-being. Appreciating the work, knowledge, and experience of older people can make it easier for them to perform their duties, encourage them to develop despite their old age, and at the same time, show young people that older age does not disqualify an employee. Employees in late adulthood can be offered the function of a mentor or teacher of young staff. It is an opportunity for them to

develop, to increase their sense of self-esteem, and at the same time to provide reliable education to young people employed. Implementation of the concept of green management of employees should therefore mobilize young and older employees to cooperate, for example combining them into task groups, it may also prove effective in maintaining the professional activity of older people. However, from the point of view of productivity, work in multi-generational teams - the transfer of knowledge between different age groups, the possibility of sharing tasks between different generations is more important than potential communication problems or resulting from different attitudes and aspirations of employees of different ages (Göbel, Zwick, 2010). In late adulthood, social support, help received from others, is of particular value, and its level is reflected in the physical and psychosocial functioning of a person. It is a source of resources that help to cope with the difficulties of everyday life, and thus increase the level of functional efficiency.

Knowing the specificity of the work of its employees and themselves, the employer should know what elements to pay attention to when assessing the ability to perform work. Professional efficiency of people in advanced age can be high, especially since the results of work often depend to a greater extent on their knowledge and experience. These people often want to develop, and use the last years of their professional life in an active way. Therefore, they should be treated as full-fledged employees.

### **3. Green management of mature employees**

In the literature, the entrepreneurship of mature workers is studied from many perspectives. Firstly, this group is studied as potential entrepreneurs, and secondly, this group is still perceived as active in the process of providing work (Curran and Blackburn, 2001; Sing and De Noble, 2003; Weber and Schaper, 2004; Kautonen, 2008).

For organizations, this should be an incentive to take actions that will translate into the increased professional activity of older people on a macroeconomic scale. Employers influence the economic activity of older participants of the labor market along two paths - by keeping their employees in employment also in the late phase of their professional career and by recruiting new employees from this group.

The concept of green management of mature employees proposed by the authors of this article is a response to the ongoing demographic changes and the related growing participation of older people in socio-economic life.

Green management of mature employees is a concept based on a "pro-employee" policy that activates this group of employees, aimed at giving them opportunities, and entrusting them with tasks that they will be able to perform perfectly, adequately to their age and capabilities. This approach can bring measurable benefits to both parties. It will make it easier for employees to work in this often difficult period, while it will help employers achieve better efficiency and reduce sickness absences.

In the opinion of the authors, green management of mature employees is the domain of broadly understood age management in the organization. It is a set of specific activities undertaken in various areas of human resources management, which are aimed at making it easier for older employees to continue their professional work in conditions that ensure their safety and health. The implementation of this management concept should be based on effective preventive programs and on ad hoc measures bringing immediate effects, such as e.g. improving the competencies and qualifications of older workers, improving their health, etc. This means that preventive measures should be targeted at the employee throughout his professional career and in all age groups, not just older ones.

One of the key areas of green employee management is focusing on the development of people aged 60+, which can be beneficial not only for the employee but also for the employer. Therefore, such employees should be encouraged and motivated to take on new challenges. In this case, non-professional training may be helpful - concerning employee motivation, coping with stress, communication, etc. The recommended concept may also have a positive impact on younger employees. It will allow them to shape their opinions about older employees as those whose knowledge and experience are appreciated and whose presence is desired by employers and perceived as an important element of the continuity of the company's operation. This may also have a positive impact on shaping the younger employee's views on their own professional activity in the later period. We believe that the green management of mature workers should include flexible working arrangements (full-time or part-time), which can have significant benefits for their well-being later in life.

The concept of management of mature employees proposed by the authors allows for more rational and effective use of human resources in organizations by taking into account the needs and capabilities of employees of different ages. It enables retention in the organization and the use of the invaluable practice, experience, and knowledge of older employees.

State support is especially important. In Poland, a draft act on professional activity is currently being prepared. The new act is to replace the act of 20 April 2004 on employment promotion and labor market institutions (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 690, as amended). The purpose of the planned change is to organize the catalog of activation instruments so that they better correspond to the situation in the labor market. The draft act received a positive opinion from the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs, which decided on the direction of the solutions proposed in the draft. At the same time, the Federation draws attention to the need to support the process of professional activation of people over 60 years of age. One such solution could be to enable older employees to act as mentors who would transfer knowledge to younger employees. Such a person would receive money for the additional time spent, and the employer would be obliged to continue employment with him for a certain period of time. Thanks to this form of

support, the elderly person does not lose their job, and becomes useful, as they pass on valuable practical knowledge to their co-workers and are guaranteed employment. On the other hand, it would be beneficial for the employer to obtain subsidies for the remuneration of such an employee.

#### 4. Conclusion

From the point of view of the economy, a longer life in health means a potential extension of the period of productivity, not only professional but also social, which brings measurable benefits to society. Prolonged activity is

important for the well-being, psychophysical condition, and independence of older people (Steuden, 2011; WHO, 2020).

We recommend the implementation of the concept of green management of mature employees as a comprehensive strategy to combat stereotypes about seniors, modifications in job placement processes that increase the chance of returning to the labor market, and visualization of the consequences of possible retirement. We also point out that this concept can help eliminate structural barriers that hinder the professional activation of older people in the economy.

#### References

- Aguado J., Arsuaga J.M., Arencibia A., Lindo M. and Gascón V. (2009), Aqueous heavy metals removal by adsorption on amine-functionalized mesoporous silica, *Journal of Hazardous Materials*, **163**, 213-221.
- Ferdman B. M., Cultural Identity and Diversity in Organizations: Bridging the Gap between Group Individual Uniqueness, w: Diversity in Organizations: New Perspectives for a Changing Workplace, M. M. Chemers, S. Oskamp (eds.), Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA 1995, p. 4; N. M. Pless, T. Maak, Building an Inclusive Diversity Culture: Principles, Processes and Practices, "Journal of Business Ethics 2004, vol. 54, no. 2, s. 129–147.
- Barney JB (1991) Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management* 17(1), 9–20.
- Baszczak Ł., Trojanowska M. Wincewicz A., Radosław Zyzik R. (2021). Raport Srebrząca się gospodarka. Jak uwolnić potencjał seniorów?, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa, s. 4 – 40.
- Baszczak, Ł., Trojanowska, M., Wincewicz, A., Zyzik, R. (2021), Srebrząca się gospodarka. Jak uwolnić potencjał seniorów?, Policy Paper, nr 3, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa, s. 12. <https://pie.net.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/PIE-PP03-2021.pdf> (access: 16.02.2023)
- Daily BF and SC Huang (2001) Achieving sustainability through attention to human resource factors in environmental management. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* 21(12), 1539–1552.
- Göbel C., Zwick T. (2010), Which Personnel Measures are Effective in Increasing Productivity of Old Workers?., ZEW Discussion Papers, No 10–069.
- Jabbour CJC (2011) How green are HRM practices, organizational culture, learning and team work? A Brazilian study. *Industrial and Commercial Training* 43(2), 98–105.
- Jackson SE, DWS Renwick, CJC Jabbour and CM Muller (2011) State-of-the-art and future directions for green human resource management: introduction to the special issue. *German Journal of Human Resource Management* 25(2), 99–116.
- Jarząbek, A., Trojanowska, M., Wincewicz, A. (2020), Raport „Behawioralnie o polityce aktywizacji seniorów”, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa, s. 4 -57.
- Kautonen, T. (2008). Understanding the older entrepreneur: Comparing Third Age and Prime Age entrepreneurs in Finland, *Journal of Business Science and Applied Management* Vol. 3 No. 3.
- Kozar Ł.J. (2019), Zielone miejsca pracy. Uwarunkowania – identyfikacja – oddziaływanie na lokalny rynek pracy, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź.
- Kucharska A. (2013), Pracownik 60+, Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy Główny Inspektorat Pracy, Warszawa, s. 3-32.
- Mishra RK, S Sarkar and J Kiranmai (2014) Green HRM: innovative approach in Indian public enterprises. *World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development* 11(1), 26–42.
- Paillé P, Y Chen, O Boiral and JF Jin (2014) The impact of human resource management on environmental performance: an employee-level study. *Journal of Business Ethics* 121(3), 451–466.
- Pocztowski A. (2016), Zrównoważone zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w teorii i praktyce, „Zarządzanie i Finanse”, t. 14, nr 2, cz. 1, s. 303–314.
- Renwick DWS, T Redman and S Maguire (2013) Green human resource management: a review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 15(1), 1–14.
- Steuden, S. (2011), Psychologia starzenia się i starości, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.
- UygurA. Musluk B.Y., Ilbey N. (2015). Examining The Influence Of Green Management On Operation Functions: Case Of A Business. *Research Journal of Business and Management – (RJBM)* Vol. 2 Issue 3, DOI: 10.17261/Pressacademia.2015312985, Access: 23.02.2023.
- Weber, P. Schaper, M. (2004). Understanding the Grey Entrepreneur, In *Journal of Enterprising Culture*, vol. 12, 1793-6330.
- WHO (2020), <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/news/q-a-detail/ageing-healthy-ageing-and-functional-ability> [dostęp: 15.02.2023].

Wright PM, BB Dunford and SA Snell (2001) Human resources and the resource-based view of the firm. *Journal of Management* 27(6), 701– 721.