



SISC

Senior Intergenerational
Social Capital

**Country report summarizing the survey
conducted among the companies**

Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy

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The SISC Project has been funded with support from the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Introduction

The aim of the present publication is to present the results of a research, which constitutes the first part of a two-year project: „SISC - Senior Intergenerational Social Capital”, realised by the Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy, together with the partners from Germany (RKW Hessen GmbH), Italy (E.RI.FO) and Bulgaria (iCentres), co-financed by the Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig Multilateral. In the course of the project, we plan to devise a mentoring model for the older and younger employees to share knowledge effectively. The SISC Project aims to support the companies in their efforts to retain the “know-how” of the highly qualified workers in the company, before they retire. The 50+ employees will undergo individual training to become mentors. As mentors, they will transfer the knowledge directly to the younger and less-experienced employees of their enterprise.

In order to define a universal model, better suited to the needs of the target group, we addresses the entrepreneurs, asking them to express their opinion on the knowledge transfer methods, the barriers to these processes, along with their expectations. The objective of the enquiry, conducted simultaneously in Poland, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria was to detect crucial information about the different European companies’ needs in terms of intergenerational learning and especially mentoring, so as to give to SISC product a really European added value. In particular, the filed research aims to gather key information about possible ways/good practices for the implementation of mentoring and e-learning schemes within EU companies. The main answers that the partnership will gain from the enquiry are:

- modalities to foster intergenerational learning within enterprises, so as to give value to the experiences gained by the eldest employees during their own working lives;
- main ways to foster the introduction of e-learning as an updating modality for senior employees: how to engage them overcoming any possible barrier;
- main ways to introduce mentoring schemes within companies and to motivate seniors at best, and ways to organise mentoring sessions;
- main knowledge and competencies needed by senior employees in order to become effective mentors, and main gaps existing between owned and to-be-owned skills.

The information collected from the survey will serve as a basis for the development of SISC main tool: the SISC e-learning pathway. This will be an ICT-based tool targeted to women and men aged 50+, enabling them to make autonomously via PC own individual balance of competencies (stressing mentoring key competencies’ related strengths and weaknesses). Moreover, this e- learning tool will let them attend an individualised e-learning pathway about Mentoring, aimed at convincing them of their own importance in terms of knowing how to transfer the knowledge to new generations, and providing them with the proper tools.

The following specific professional figures have been involved in the study: HR Managers, trainers, or employers. This decision derives from the urgency of gathering focused information about companies’ organisation and boundaries to the implementation of mentoring and e-learning programs. Four countries have been involved in the enquiry: Italy,



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Germany, Poland and Bulgaria, for a total of 60 interviews. In particular, 15 interviews were planned to be carried out in each country, matching to the need to implement in-depth interviews. The 60 surveyed companies include 20 small companies (employing 10 to 50 employees), 20 medium-sized companies (employing between 50 and 200 workers) and 20 large companies with over 200 employees. The aim is to analyse the differentiation of answers in companies of different sizes.

In order to gain meaningful in-depth information, an open enquiry method has been selected. Instead of a structured questionnaire with closed answers, a scenario for the interview has been defined.

The scenario for the interview was structured in the following sections:

1. The Company

These questions focus on dimension, belonging sector and composition of the staff of the Company.

2. Internal learning and communication

These questions focus on the general use of different communication channels within the Company and on the general ways in which employees use to share knowledge.

3. Intergenerational learning

These questions focus on the involvement of senior employees in the process of sharing knowledge and experiences gained during the own working lives.

4. Mentoring

These questions focus on ways/possible ways of mentoring programs implementation within the Company.

5. e-Learning

These questions focus on ways/possible ways of e-Learning programs implementation within the Company.

6. Competencies needed by mentors

These questions focus on competencies needed in order to perform the role of mentor effectively.

The last section is dedicated to the formalisation of a possible engagement of the company in the next phases of the project, and particularly in the testing of the tools.

The results of the research were summarised in country reports and compiled into a joint European report.

1. Situation in Poland

Ten per cent employees In Poland are over 55 years old. Many of them will retire in the coming years, taking away their 30-40 years of work experience with them. In Poland the companies rarely make use of the experience of 40+ workers. Moreover, "The Poles leave the labour market very early and recede into professional inactivity. The average age of retirement is lower than the one prescribed by the law and belongs to the lowest in the entire European Union. In 2005 the retirement age averaged 59.5, as compared to 61 in the EU 27 (57 and 60 for women accordingly). The average employment rate in the 50-64 age group was much lower than in the EU member states and equalled 43.4 per cent in 2007 (compared to 55.6 per cent EU 27 member states' average). Such a large disparity is caused especially by the low employment rate in Poland but also by the specific problems of the 50+ aged workers on the labour market"¹.

Poland and Spain are the only EU member states, where over 60% of the workers aged 54-60 want to retire as early as possible. According to the research conducted by the Polish Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, "the people in Poland cite the following reasons for their desire to end their professional activity as soon as possible:

- they feel tired of work, which is mostly caused by a lack of age management policies in the companies: the employees carry out the same tasks for years, they are rarely trained and promoted; as a result, they are negatively assessed (as being incompetent) each time the company undergoes a major change; they can be also tired of the monotony, the lack of development perspectives and the inadequacy of their tasks to their changing physical capabilities;
- the state of their health – the research shows an adverse trend of the most healthy (according to their own judgement) deciding to retire most often;
- competition of the younger employees, pressure of the new technologies, danger of being fired due to the employers' economic condition or the part-time character of the work, often changing retirement legislation – all the above make the retirement a safer and more attractive solution to the employees;
- the pressure of the employers, who want to get rid of the workers in the legal-protection period and often prefer to hire younger and qualified employee, the latter being often more flexible and having lower salary expectations, instead of investing to improve the qualifications of the older employees (often perceived as less active and resistant to changes). However, the empirical research shows the exact opposite argument, that there is no causality relation between ageing and work performance. It creates a vicious circle of the employer not investing in the employee's professional development (as being convinced of a forthcoming retirement) and the employee having little self-confidence. Being threatened by the perceived lack of trust their abilities, the employees choose to retire to escape the supposed sack and secure them some income"².

According to the above statements, the employers themselves do not realise the potential represented by the older employees. Moreover, most of the companies (not only in Poland, but also in other European countries, The United States of America and Canada) have no intergenerational knowledge-transfer systems. What these companies do not realise is also

¹ Program „Solidarność pokoleń. Działania dla zwiększenia aktywności zawodowej osób w wieku 50+”, Warszawa, September 2008, p. 34 et seq.

² http://mpips.gov.pl/index.php?gid=339&news_id=1345

the threat caused by the retirement of older workers, if the managers do not ensure to retain their knowledge, experience and the whole spectrum of their professional qualifications. The younger people, with their attitude to change their jobs more often, may not be able to bridge the above gap³. On of the consequences of the lack of intergenerational knowledge transfer are the recurring mistakes made by younger workers and doing harm to the organisation. According to the opinion polls conducted among the entrepreneurs, many employers do not monitor the age structure of their workforce, not knowing the numbers of employees who have retired in the preceding 3-years time nor the numbers of employees in the near-retirement age. The level of consciousness on the above matter depends to a large degree on the size of the company and the sector of business, but in general, the researchers were surprised to find that the elements of age management did not exist in the employees' logic.⁴

The Conference Board – the research team responsible for the "Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace" report, identified four means of intergenerational knowledge transfer between the workers:

- choice of the best methods of knowledge transfer according to the actual needs;
- understanding the general educational preferences, as for both the sources of knowledge and the trainees;
- adapting the methods of knowledge transfer to the different learning styles of different generation;
- recognition of the best practice of knowledge sharing in the organisation⁵.

Having regard to the demographical changes in the Polish society, as well as the changes in the employment structure, the Polish Cabinet of Ministers, has adopted, on 17 October 2008, the programme called "*The solidarity of the generations – actions to improve the professional activity of the people aged over 50*", together with the first draft law implementing the above programme.

The "*Solidarity of the generations*" programme aims to create incentives for the employers to hire and keep the older people employed, as well as to enable the people in their fifties to improve their qualifications, abilities and work efficiency. We perceive this programme as an opportunity to popularize the intergenerational knowledge transfer in the companies. This should be achieved through the actions proposed by the government in the areas of: work conditions improvement, promoting the employment of the 50+ workers and age management (including the dissemination of age management principles among employers and employees, implementation of age-management strategies in companies to keep the key knowledge and competences of the mature workers, adapting the working conditions of the 50+ workers to their needs). Other actions include the actions to improve the qualifications and competences of the target group (via creation of the conditions to prepare the learning paths, popularization of the life-long learning among for the 45+ people, diagnosing their missing qualifications and adapting the educational offer accordingly).

³ "Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace" Report as cited by Wanda Żółcińska, "Międzypokoleniowy przepływ wiedzy", 1.09.2008, <http://ceo.cxo.pl/news/164838/Miedzypokoleniowy.przeplyw.wiedzy.html>

⁴ „Dezaktywizacja osób w wieku okołoemerytalnym. Raport z badań”, Departament Analiz Ekonomicznych i Prognoz Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, Warszawa, 2008, p. 122.

⁵ "Bridging the Gaps: How to Transfer Knowledge in Today's Multigenerational Workplace" Report as cited by Wanda Żółcińska, "Międzypokoleniowy przepływ wiedzy", 1.09.2008, <http://ceo.cxo.pl/news/164838/Miedzypokoleniowy.przeplyw.wiedzy.html>

The research conducted several years ago in the Polish companies⁶ reported that the knowledge transfer was mostly (in the 95% of the surveyed firms) conducted between the workers from different divisions and levels, through the cooperation in the cross-departmental working teams. According to three fourths of the respondents, this method was most beneficial for them. Another means of knowledge transfer often quoted by the surveyed companies included rotating positions and mentoring (understood as "learning from the masters"). "The experienced managers, best in the company, (the mentors) transfer the "silent" knowledge (e.g. experience, tips and advice) to the high-potential workers (the apprentices) via series of consultation meetings, to build the managerial potential for a strong company leadership in the future"⁷.

Nevertheless, the above cited research showed that the Polish companies were "a classical example of a phenomenon called "knowledge viscosity" in management theory. The information and competences are closely related to the individual company departments and the rest of the organisation has no idea of the knowledge possessed by its units"⁸. In the opinion of the surveyed entrepreneurs, the potential barriers to knowledge transfer include: competition among workers, inadequate consciousness of the advantages of knowledge sharing, as well as insufficient motivation and time.

According to the results of another research⁹, conducted among the Polish entrepreneurs, the workers are conscious of the fact that knowledge is something positive and necessary, but they do not feel motivated to share it. The managers in turn, have been proven to be unable to motivate the workers to share their knowledge, probably due to the lack of consciousness of the importance of knowledge sharing to the company (and the resulting underestimation of the importance of knowledge for the company's competitiveness on the market).

Based on the experience gathered by the Pensioner Foundation (founded by the Warsaw pensioners), one can conclude that intergenerational knowledge sharing can bring very good results. The foundation started a cooperation programme with companies, based on pairing retired engineers with young workers, beginning their professional life. During the meetings in the workplace organised several times a week, the seniors present their younger colleagues proven solutions to particular everyday problems and the youngsters teach the seniors e.g. how to use the newest computer software. According to the CEO of the

⁶ Based on the information on the research conducted by the Chair of Management Theory of the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) within the projects: "Development of knowledge-management mechanisms" (2004) and "Knowledge management in Polish companies: theoretical problems and case studies" (2003). For more information (in Polish), see: <http://nauka.opi.org.pl/raporty/opisy/instytut/8000/i8296.htm> and Beata Mierzejewska, „Zarządzanie wiedzą unplugged”, http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/artypkyl_v2.php?numer=5&id=59#top.

⁷ Beata Mierzejewska, „Zarządzanie wiedzą unplugged”, http://www.e-mentor.edu.pl/artypkyl_v2.php?numer=5&id=59#top.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ „The research covered the sales departments' workers of 32 middle-sized production- and service-production profiled companies from the podlaskie and warmińsko-mazurskie voivodship. All of the surveyed had direct contact with their companies' customers in their work. The surveyed group totalled 128 people, a sample of diverse age, sex, tenure and family situation." Moczyłowska J., *Psychologiczne bariery w zarządzaniu wiedzą* (in:) Grudzewski, W., Merski, J., „Zarządzanie wiedzą istotą organizacji inteligentnych” Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomicznej, Warszawa, 2004, pp. 243-256, as quoted by Perucki K., „Dzielenie się wiedzą - czynnik ludzki”, Gazeta IT no 9, 19.10.2005 (http://archiwum.gazeta-it.pl/zw/git31/dzielenie_do_druku.html)

Pensioner Foundation, the participants of the programme show great respect towards one another, build strong relations among themselves and often lavish praise upon the other party. The elderly value the patience of the young, patiently explaining the ways of the new technologies and at the same time gathering many practical skills, not taught at the universities. The knowledge and experience of the older colleagues have often proved more valuable than the swiftest of computer calculations¹⁰. Moreover, the intergenerational cooperation has helped to bridge the generation gap in a natural way.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned conclusions, not many entrepreneurs realise that older workers may be very valuable partners to their younger counterparts. They have a vast knowledge and many skills to offer, which may be very valuable and worth making use of. Many managers simply do not realise that the intergenerational cooperation is a necessity for their companies.

We believe that mentoring, supported by the e-learning technology is a very efficient method of intergenerational knowledge transfer in the companies. It can be a great way to retain the knowledge and experience of older workers, but also to keep them longer actively working for the company. As a result, mentoring can contribute to a general improvement in the employment structure in Poland, but also in other ageing societies.

2. Presentation of the surveyed companies

2.1. Company size

The interviews have been conducted in 16 companies: 5 small enterprises, 6 medium-sized and 5 large companies. In the small enterprises group, employing 10 to 50 workers, 40 percent achieved sales value below 1 million euros and the sales of the remaining 60 per cent totalled 2-10 million euros. Among the medium-sized companies, employing between 51 and 200 workers, 17% (1 company) achieved a sales value below 1 million euros, 33% (2) totalled 1-2 million euros with their sales and the remaining 50% (3 companies) reached a sales value of 2-10 million euros. In the group of the largest companies, employing over 200 workers, 20% (2) earned between 2 and 10 million euros, 40% (2) - between 10 and 43 million euros and the remaining 40% (2) – earned over 43 million euros from sales. In the whole surveyed group (16 companies) 20% have not reached 1 million euros in sales, 15% earned 1 to 2 million euros from sales, 54% noted sales between 2 and 10 million euros, 15% - 10-43 million euros and another 15% reached the sales figure of over 43 million euros.

2.2. Sectors of business represented in the survey

Among small companies, most companies (60%) belonged to the service sector and the rest were construction companies (40%). In the medium-sized companies group, a half offered services and the other half belonged to the production sector. As for the large companies, 60% were service companies and 40% of the large firms belonged to the manufacturing sector. In the whole sample, the service companies constituted 56%, the manufacturers made up 31% of the population and the remaining 13% were construction companies.

¹⁰ Mól D., „Międzypokoleniowe pary”, Rzeczpospolita, 02.09.2008.

In the group of small enterprises there were firms representing the road-building, data transmission and computer network management sectors. There were also companies offering medical, financial and construction services. Among the middle-sized companies, there were companies dealing in: industry equipment assembly, steel constructions, logistics, production of hygienic papers, clothing companies, as well as water and sewer administration enterprises. The large companies were represented by mining equipment and iron casting producers, steel constructions, anti corrosive protection, as well as construction companies, heat and electricity suppliers and sweets production and medical services companies.

2.3. Age structure of the workers

Table 1 presents the age structure of the employees of the surveyed companies.

Table 1. Age structure of the surveyed companies.

1.5. Age structure in groups (number)				Per cent		
Company size	< 30 years	30 - 50 years	> 50 years	< 30 years	30 - 50 years	> 50 years
Small	53	78	20	35,1	51,7	13,2
Medium	144	321	99	25,5	56,9	17,6
Large	1316	2139	1233	28,1	45,6	26,3
Total	1513	2538	1352	28,0	47,0	25,0

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Most workers of the surveyed companies, regardless of company size, belonged to the 30-50 age group and constituted over a half of all workforce in the small and medium enterprises. Also in the largest companies, 45 per cent of the employees belonged to this age group. The young workers (younger than 30 years of age) and the older (50+) constituted respectively 28% and 25% of the total surveyed population. However, the young to old workers ratio varied among the companies of different size. The smallest proportion of the older workers was noted in the small companies (only 13%), whereas in the medium and large enterprises it was larger – 17,6% and 26% respectively. Nevertheless, in companies of every size group, there are workers who (considering their age and tenure) could become mentors.

During the research, the surveyed companies were also inquired, whether they would be interested in the testing of the e-learning programme. Half of the surveyed companies (8) answered positively. Among the 16 surveyed people, 11 (69%) were women.

3. Learning processes and internal communication

3.1. Corporate culture

The surveyed companies were inquired to indicate the corporate culture that best describes the model dominating in their organisation, the possible choices being: hierarchy oriented, cooperative and team-building oriented. The participants of the poll could also point to other management styles as prevalent in their companies. The table below presents the detailed results.

Table 2. Corporate culture of the company



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Company size	Hierarchy oriented	Cooperative	Team-building	Other
Small	1	3	1	0
Medium	2	3	1	0
Large	3	1	1	0
Total	6	7	3	0
Total (per cent)	37,5	43,8	18,8	0,00

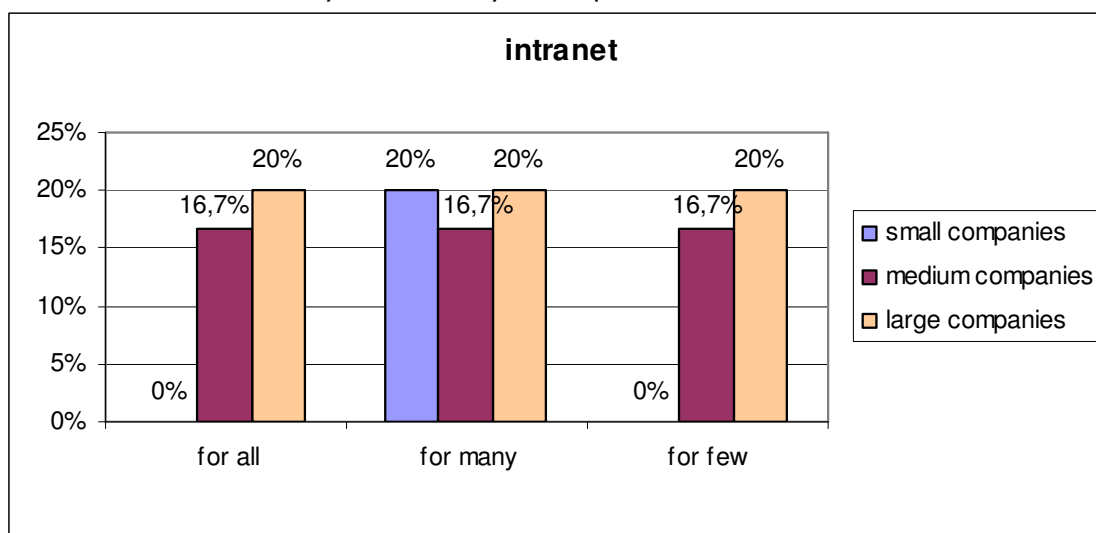
Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The cooperative model was the most commonly represented in the surveyed population, with 43,8% of all the answers. The above mentioned model was most commonly indicated by the small and medium companies (with 60% and 50% of the indications respectively), whereas the large companies were found to prefer the hierarchy oriented model (60% of the indications). On the contrary, the latter management style was only indicated by one small company. Among the medium-sized companies, one third pointed at the hierarchy oriented corporate culture. Based on this results, it can be concluded that hierarchy orientation grows stronger along with the size of a company.

3.2. Availability of the communication channels

The aim of the present set of questions was to determine the availability of the communication channels to the employees of the surveyed companies. The respondents could indicate channels such as: intranet, internet, e-mail, newsletter, meetings, phones, knowledge bases, message boards, computers or other channels. The availability of the individual channels is presented on the following charts. The percentage results show the share of positive answers in the given size group.

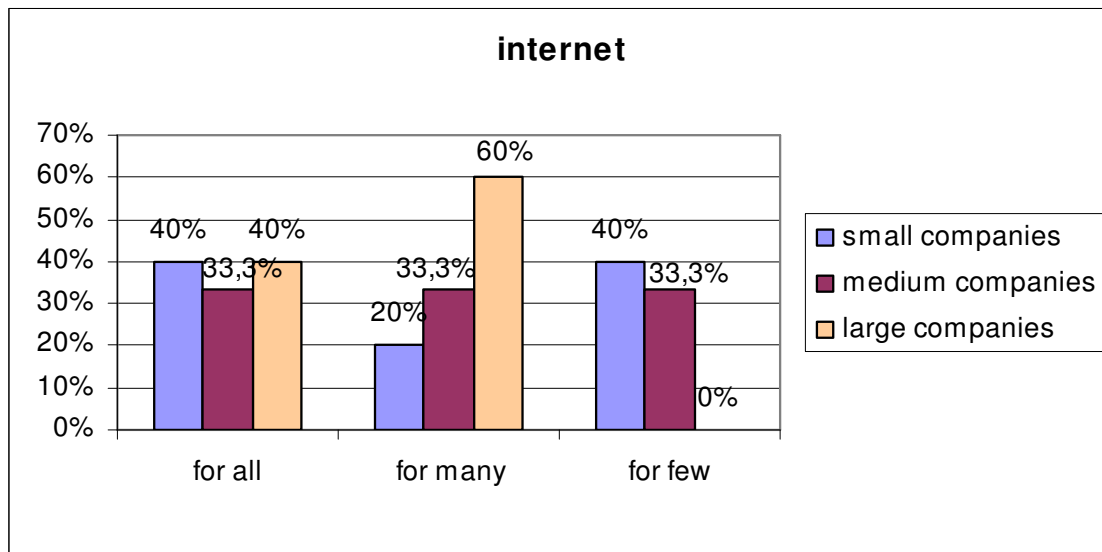
Chart 1. Intranet availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Intranet is rather rarely used as a communication channel in the Polish companies. Among the surveyed enterprises, it was indicated as widely available by only one company representing each group, whereas only one medium and one large company indicated universal availability and limited availability of this tool.

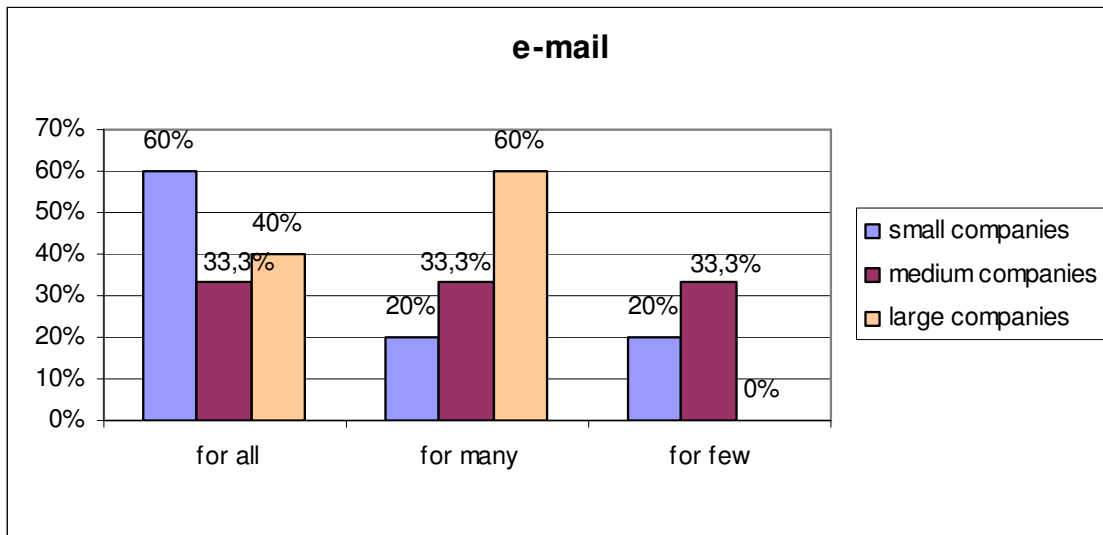
Chart 2. Internet availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The internet was found to be available for all workers in 6 of the surveyed companies (with 2 indications per each size group). The same number represents the wide availability of this tool (with different proportions of the indications – with 1 small, 2 medium and 3 large companies). Limited availability was indicated by 2 small and 2 medium enterprises. The above results confirm that all of the surveyed companies use internet to communicate with their employees. However, it is worth noting, that its availability is limited in a quarter of the surveyed companies (mostly production companies).

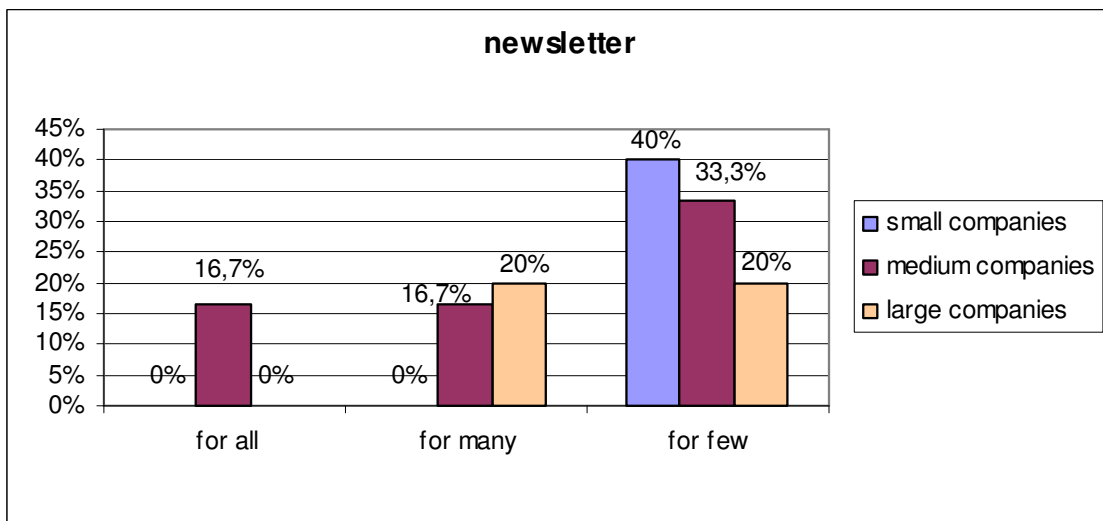
Chart 3. E-mail availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

E-mail was found to be universally or widely available in over 80% of the surveyed companies, with the first answer being indicated by 3 small and 2 of both medium and large companies. One small, 2 medium and 3 large companies indicated the wide availability of e-mail, whereas limited availability was only pointed at by one small and 2 medium enterprises. The data presented above suggests an almost universal availability of this communication channel among the surveyed companies.

Chart 4. Newsletter publishing in the surveyed companies

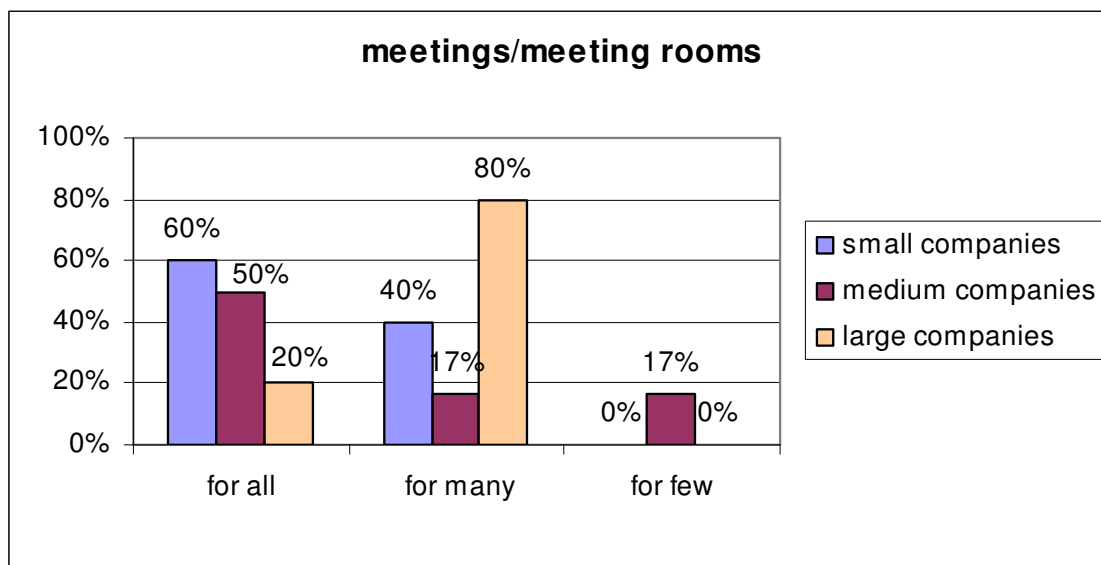


Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Newsletters are available to the employees in exactly the half of the surveyed companies. However, the access to this communication channel is strongly varied among the companies. Only one small enterprise declared universal availability of the newsletter, whereas it is widely available in one small and one large company. Another 2 small, 2 medium-sized and one large companies indicated that newsletters are available for some of their employees.

Considering the wide availability to the internet, as stated above, such a small popularity of newsletters as means of internal communication is difficult to understand.

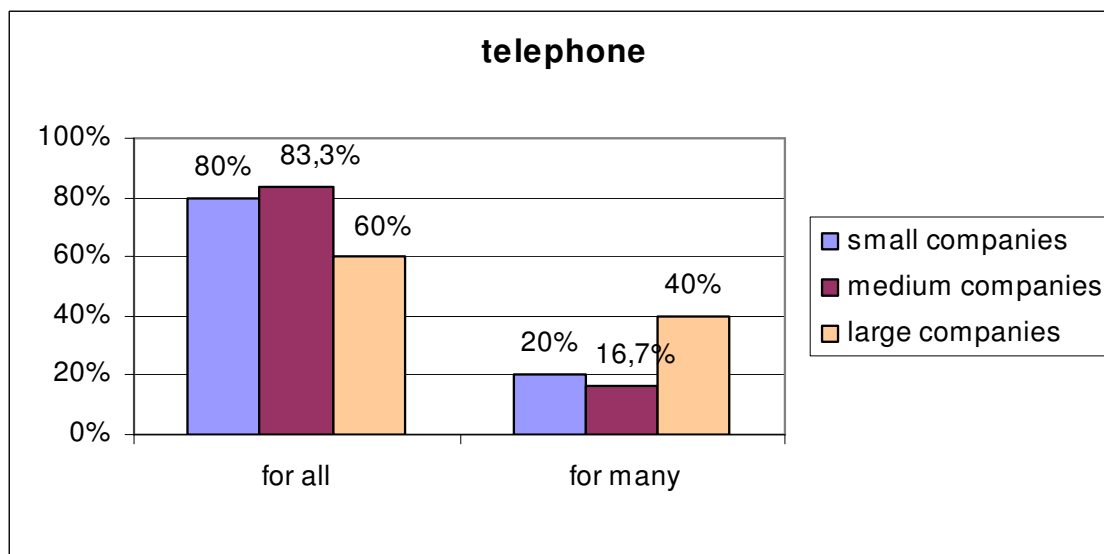
Chart 5. Meetings/meeting rooms availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Meetings are a very popular communication channel, being available for all employees in 3 small and medium companies and in one large enterprise. Another 3 small, one medium and 4 large companies indicated wide availability of this tool and only one medium company indicated the limited availability of meetings. The results lead to a clear conclusion that meetings are widely prevalent even in the large companies.

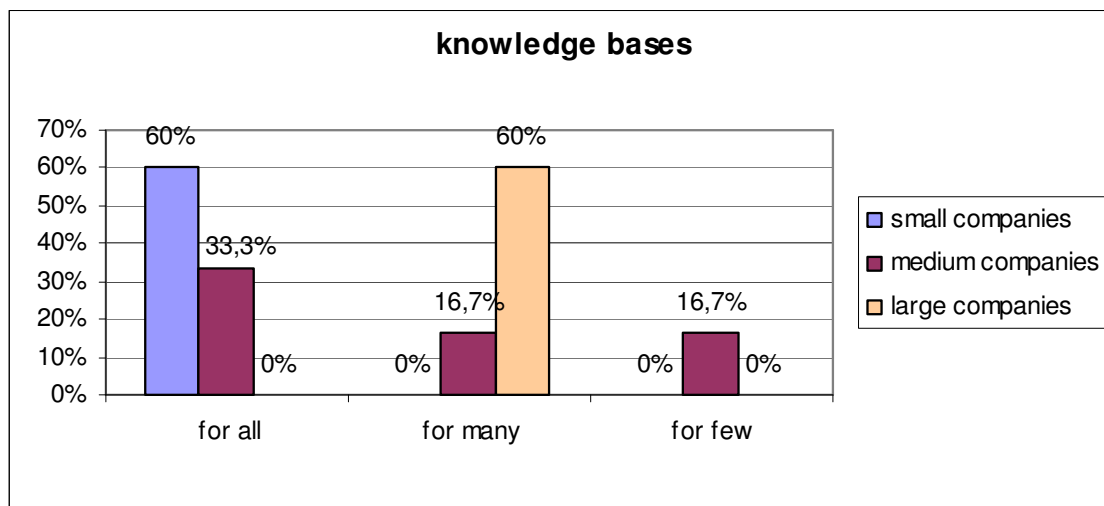
Chart 6. Telephone availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Telephone is a communication channel widely or universally available for the employees. Universal availability was indicated by 4 small, 5 medium and 3 large companies, whereas only 2 small, one medium and one large companies indicated wide availability of this tool.

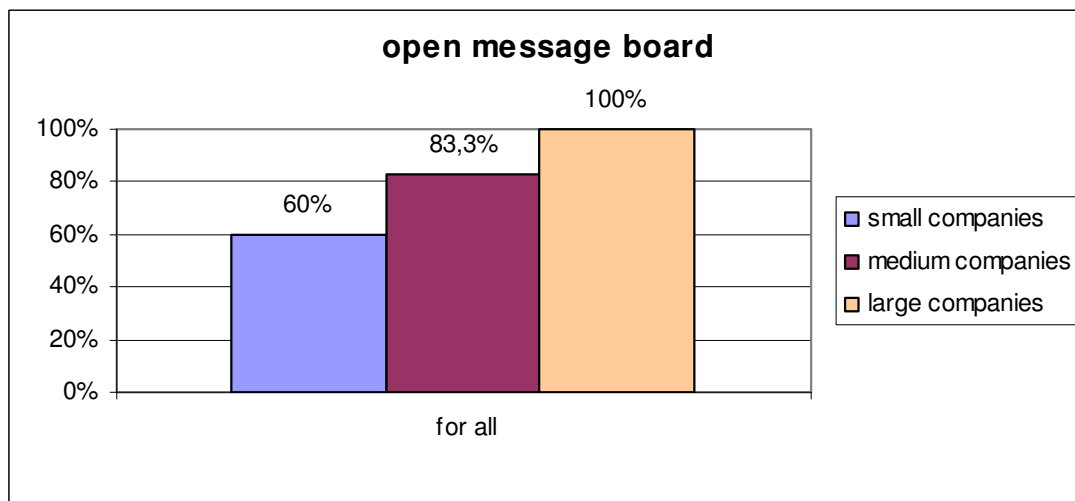
Chart 7. Knowledge bases availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Over 60% of the polled companies have their own knowledge bases available for the employees. Such bases were found to be universally available in 3 small and 2 medium companies. Moreover, "many employees" were declared to have access to the above mentioned bases in 3 large and one medium company. Only one medium-sized company declared limited availability of knowledge bases, therefore it can be clearly stated that most of the surveyed companies create knowledge bases and make them available for their employees.

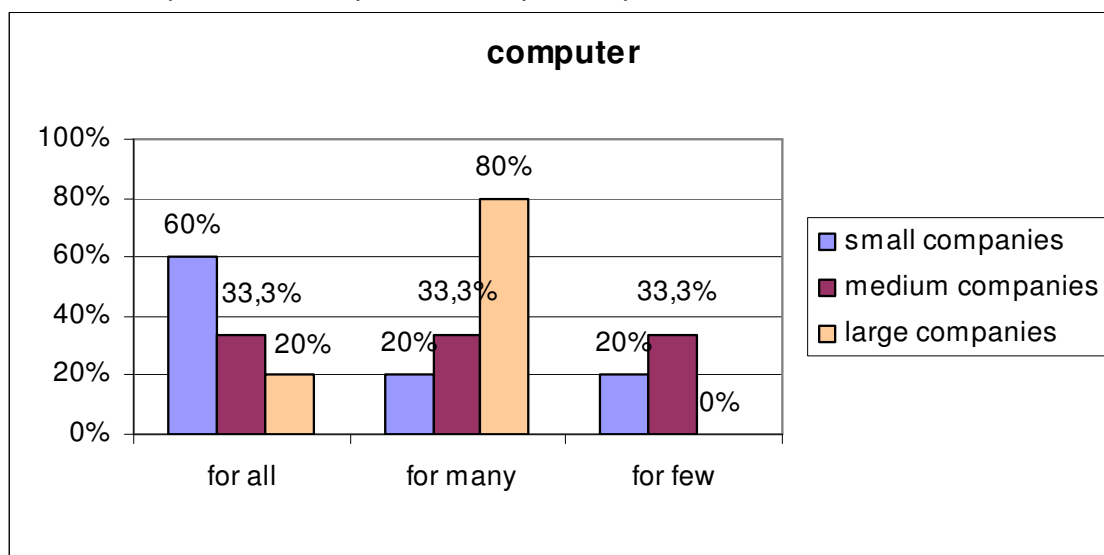
Chart 8. Open message board availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Open message boards are available in over 80% of the surveyed companies and if present, they are available for all employees. Only 2 small and one medium-sized company indicated not using this communication channel.

Chart 9. Computer availability in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

All of the polled companies secure their workers with computer access. However, universal availability has only been indicated by 3 small, 2 medium and one large company, whereas wide the rest of the latter group offer computer access for most of their employees (this has also been indicated by one small and one medium-sized company). Another one small and two medium companies provide access to computers only to few of their workers. None of the polled companies indicated other communications channels used by them.

3.3 Most used communication channels

The polled companies were also asked to indicate three communication channels they used most often. The table below illustrates the breakdown of answers.

Table 3. Most used communication channels

Indications	Categories	small companies	medium companies	Large companies	Total	Per cent
1 st channel	meetings	5	5	5	15	93,75
2 nd channel	internet	2	5	4	12	75
3 rd channel	telephone	3	5	2	10	62,5

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Based on the information presented above, the most used communication channel indicated by the polled companies were meetings, as indicated by 15 companies (with only one large

company that named fax as their primary communication device). In addition, one small company clearly indicated meetings as the only means of communication used. The second most popular communication channel (as indicated by 12 companies) was the internet, mostly used of for e-mails and intranet communication. The remaining 3 companies named message board, internal telephony and training sessions as their second choice for communication. The third communication channel, among the most used by the polled companies was the telephone (indicated by 10 companies). Other "3rd choices" included: internal training (2 enterprises) and a company newspaper. The remaining respondents were not able to indicate third the channel. The results show quite clearly, that the innovative communication channels cannot be used to replace traditional direct meetings, even in the large enterprises, where the regular meetings with the managers and direct superiors were found to play a key role.

4. Intergenerational learning

4.1. Importance of knowledge keeping

The polled companies were asked how much knowledge do they lose, when older employees retire. Ten respondents indicated a very large loss. The lack of knowledge-transfer processes may lead the company to a state of disorganisation and undermine all corporate processes. The polled companies also indicated difficulties in adaptation of the new workers, thus diminishing the company's potential and profits, as the experience gathered by the retired workers is impossible to recover. Another consequence is the loss of the accrued knowledge and respect often enjoyed by the older workers. Only two respondents indicated that the workers leaving the company because of retirement share their knowledge with their younger colleagues. The other polled companies stated that there were no retired employees yet, so it was difficult for them to assess the losses. All the responses suggest that the mechanisms of intergenerational knowledge transfer in Polish enterprises require enhancements, so that the retirement of some employees would not bring losses to the company.

4.2. Means of intergenerational knowledge transfer

The representatives of the polled companies were asked to indicate methods of knowledge transfer from the older to the younger employees. They were free to choose among: tutoring, mentoring, knowledge bases, training, e-learning and other means of knowledge transfer. The respondents were also free to point the means used by their companies and those they personally found interesting. The results are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Means of knowledge transfer

Means of transfer	Applied				Deemed interesting			
	Small	Medium	Large	Total	Small	Medium	Large	Total
tutoring	5	4	4	13	0	1	1	2
mentoring	4	1	2	7	1	4	2	7
knowledge base	1	4	3	8	0	1	1	2
training	4	5	4	13	0	0	0	0
e-learning	0	0	1	1	1	5	3	9
other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

When asked about the losses caused by employees leaving for retirement, companies often indicated significant “know-how” losses. However, based on the results above, the enterprises strive to recover the knowledge (partially at least). Tutoring and training were found the most commonly used means of knowledge transfer (as declared by over 80% of the polled companies). Tutoring was found to be used by all of the small, together with most medium and large companies (13 in total). Another 2 enterprises deemed this method interesting. Training was applied in 4 small and large companies, as well as in 5 medium-sized enterprises and being universally known, has not been indicated as interesting by any of the companies.

Another popular means of knowledge sharing is keeping knowledge bases, with the half of the companies having declared using it and another 2 indicated it as “interesting”. Also almost half of the respondents declared using mentoring (with the same number having declared their interest). However, it must be noted, that the declarations described above were made before the respondents were explained the meaning of the word “mentoring”.

Mentoring is the least popular among the means of knowledge transfer, with only one company having indicated practical application, yet another 9 having declared their interest, which suggests significant development potential for e-learning among the polish enterprises.

4.3. Knowledge-transfer related satisfaction level

The representatives of the surveyed companies were also asked to specify the level of their satisfaction with the results of knowledge transfer from the senior to junior employees. The satisfaction levels are presented in the table below.

Table 5. Knowledge-transfer related satisfaction level

Company size	Satisfied with the intergenerational knowledge transfer?			Per cent (within own group)	
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No
Small	4	1	5	80	20
Medium	5	1	6	83,3	16,7
Large	3	2	5	60	40
Total	12	4	16	75	25

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The results presented in the table above suggest that 80% of the small, over 80% of the medium-sized and 60% of the large companies are satisfied with the degree of intergenerational knowledge transfer among their employees. Most respondents indicated that efficient knowledge transfer depends on the working conditions and the relations between the older and younger employees. In addition, the role of the appropriate organisation of work, knowledge of the know-how transfer procedures, along with the openness of both the junior and staff to learn were also pointed at, as necessary factors for success. According to the respondents, also perceived workplace stability and creation of professional development paths for the workers are not to be underestimated.

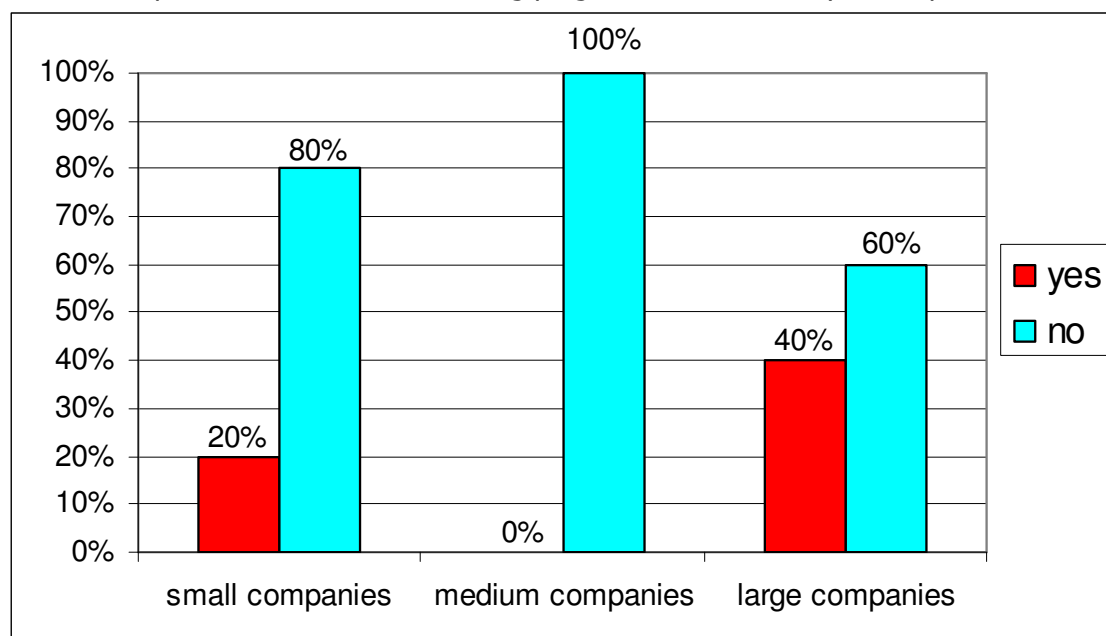
The representatives of the polled companies also pointed at some problems, resulting in low levels of knowledge-transfer satisfaction. The main issue seemed to be the anxiety of the senior workers to lose their present position, thinking that the knowledge transfer to the younger colleagues would render them useless. In addition, one company indicated low knowledge-transfer abilities among the senior workers, as being the largest barrier.

5. Mentoring

Questions in the present section concerned the methods and possible ways to implement mentoring programmes in the polled companies. This section encompasses 6 groups of main questions, regarding the mentoring programmes already in place, the company experience in this matter, motivations for implementation, as well as the expectations of the enterprise and its employees regarding the implementation of a mentoring programme. In addition, the respondents were asked to point at barriers to taking over a role of a mentor by the senior workers, the junior staff's participation in the mentoring programmes, along with the possible motivating factors for both groups. The present section has been introduced by defining "mentoring" and the objectives of this process.

5.1. Mentoring implementation

Chart 10. Implementation of the mentoring programme in the surveyed companies



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

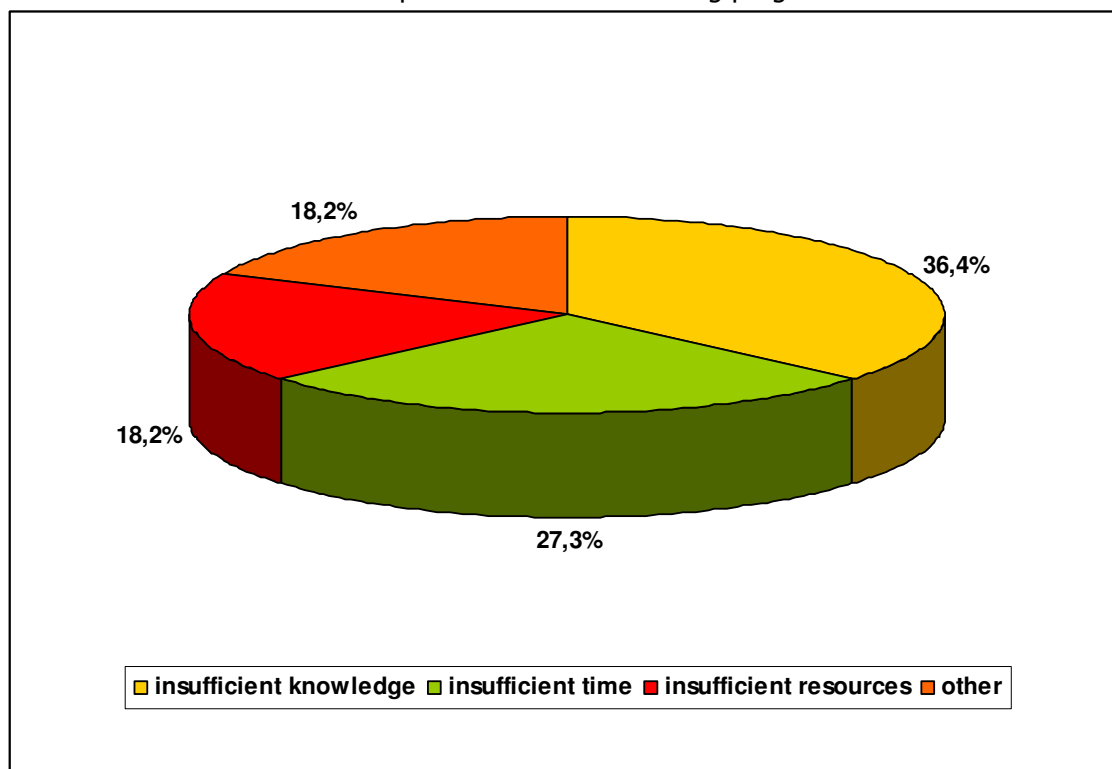
Among the 16 representatives of the polled companies, only three admitted (one from a small and two from large companies) that their enterprises had implemented a mentoring programme. It is interesting, that no such answers from the medium-sized companies were noted.

Companies that had implemented a mentoring programme

The results of the poll suggest that only a third of the surveyed companies have included the mentoring programme in an overall business strategy. The programme functions as one of the internal processes and covers all "High Potential" employees (workers with high potential for the company). Their mentors are top-level executives. In the second analysed case (healthcare company) the implementation of the procedure was a one-off process, related to a promotion of one of the employees, to whom a mentor had been assigned (in this case a long-tenured and experienced doctor, being at the time his direct superior). In the third of the companies, where the mentoring procedures had been implemented, they function rather as a general practice, not a formalised process (written into the corporate strategy). The company applies them to all newly-hired employees and the heads of departments are assigned the role of their mentors. All respondents from the enterprises described above are satisfied with the way the mentoring processes work in practice, enabling the new employees to quickly acquire new knowledge (otherwise unreachable neither in professional nor personal training courses) and adapt to the corporate culture. In addition, one of the respondents underlined the fact that having the mentoring programme included in the business strategy opens new development opportunities for his company.

Barriers to the implementation of a mentoring programme

Chart 11. Main barriers to the implementation of mentoring programmes

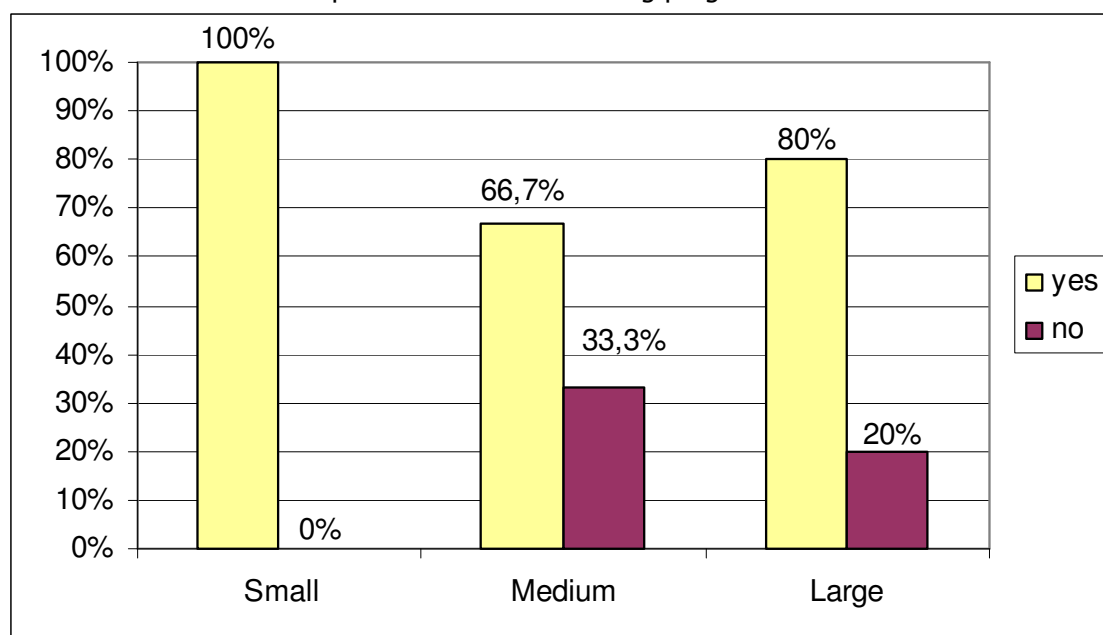


Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Over 81% of the respondents admitted that their companies had no mentoring procedures implemented. One of the main reasons for such state is (in the opinion of the surveyed) lack of sufficient knowledge (36.4% of the indications) and insufficient time for the

implementation of the procedures (27.3% of the indications). Moreover, 18% of the respondents pointed at the lack of sufficient human and technical resources in their company. An interesting fact is that only one person claimed to see no barriers to implementation of a mentoring system. Moreover, two representatives of companies not having a mentoring programme in place are not interested in future implementation. As a reason, they cited insufficient economic resources and a fact, that their companies hire young and unqualified people, who soon become valuable workers, owing to training courses and an oversight of senior employees. It seems though, that the surveyed do not have complete knowledge on the mentoring process and do not realise, that it means in practice the help of the senior workers offered to the younger employees. They neither have an idea of the real costs of the implementation of mentoring processes, which can in many cases be very low.

Chart 12. Interest in the implementation of mentoring programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The chart above clearly shows that all respondents representing small companies were interested in the implementation of a mentoring programme. However, it were the representatives of the medium-sized companies, who were found to be the least interested in the implementation.

5.2. Companies' expectations regarding the implementation of mentoring

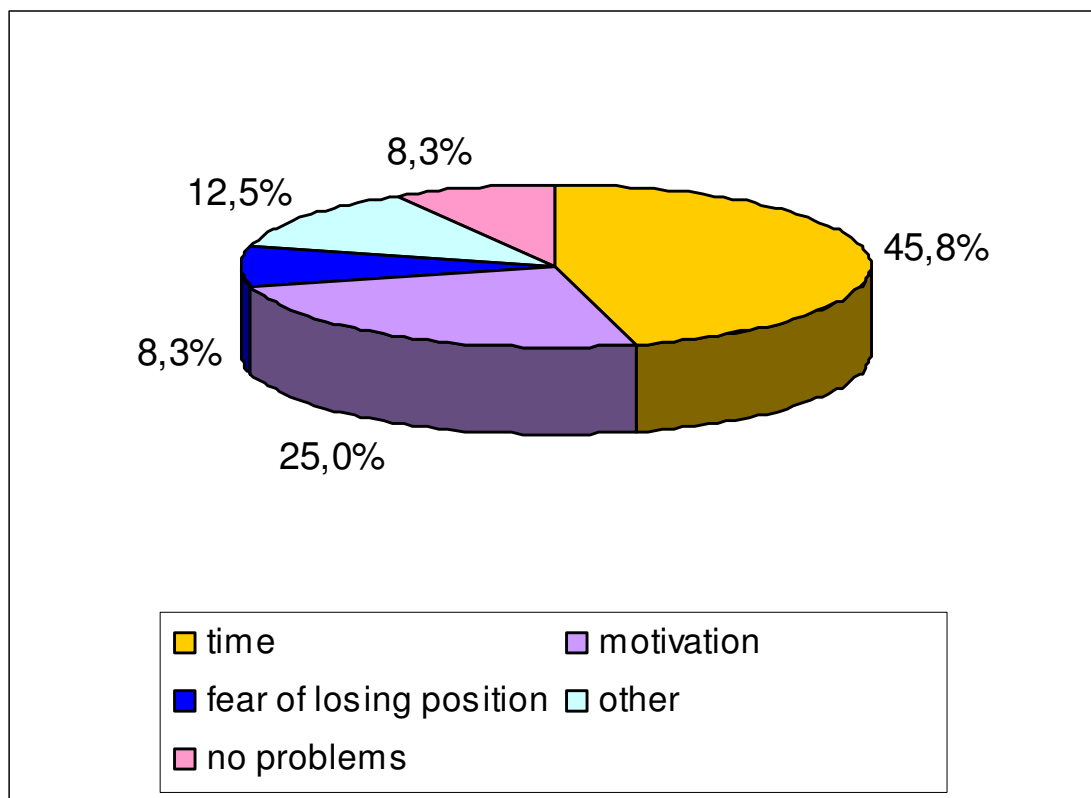
The survey participants were asked to indicate their expectations from the implementation of a mentoring programme in their companies and the expected benefits from the process. Surprisingly, a half of the polled company representatives pointed at the improvement of the overall knowledge and information flow in their companies (i.e. the strengthening of their internal communication system), as the most expected change. Among the most important direct benefits from the improvement of information flow, the respondents often pointed at

the possibility to integrate the newly-hired people into their new tasks quicker, at the same time enabling them to acquire the new, complete and “priceless” knowledge based on the past experience. Altogether the processes mentioned above should lead to the improvement of interpersonal relations and stronger integration of the staff. One of the poll participants underlined the fact, that a mentoring programme can also help the senior workers realise the gravity and value of the knowledge they possess and, as a result, strengthen their abilities to transfer knowledge to the younger workers. Almost every fourth survey participant (18%) indicated also the development aspect of the implementation of a mentoring programme. They underlined mostly the expected work efficiency and quality boost, development of the know-how, the opportunities to educate proper successors and, finally, faster development of the whole company.

5.3. Seniors’ willingness

Over a half of the survey participants (56.3%) stated that the older employees of companies would be interested in becoming mentors to their younger colleagues. Their answers suggest that that the mentoring programmes would enjoy the most popularity among the employees of the small companies (all participants’ answers were positive) and the least – in the large companies (no positive answers recorded). In the large companies group most respondents had difficulties to give a simple answer , because the willingness to participate in a mentoring programme depends on their position in the company and the quality of preparatory programmes for the future mentors.

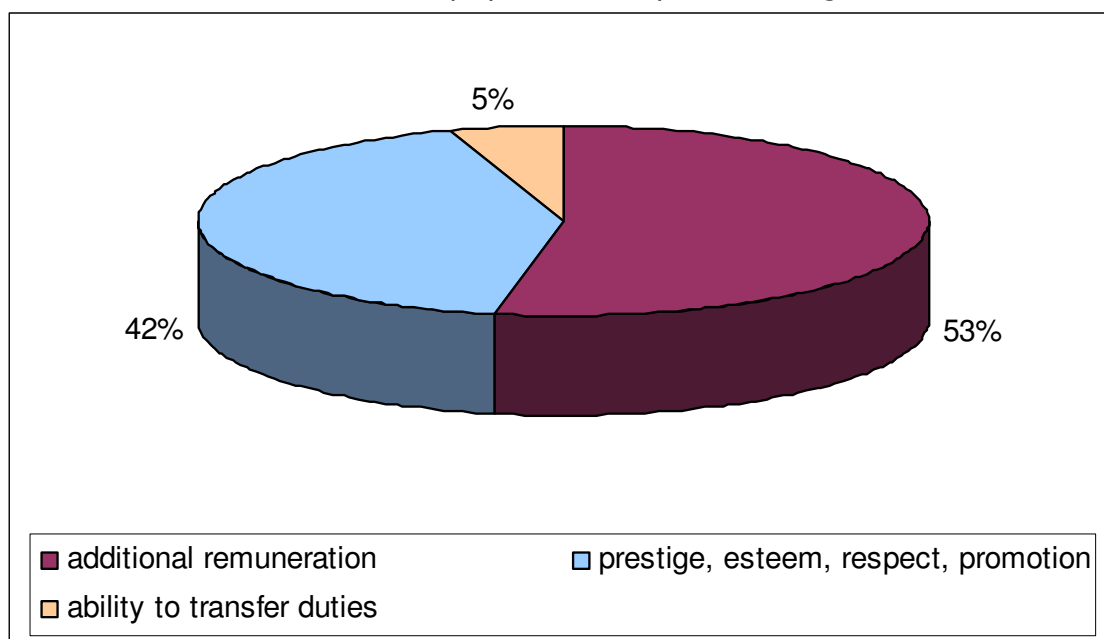
Chart 13. Possible problems for the older employees concerning the implementation of mentoring programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Almost 20% of the survey participants stated that their companies' employees will show no interest whatsoever in becoming mentors. The main problem lies in the lack of time (as indicated by 45.8% of the respondents). This factor was pointed at, as being the main obstacle, by all representatives of small companies. Among the other problems, the participants indicated: lack of motivation (25% of the answers) and the fear of losing one's current position in the company (8.3% of the responses). The latter factor, also described as increased "competition", but also degradation of one's "expert" position (due to the unique know-how possessed) or negative changes potentially induced by the younger workers were most common among the small companies' respondents. Among the problems arising from taking up the role of a mentor, the poll participants included also: lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to learn, frustration and past negative experience (including the feeling of getting unwanted extra job to do). However, as for the last of the above stated problems, one of the respondents gave an inverse example of a person very willing to become a mentor to the young workers, with the intention to get rid of some tiring tasks. Two participants of the poll underlined the fact, that the biggest problem can lie in the corporate culture, especially regarding the appropriate preparation of the workers to taking up the role of mentors, motivation and systemic support. Only two companies' representatives claim that the older workers will have no problems with becoming mentors.

Chart 14. Motivators for the older employees necessary for becoming a mentor



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

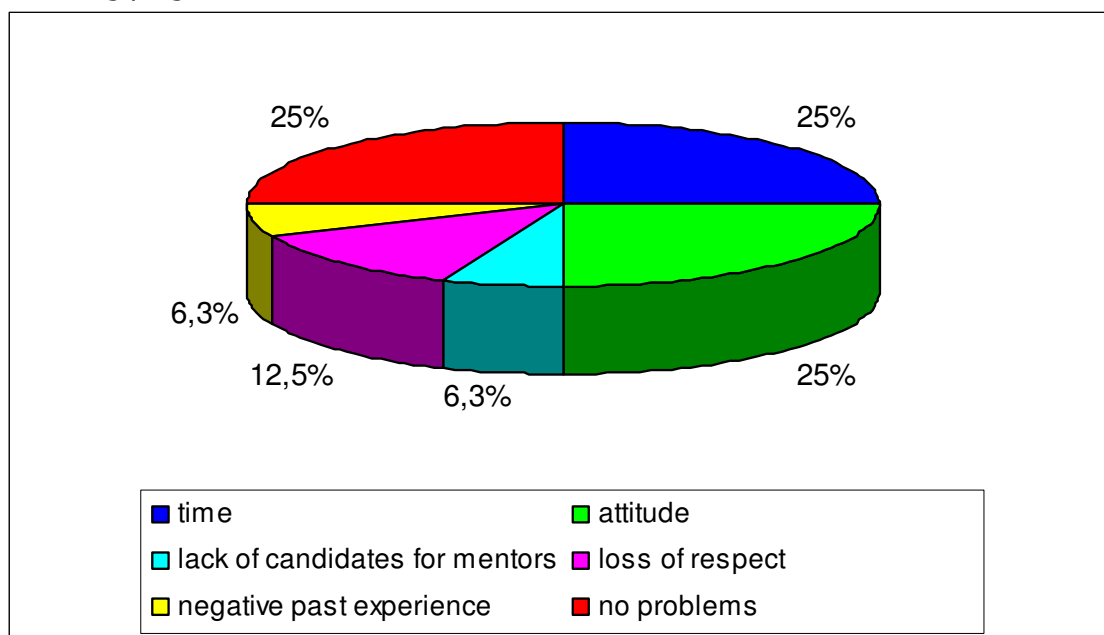
The above chart clearly depicts the opinion of over a half of the poll participants, that the best motivator to become a mentor would be financial benefit (increase in salary or a bonus). Among the other motivating factors, the respondents included: a privileged position in the company, increased respect, extra prestige (due to a promotion to be an official mentor in the company hierarchy), more esteem in the eyes of the co-workers and the promotion itself, but also an increased self-esteem (owing to the confirmation of one's own abilities and capabilities to transfer the possessed knowledge to the younger workers). As

extra motivation, one of the respondents pointed at the opportunity to charge the new person with a part of one's own tasks.

5.4. Juniors' willingness

The survey participants were also asked to assess the degree of junior employees' willingness to cooperate with the seniors and point at potential problems. It is interesting that, differently from the senior workers, 15 out of 16 respondents claimed that the younger workers would be eager or even very eager to take up the cooperation with their older colleagues, and the newly acquired knowledge would be an interesting form of development for them. Only one of the poll participants answered that it was difficult for them to judge.

Chart 15. Possible problems for the younger employees concerning the implementation of mentoring programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

According to the poll participants, the among the biggest problems in making younger and older workers cooperate effectively, there would be: insufficient time and negative attitude of the junior workers, together with the resulting lack of the common ground for reciprocal understanding (both answers with 25% of the indications) caused by the lack of self-confidence, the fear of failure, frustration or unwillingness to reveal one's limited knowledge in a given area. At the same time, the same share of poll participants claim, that there would be no problems with the junior workers' willingness to participate in a mentoring programme.

5.5. Time to allocate

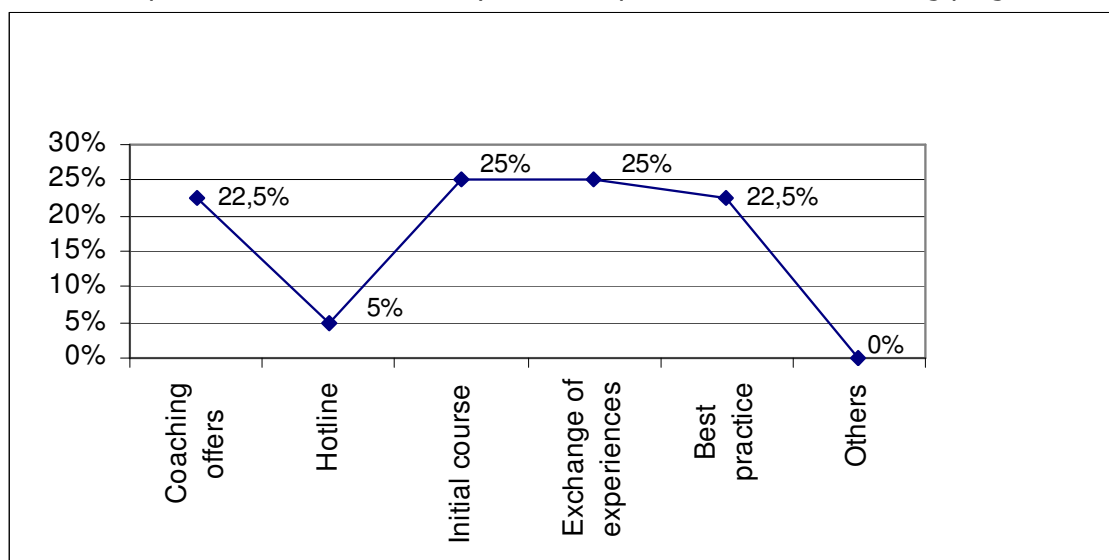
In the course of the research, the participants were also asked to point at the time necessary, in their opinion, to implement full all mentoring-programme processes. Eight people gave precise indications on the time, they would contribute for the implementation, varying from 2% of each day's working time up to one year. The rest of participants made the indication for time conditional to the position concerned, workers' abilities and the area of

implementation of the mentoring programme. One of the answers showed no interest in the implementation of the facility in question.

5.6. Support/assistance

The following question regarded the types of assistance necessary in the implementation of mentoring programmes in the company (respondents could choose more than one answer). The opinions are presented in the chart below.

Chart 16. Expected assistance necessary for the implementation of mentoring programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Among the 5 exemplary answers given in the questionnaire, 2 facilities were pointed at as the most desirable forms of assistance – initial courses and exchange of experiences (both gathered 25% of the indications). Just a little less desirable for the poll participants were: coaching offers and best-practice exchange (both with 22.5% of the indication). Hotline turned out to be the least expected form of assistance (with only 2 answers in favour).

6. e-Learning

The questions in the present section regarded the methods and possible ways to implement the e-learning programmes in the surveyed companies. It included 4 main questions on the previously implemented e-learning programmes, companies' experiences on the matter, motivation to implement them, as well as on the companies' and their employees' expectations regarding the implementation of such programmes. In addition, the poll participants were asked to point at barriers in the application of e-learning solutions by the older workers and indicate the motivating factors for this group. This section was introduced by a definition of e-learning, its main objectives and the benefits from the implementation of this method.

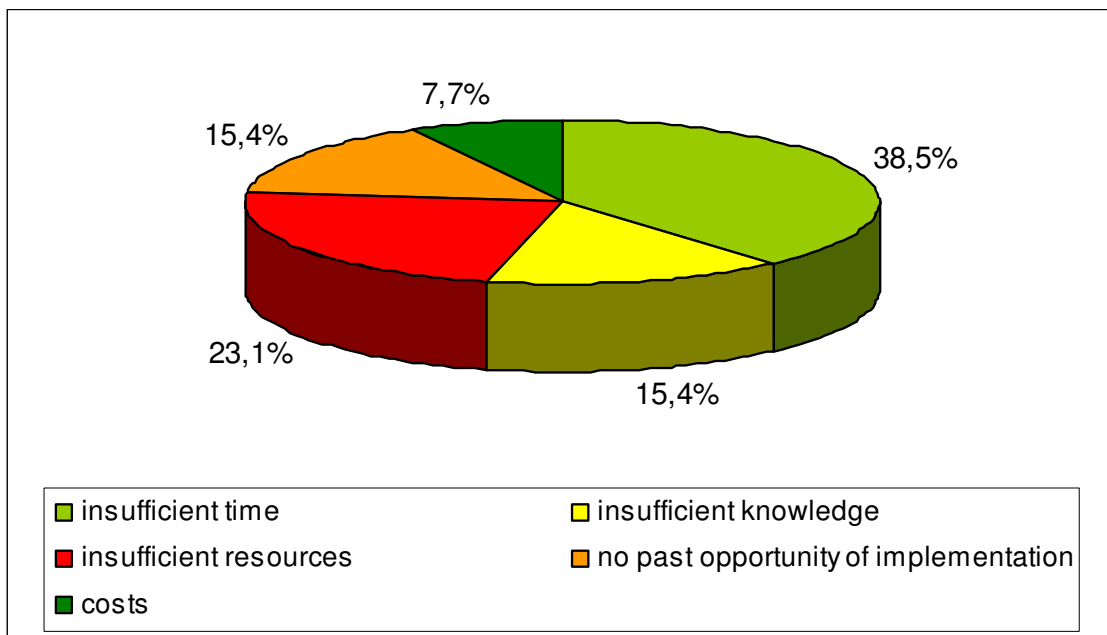
6.1. e-learning implementation

None of the participants admitted that their company had implemented a complete e-learning programme. One of the respondents (representing a large company) indicated that the e-learning system operates in his company, but on a "project-by-project" basis, not as an ongoing process. The mentioned processes mostly serve the purpose of realizing global initiatives of the company, involving all of the employees of their company.

What are the main obstacles in the implementation of e-learning?

The poll participants were asked to indicate the main problems and obstacles, that make them unable to implement e-learning programmes.

Chart 17. Main obstacles for the implementation of an e-learning programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

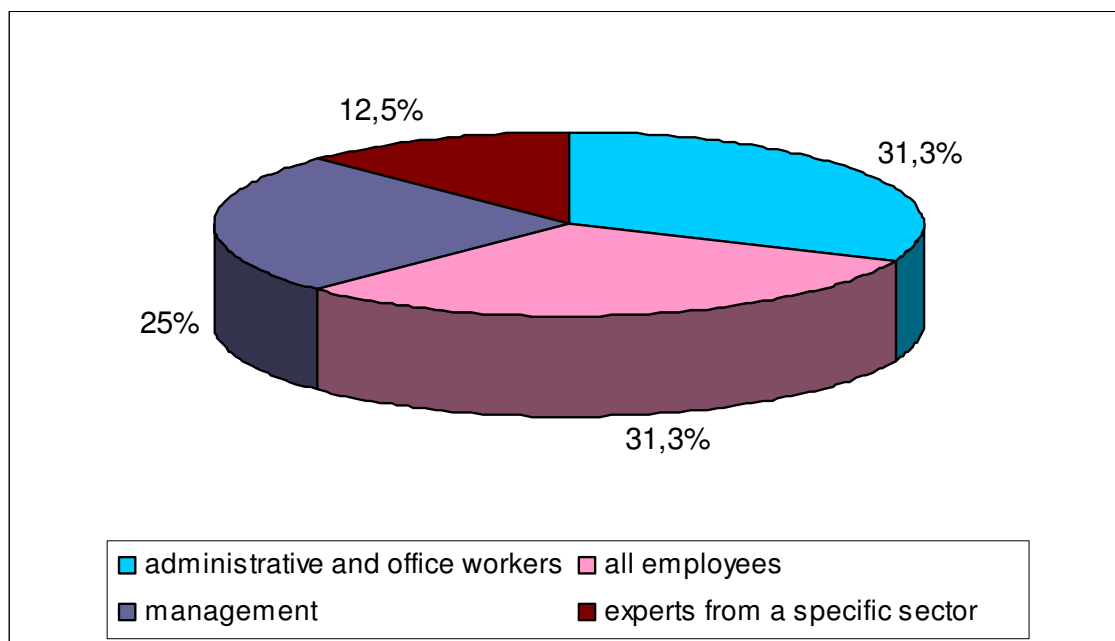
The above chart clearly portrays the lack of time as the biggest obstacle to the implementation of e-learning, with 38.5 % of the answers. To the almost equally important problems, the respondents also included insufficient resources and knowledge. Regarding the resources, many the participants pointed mainly at the infrastructure (e.g. not sufficient number of computers in a construction company). Two people also indicated no problems in the e-learning implementation, although their companies had not yet had an opportunity to implement such solutions. In addition, one respondent pointed at the costs as a main obstacle to implementation.

On what conditions could e-learning be beneficial to Your company and who could participate in such courses?

According to the survey participants, e-learning could be put to a more productive use in their companies as additional support for their employees in the area of new knowledge

acquisition. One of the respondents made the implementation of the programme conditional on the possibility to build a special unit (or pick a person), who would take the responsibility of the overall implementation and oversight over the project. According to a third of the polled companies, the beneficiaries the e-learning programmes should include all of a company's employees. The same proportion of the respondents indicated the need to make the e-learning facilities available especially to the administration and office workers. At the same time, in the opinion of 25% of the poll participants, e-learning should be applied only to the management (including the project and department managers). The following chart illustrates the precise breakdown of answers.

Chart 18. Potential participants of an e-learning programme

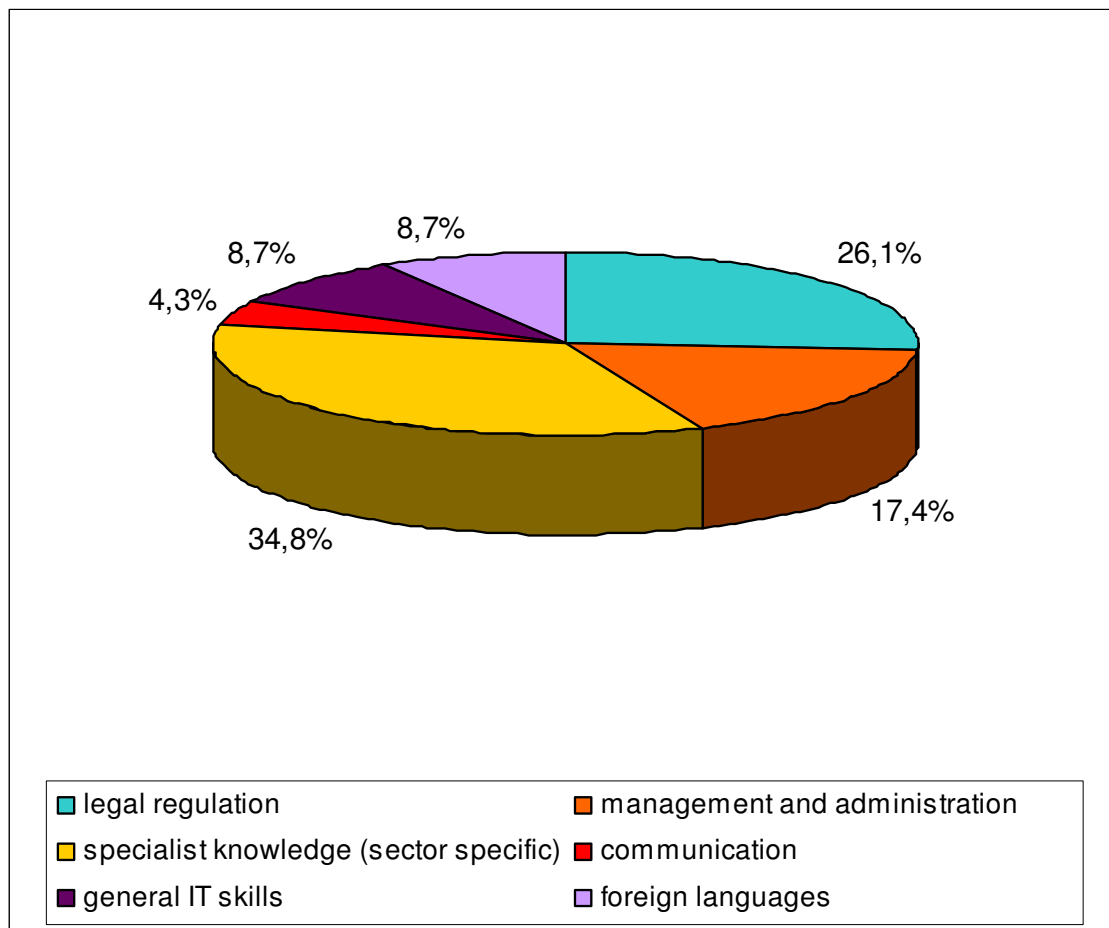


Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Areas (topics) to be covered by e-learning

During the poll, the participants were asked to indicate the topics, which could be taught using the advantages of the e-learning methods.

Chart 19. Areas (topics) to be covered by e-learning



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

Based on the above chart, it can be stated, that the topic most preferred by the polled companies to be covered by e-learning, is the specialist sector-specific knowledge (in marketing, sales, HR, corporate finance and the profession-specific specialist knowledge). Legal regulations were found only a little less popular area of e-learning implementation, as indicated by 26.1 % of the respondents. According to the poll participants, also the general management and administration knowledge could be transferred using the e-learning methods. Other course subjects, where e-learning could be implemented be implemented, indicated by the respondents included: IT-literacy, foreign languages and internal communication (i. a. employer-employee relations).

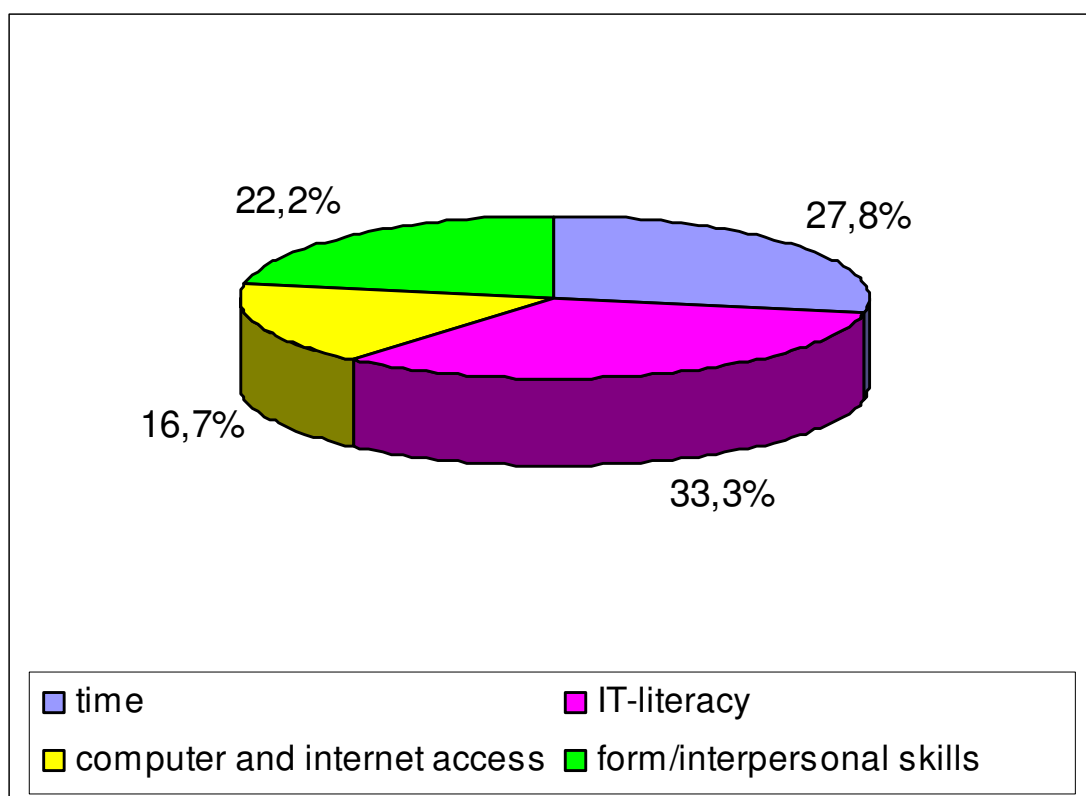
Infrastructure

Among the 16 poll participants, five admitted that their companies do not have the necessary infrastructure to implement e-learning (e.g. du to the insufficient number of computers or their availability limited to the administration workers). The availability of computers and internet access is the main obstacle to the implementation of e-learning tools, according to 16% of the respondents (see chart 20 – question 6.2 below).

6.2. Senior workers' eagerness

According to almost 70% of the respondents, older workers might be interested in the e-learning programmes. Similarly to the results regarding the mentoring programmes, most of the positive indications came from the small companies. Only in the middle-sized companies, some respondents claimed that the older workers might not at all be interested in such a method of knowledge transfer (they pointed at two groups of workers in this context – the manual workers and employees in the pre-retirement period).

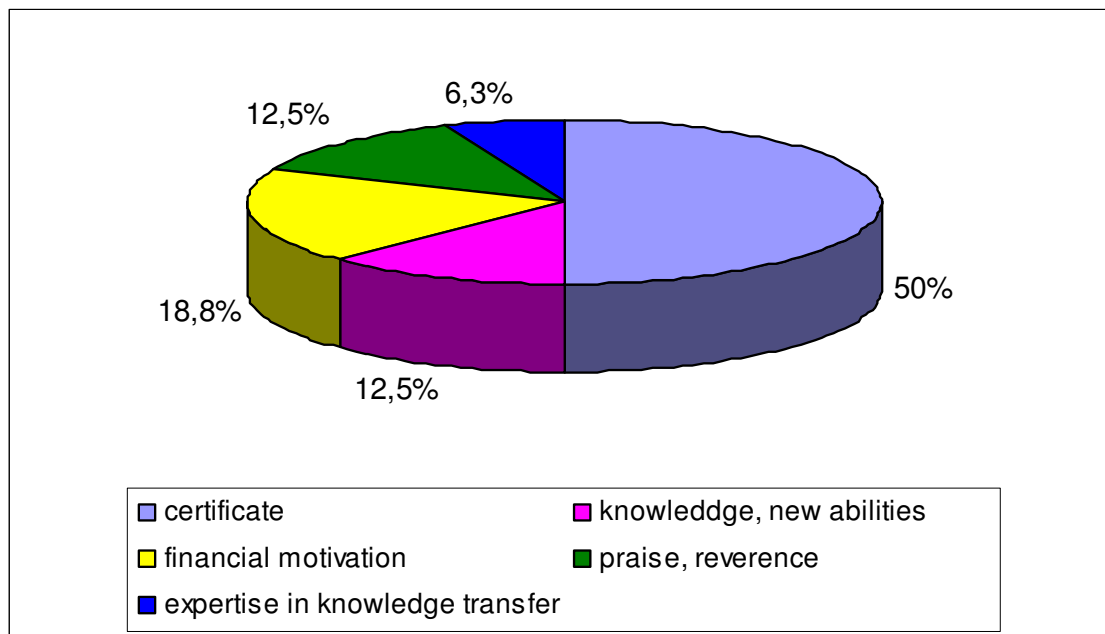
Chart 20. Possible problems for the older employees concerning the implementation of an e-learning programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

One of the representatives of a large company underlined the fact that the workers would only be interested in e-learning programmes, if they had been offered prior IT-literacy courses and appropriate support from the company. It seems that the problem of inadequate basic IT-skills among the older workers is not typical only for the large companies, as it was indicated as a main obstacle by a third of all respondents. According to the survey participants, an equally significant problem is insufficient time (27,8% of the indications) and the specific features of the e-learning process itself (as opposed to the traditional training courses), along with the inadequate corporate culture and lacking knowledge-transfer abilities (according to 22.2% of the answers).

Chart 21. Motivators for the older employees to participate in e-learning courses



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

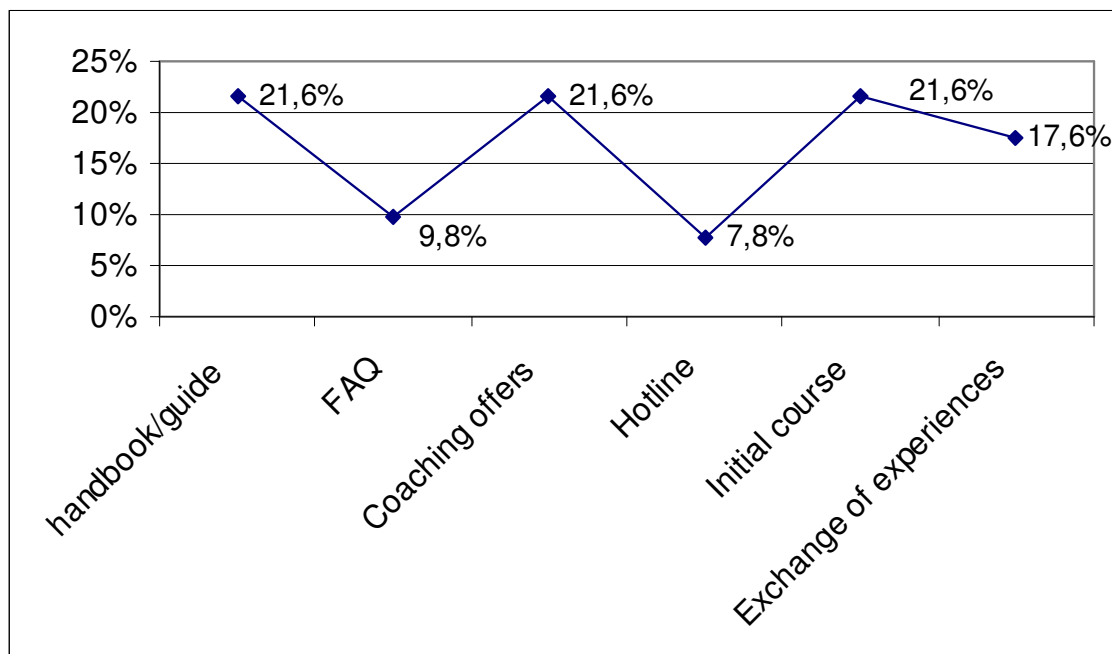
In the opinion of a half of the survey participants, the best motivators for the older workers to participate in the e-learning courses could be certificates and diplomas. Another popular motivators include: financial benefits (bonuses and perks) – as stated by 18.8% of the respondents, together with the opportunity to acquire new abilities (including knowledge) and special distinctions (e.g. praise and reverence from the superiors) – with 12,5% of the indications for the last two motivators.

6.3. Time to allocate

In the survey participants' opinion, the time needed to be allocated to the implementation of the e-learning as a method of knowledge transfer depends mostly on the subjects covered by the courses and the abilities of the participating employees. The indications varied between 1 hour daily and one full month. One of the respondents stressed the fact, that an e-learning programme could only be implemented during the free time, due to the lack of time within the working hours.

6.4. Support/assistance

Chart 22. Expected assistance necessary for the implementation of an e-learning programme



Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

In the following question, the poll participants were asked to indicate the means of assistance they would need to fully complete the implementation of e-learning programmes in their companies (more than one answer was allowed to be given). Among the six solutions proposed by the questionnaire, three were indicated as the most expected: initial training courses, coaching offers and handbooks/guides (each being indicated by 21.6% of the respondents). Similarly to the answers regarding the mentoring programmes, the hotline (pointed at by only 4 poll participants) was found to be the least expected form of assistance.

7. Competences required from the mentors

The objective of the present part of the research was to identify the competences which are vital for the mentors to be able to fulfil their duties effectively. To begin with, the survey participants were given the following definitions of competences needed by mentors:

a. Analysis

Ability to analyse a situation, taking into consideration all the aspects in order to identify any possible problem together with main objectives to be reached.

b. Communication

Ability to communicate effectively with the others choosing the best communication channel for a specific purpose, presenting information in an appropriate manner for the situation, and understanding messages and responses received from others. Ability to listen

c. Decision making

Ability to select a logical choice from among a set available options, forecasting the outcomes of each option, weighting all the positives and negatives, and considering all the possible alternatives.

d. Flexibility and Innovation

Ability to be flexible with clients in order to reach foreseen objectives; and ability to identify criticalities and rigidities of a given framework with the aim of innovating.

e. Internal client orientation

Ability to identify internal clients' (staff members) needs and to match them to appropriate solutions, establishing and maintaining productive partnerships by gaining their trust and respect.

f. Leadership

Ability to motivate a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal, being the inspiration and director of the action.

g. Motivation and development pursuing

Ability to stimulate and motivate others towards personal and team development, by encouraging to self-analysis and continuous growing.

h. Networking

Ability to develop and use contacts made in business/life for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact.

i. Organization and planning

Ability to establish an appropriate programme of action by setting priorities, anticipating needs, organising time, setting and achieving targets.

j. Tasks allocation

Ability to pursue targets achievement by defining tasks allocation according to available resources and hierarchy in objectives importance/urgency.

In the next step, the representatives of the surveyed companies were asked to rank the competences described above, according to their importance to effective mentoring, in a scale, where (1) signifies the most important competence and (10) – the least important one. The following table presents the precise breakdown of the answers.

Table 6. Ranking of the competences required from the mentors to effectively fulfil their duties (in the scale of 1 – the most important to 10 – least important), average answers

Competences:	Company size:			Average
	Small	Medium	Large	
a. Analysis	7,8	6,0	5,0	6,3
b. Communication	2,0	3,2	4,2	3,1
c. Decision making	5,6	4,8	5,6	5,3
d. Flexibility and Innovation	3,4	7,0	6,2	5,6
e. Internal client orientation	7,2	5,2	5,4	5,9
f. Leadership	5,4	3,0	5,2	4,4
g. Motivation and development pursuing	5,2	6,2	6,6	6,0
h. Networking	8,6	8,7	4,8	7,4
i. Organization and planning	4,2	6,3	4,8	5,2
j. Tasks allocation	5,6	4,7	7,2	5,8

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The indications, as presented above, clearly show that the most important competence of the mentor is communication(average rank 3.1), then leadership (4.4), organization and

planning (5.2). The least important competence, in the respondents' opinion, is networking (7.4). The average ranks differ from the group results, as the small and large companies gave the highest rank to communication and the respondents representing medium-sized companies mostly pointed at leadership. Also flexibility and innovation have been ranked high by the small companies. Interesting results stem from the indications of the large companies, where networking (the least appreciated feature among the respondents from other groups) comes as the second-most important competence, after organisation and planning. It is also worth noting, that the most significant disparities in individual ranks (ranging from 2 to 8.6) was recorded in the small companies group, which makes the competences ranked as highest in this group more important than the rankings of the other groups.

One of our objectives in the research was to assess if the actual competences of the oldest and most experienced workers are those important for effective mentoring. The participants were therefore asked to rank the competences listed above, from the most often possessed by the older employees of their companies (1), to the least often possessed (10). The following table presents the detailed breakdown of rankings.

Table 7. The occurrence of the competences possessed among the company's oldest and most experienced employees (ranging from 1 – the most often possessed competence to 10 – the least often possessed competences). Average results.

Competences:	Company size:			Average:
	Small	Small	Small	
a. Analysis	6,8	4,8	4,4	5,5
b. Communication	2,2	4,6	5,0	3,8
c. Decision making	4,6	5,0	5,0	4,7
d. Flexibility and Innovation	6,4	6,6	6,6	6,5
e. Internal client orientation	6,0	5,0	6,4	5,9
f. Leadership	5,6	4,6	7,0	5,6
g. Motivation and development pursuing	6,8	8,4	5,8	7,1
h. Networking	5,2	4,8	3,6	4,9
i. Organization and planning	5,4	6,0	4,6	5,3
j. Tasks allocation	6,0	5,2	5,6	5,6

Source: Prepared by the authors using the entrepreneur opinion poll results.

The average results presented above suggest, that the most experienced employees of the surveyed companies most commonly possess the communication (average rank 3.8), decision making (4.7) and networking (4.9) competences. The least often possessed competences of the mentor-candidates are Motivation and development pursuing (7.1), flexibility and innovation (6.5), along with the internal client orientation (5.9). The results of the small companies responses were almost the same as the average indications. However, it is worth noting, that flexibility and innovation, ranked very high as desired competence of the mentors by this group, is in fact strongly underrepresented among the oldest and most experienced employees of these companies. Another conclusion from the results presented above is, that the competences most desired for mentors are the most strongly represented among the senior and experienced employees of the largest companies. Although the actual order of occurrence is slightly different from the preference ranking, they seem to be the most prepared to become mentors for their younger and less experienced colleagues.

No other desired competences of a mentor were indicated by the respondents (apart from the ones suggested in the questionnaire).

8. Summary and conclusions

On the basis of the research conducted, the implementation of the new mentoring and e-learning procedures is needed in the Polish companies. What is even more important, the representatives of the surveyed enterprises have confirmed the assumption, that the implementation of the intergenerational knowledge transfer programmes would strongly support their internal management processes. It can be stated, based on the fact, that half of the poll participants were eager to take part in the test phase of the experimental version of the e-learning programme.

The surveyed companies represent mostly the cooperative model of corporate culture. In addition, a correlation between the company size and hierarchy-orientation has also been found, the latter model being prevalent in the large companies. The study also confirmed that the Polish companies use modern communications channel. The internet and e-mail are available in almost all of the surveyed companies. However, one fourth of the poll participants indicated limited access to both of these channels. In addition to the latest communication technologies used in the companies, the direct meetings remain the most popular communication channel in the everyday corporate practice (these have been indicated as the basic means of communication in almost all of the surveyed companies).

The companies participating in the poll attach significant importance to the intergenerational knowledge transfer. Two thirds of the surveyed enterprises indicated significant losses resulting from insufficient knowledge transfer. The imperfections of this process render the adaptation of the newly hired workers longer and decrease the overall efficiency of the company. The intergenerational knowledge transfer systems are still largely ineffective in Polish enterprises and all too often the retirement of older workers leads to irreversible loss of the knowledge possessed by them.

The results of the research conducted also illustrate the fact, that Polish enterprises often make efforts to retain and use the knowledge of the senior workers. The most popular methods of knowledge transfer are tutoring and training courses, with only slightly lower popularity of building knowledge bases. On the contrary, e-learning is rather unpopular (used by only one of the surveyed companies). Still, over a half of the respondents found this knowledge transfer method interesting, which gives e-learning fairly good development opportunities in the future. Most of the respondents are satisfied with the degree of the knowledge transfer in their companies, which is inconsistent with the losses caused by retirement, declared by them in earlier answers. The discrepancy described above may show a relatively weak knowledge of the more effective knowledge-transfer procedures.

Based on the poll participants' answers, it can be ascertained, that the most of the companies had not implemented any mentoring and e-learning programmes yet. However, some companies have already experimented with the single processes from the two on a project-by-project basis. In addition, it can be confirmed that the Polish entrepreneurs are interested in the implementation of innovative knowledge-transfer programmes, which could support them in the adaptation of new workers to their professional duties and help them retain the unique "know-how" possessed by the senior employees. Among the main

obstacles to implementation are: the insufficient knowledge and time, along with the psychological barriers, on the part of both junior and senior workers. In the case of e-learning another obstacle is insufficient IT-literacy among the senior workers.

Most participants of the survey showed their interest in the implementation of mentoring and e-learning programmes. However, they would appreciate professional assistance in the process, preferably in the form of professional training courses, ready-made handbooks and external expert guidance, as well as the possibility of learning from the implementation best practices from other entrepreneurs.

On the basis of the results of the study, it can be also stated that:

- Among the most important competences required from the mentors to be effective in fulfilling their duties, the respondents indicated: communication, leadership, as well as organisation and planning abilities. The individual ranks varied with the different size groups of companies.
- The real competences possessed by the older and long-tenured employees of the Polish enterprises differ from the ones necessary for effective mentoring. The greatest convergence of the actual and desirable competences was recorded in the large companies, with more than 200 workers, making their employees best prepared to become mentors for the younger and less experienced colleagues.

The implementation of a mentoring programme based on e-learning in the companies, seems to be a perfect way to bridge the gap of mistrust between senior and junior employees. The participation of the both groups in mentoring processes should favour reciprocal understanding of the way of thinking, finding new ways of cooperation and finally, it should lead to the knowledge transfer to the younger employees, by the senior staff (bound to retire in the near future), but also in the opposite direction. It is probable, that the younger workers, after spending more time with their older and more experienced colleagues, will be more eager to share their knowledge and "know-how" with the future generations. Owing to the e-learning, the senior workers will also be able to improve their competences, which can create new professional opportunities for them and should also positively influence their self-appraisal (resulting from their awareness of the great value of their knowledge, which is important to be retained by the company). Moreover, it can also make older workers feel so self-assured that they would be less eager to retire on the very first day possible, as they would feel needed and appreciated in their workplace, which is especially important in Poland due to the low employment rate and low average retirement age.

The scale of final benefits will depend on the way the mentoring process is organised in a specific company and the personal impressions of the participants, what makes the appropriate attitude and preparation of all participants extremely important. It is also vital to explain the objectives of the new initiative to all employees, as well as to present them the expected results – for the employees, as the whole team, for the youth and for those in the pre-retirement age, as well as for the organisation.

One can expect that the implementation of the mentoring system would raise the entrepreneurs' awareness of the inevitability of changes and the necessity to prevent the losses in "know-how" with the retired employees. It might also change the stereotypes of the senior workers and motivate the entrepreneurs to make greater use of the presently underestimated potential of the older but more experienced employees.