

Labor retention in the domestic SME sector in Somogy county

Munkaerő megtartás a hazai kkv szektorban Somogy megyében

KÓMŰVES ZS., BERKE SZ.

Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences Campus Kaposvár, Institute of Economic Sciences, Leadership and Organization Department, komuves.zsolt@uni-mate.hu, berke.szilard@uni-mate.hu

Abstract

Companies face many new challenges as a result of ever-changing HR trends. One of the most significant problems in recent years has been the ever-changing workforce. Employee loyalty is no longer a matter of course, it must be actively pursued. The root of the problems often goes back to recruitment, as many employers try to attract the workforce by “beautifying” the job advertisement, focus on creating a better image of the organization. Many times we encounter that recruitment was not adequately prepared, not enough attention was paid to select the right workforce. However, it is also important to emphasize that it is not enough to get the workforce, you need to be able to keep it as well. In our questionnaire research, we have examined how the recruitment process takes place, what steps have been taken to ensure employees to remain being committed and to stay loyal to their employer. Based on the results, we can conclude that employers know and apply labor retention methods. The most commonly used procedures were longer learning times, involvement in decisions, organization of trainings, or just job rotation.

Keywords: HR trends, labor retention, motivation, SME sector

JEL: M54

Absztrakt

Egyre több szervezet küzd a szakképzett munkaerő-hiányának problémájával, így a megtartás-menedzsment a HR szakma egyik kulcsterületévé vált az elmúlt néhány évben. A témával kapcsolatos felmérések döntően a dolgozók szemszögéből közelítik meg a kérdést, lényegesnek tartottuk ezért feltárni, hogy a vállalatvezetők hogyan vélekednek az alkalmazott munkaerő-megtartást célzó intézkedések eredményességéről. Tanulmányunk egy 2020-ban készült kutatás néhány eredményét mutatja be. Az általunk megkérdezett vállalatvezetők a rugalmas foglalkoztatási formákat (pl. rugalmas munkaidő) tartják leginkább alkalmasnak a munkaerő-megtartására, de fontos szerepet tulajdonítanak a csoportkohézió kialakításának (pl. tréningek szervezése), illetve a dolgozók béremelésbe való bevonásának is. A tervezett eszközök közül kiemelkedik a hosszú távú ösztönzési program, munkavállalói elégedettség és elköteleződés felmérése, valamint a teljesítményértékelési rendszer kidolgozása és annak bevezetése. Legkevésbé alkalmazott munkaerő-megtartó programelem az életbiztosítás és a nyugdíjbiztosítás.

Kulcsszavak: HR trendek, munkaerőmegtartás, motiváció, KKV szektor

JEL kód: M54



Introduction

The Hungarian SME sector typically does not lead the way in innovation, according to both statistical reports (KSH, 2016; NKFIH, 2018) and empirical research (Hámori és Szabó, 2010). However, due to their weight in employment and the proportion of their contribution to GDP, it is important to examine the efficiency of domestic small and medium-sized enterprises. One of the most serious problems for SMEs, in addition to drastic labor shortages, is the almost incessant migration of workers. So much so that many times the increased fluctuation itself is the cause of labor shortages. Many companies in Hungary are struggling with this today, which is one of the significant obstacles to further development and even further operation. As fewer and fewer suitable candidates emerged, companies put pressure on existing staff to cater for increased production due to the strengthening economy. All this has caused serious stress at all levels of companies (Bencsik, Juhász, & Mura, 2019). It became common at manufacturing companies that when they were finally able to hire new people, they were still gone during the trial period. All this has led to the fact that fluctuations of 60-80 percent are not uncommon either (Csikós, 2017). It is also important to point out that while the older generation was satisfied in the past with being recruited, the new generation already expects managers to give them a more serious role, ask for their opinions, get attention, the company will pay them correctly. If their needs are not met, they will continue without thinking as they can choose from the offers. Thus, retaining key people is a topical issue for which managers and HR professionals are constantly looking for new and new solutions in order to ensure their competitive advantage over their competitors (Poór és Csedő 2016, Szabó-Szentgróti és Gelencsér, 2018). Based on the above, it can be stated that employers are facing a challenge, the question is whether they can innovate, are they able to apply a motivational strategy appropriate to the requirements of the age in order to retain the workforce? The study presents the results of a recent research conducted by the authors among the leaders of the Hungarian SME sector in order to explore the domestic motivational conditions and the most important factors of labor retention. Research results can form the basis for development proposals at a later stage.

1. Literature review

Retention is the most effective recruitment - faster or slower, but more and more Hungarian companies have restructured their operations in this spirit to try to find a solution to the labor shortage. The labor shortage, which has become increasingly burning in recent years, has significantly changed the relationship between employers and employees in most industries, and this has encouraged many companies to make serious changes (Fabók, 2019). It is in the economic interest of employers to retain motivated employees, especially in areas where it is difficult to replace the expertise acquired over several years (Borbíró et al., 2007). In addition to labor shortages, one of the most significant employment problems today is fluctuation, the remedying of which is a challenge for almost all employers.

Fluctuation in the workplace can be traced back to several reasons, such as job dissatisfaction, low loyalty to both the employer and the employee, work-life balance conflict and, of course, wages (Csedő et al. 2016; Pató és Illés, 2018). Between 2010 and 2014, the average fluctuation was still 10-14%, reaching 30% in some cases in critical cases. Research from BDO Hungary and Coface in 2017 shows that 77% of companies fill a job for at least two months; fluctuation exceeded 10% in 26 percent of firms; almost a quarter of the hired employees leave their jobs within a few months. Fluctuation is a problem for a company in several ways, as replacing a lost workforce, recruiting, selecting and incorporating is an extremely costly and time consuming process.

In addition to recruitment and retention difficulties, the difficulties of cooperation between different generations pose another challenge for HR professionals (Szabó és Kalmár, 2009), (Lazányi és Bilan, 2017). This is because the age difference affects collaboration, and working together can be difficult for both the younger and older generations (Szabó és Piros, 2007; Ian et al. 2017). Research shows that retaining an experienced employee involves far less investment than integrating a new employee, so it is essential for companies to improve the effectiveness of retention measures, as neither employer has an interest in reselling the knowledge invested in its employees to the labor market (Dajnoki és Héder, 2017) (Krajcsák, 2014).

Retention management is a set of targeted measures that are developed and implemented to employ the entire employee team, or a group of employees, for as long as possible (Krajcsák és Kozák, 2018). Retention is a complex process that involves many areas and tools, and therefore requires a definite concept and conscious intervention on the part of employers. (Bertalan és Boldizsár, 2015). During retention management it is advisable to take into account the different needs of different groups of employees with regard to the measures to be introduced. Therefore it is important to take into account that gender, age, life situation, position, job, etc. In the case of differentiated groups of workers, the same measure may have different effects, so it is appropriate to use tools that can achieve a change of attitude in the desired target group.

One of the tools of well-designed retention management can be to increase employee engagement and satisfaction, but attachment to the organization can also be influenced by a variety of factors and circumstances, including sociodemographic characteristics. Pozin (2013) writes in Forbes magazine: “if the rate of employee dissatisfaction is high, the conditions of the work environment are unfavorable, thus it will be more difficult to retain employees”. In summary, this is an area of research that may affect several functions related to human resource management, such as incentive management, talent management, career management, but is closely related to the topic of employee satisfaction and commitment and fluctuation-related activities (Csutorás, 2016).

Based on the above, it can be stated that employers are facing a challenge: the main question is whether they can innovate, are they able to apply a motivational strategy appropriate to the requirements of the age, in order to retain the workforce? The study presents the results of a recent research conducted by the authors among the leaders of the Hungarian SME sector in order to explore the domestic motivational conditions and the most important factors of labor retention.

2. Methods and materials

In order to achieve the goals we formulated, we conducted primary and secondary research. In the course of primary research, we tried to highlight the shortcomings and strengths within the organizations in order to attract and retain labor with the help of a questionnaire compiled by us. During the compilation of the questionnaire, we reviewed and partially adapted (Table 2) the research questionnaire prepared by the research team of Poór et al. (2018) on a similar topic. We have taken into account current labor market developments and anomalies to measure their impact in a targeted, objective and quantitative way. The research is based on a questionnaire covering five groups of questions. The questionnaire consists of the following main sections:

- background variables,
- coronavirus anomalies
- causes of labor shortage
- labor selection criteria
- workforce retention programs

Quantitative research was conducted between January and April 2020 in the Southern Transdanubia region (Somogy-, Baranya-, Tolna county), using self-administered questionnaires. The sampling group contains 108 participant. The survey data can be summarized as follows:

- Sampling unit: managers of domestic small and medium-sized enterprises (minimum middle management level)
- Sample size: 108 enterprises (47 small and 61 medium-sized enterprises)
- Sampling location: Southern Transdanubia (Somogy, Baranya, Tolna county)
- Number of the participants: Somogy (72), Baranya (23), Tolna (13).
- Data source: primary data.
- Research method: questionnaire survey.
- Research tool: questionnaire.

Contact method: online data collection (The survey was an online survey based on voluntary data provision, providing anonymity to the participants and running on the Internet).

In the analysis, small enterprises with 9 to 49 employees and medium-sized enterprises with 50 to 249 employees were considered medium-sized enterprises. Research on the SME sector is difficult due to their heterogeneity, number, different characteristics and access constraints.

The aim of the present research was not to achieve results that can be generalized to the whole sector, to show characteristics specific to regional, sectoral or organizational size. The sample is therefore not representative, and due to the number of participants, the results are not suitable for generalization.

An important aspect of compiling the questionnaire was the ability to complete it quickly and use clearly worded closed-ended questions. Before conducting the research, we conducted a pilot survey in order to filter out any ambiguous or possibly unprocessed questions. The answers to the questionnaires included in the sample were processed and evaluated using Excel and SPSS. Data were typically subjected to univariate statistical analyzes. We examined the correlations between the variables by cross-tabulation analysis. In the case of secondary data sources, we relied on domestic and international literature, publications, journals and Internet links.

3. Results and discussion

We started processing the data by recording background variables. Thus, the respondent's gender, age, nature of employment, size of the organization, and nature of the sector served as a starting point for further investigations. **Figure 1** shows the gender and age of the respondents.

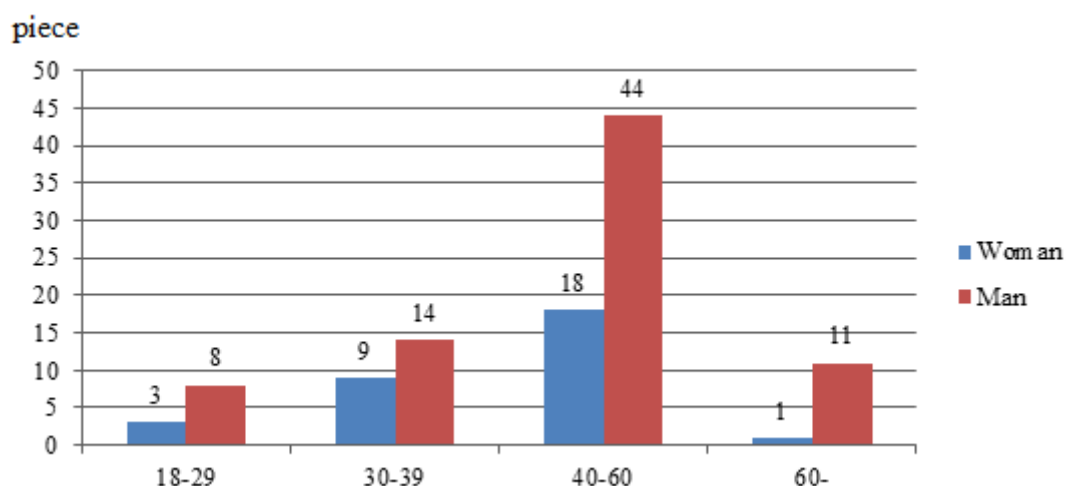


Figure 1: Age and gender of respondents

Source: Own research

In the research sample, the number of male leaders was 77 and the number of female leaders was 31. In terms of their age, the respondents were mainly from the middle age group (40-59 years). In terms of ranks, we can say that 30 middle, 36 top and 42 owners participated in the study. Half of the surveyed enterprises (Figure 2) operate in the service, agriculture and commercial sectors. Based on the comparison of the scope of activities and the size of the organization, it can be said that in the research sample small enterprises predominate in terms of agricultural activity, while the number of medium-sized enterprises is decisive in the field of information technology and trade.

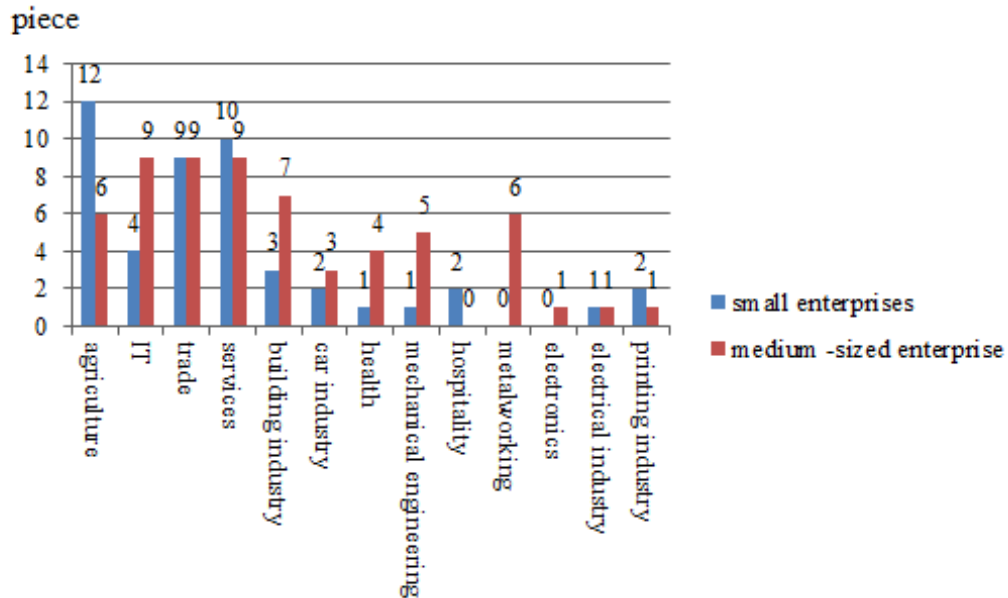


Figure 2: Relationship between sectoral distribution and organisational size

Source: Own research

After examining the background variables, let us move on to the analysis of the effect of the coronavirus. The research question was: Did the coronavirus affect your company in terms of retaining your workforce? If so, how did you react to the situation? According to MiniCRM research, at the beginning of March, only twenty percent of Hungarian SMEs reacted to the coronavirus at some level. Barely three weeks later, that rate jumped to 91 percent. 49 percent of companies initially introduced only precautionary measures, while another 42 percent had already responded to the epidemic by telecommuting or quarantine in mid-March. Interestingly, however, only 11 percent of respondents developed a written action plan to address the epidemiological situation (miniCRM research, 2020). But what about the businesses we are examining? 56% of responding managers reported that their business was directly or indirectly affected by the impact of the coronavirus epidemic. 74.07 percent of executives surveyed rated their own business outlook as unfavorable, of which 51.85 percent of firms rated it as very unfavorable and 22, 22 percent rated it as rather unfavorable for the next 6 months. 62.03 percent of companies say the epidemic will greatly worsen their future prospects. If we compare the question with the organizational size, we can see that COVID-19 affected 73% of the responding medium-sized enterprises and 46% of the small enterprises in some way. The emergency caused by the coronavirus epidemic hit everyone unexpectedly, and workers and employers alike had to respond with record speed. Figure 3 shows how the managers of the interviewed small and medium-sized enterprises reacted to the situation.

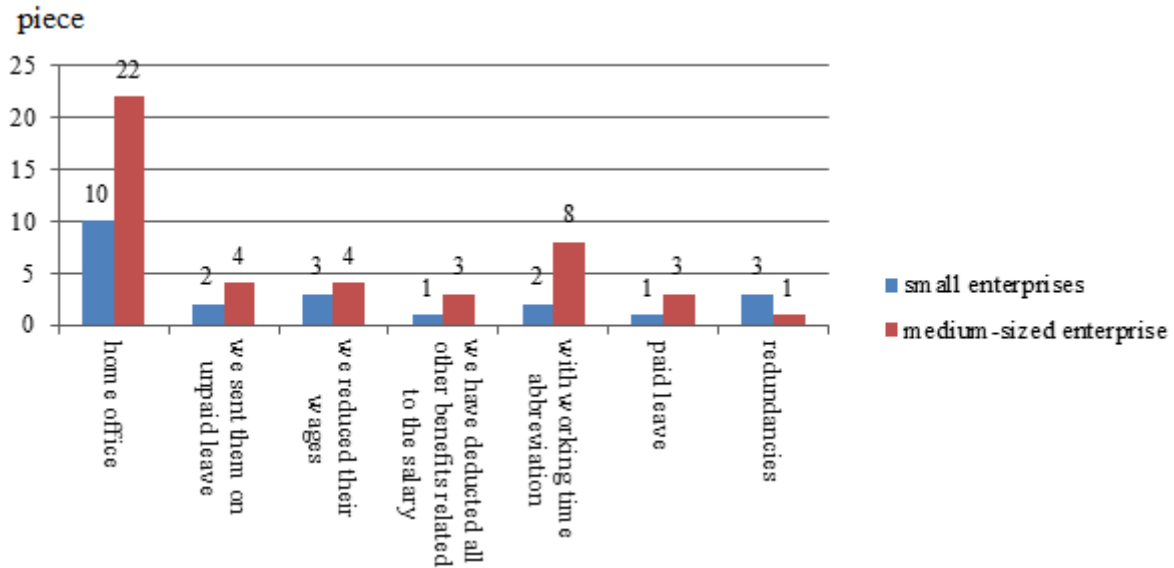


Figure 3: How did your company react to the economic consequences of the Covid - 19 virus?
Source: Own research

Due to the necessary exit restrictions, the so-called “Home office” work affected 47 percent of employees. Companies, organizations and institutions have been forced to introduce reduced working hours, unpaid leave and even redundancies. About 14 percent of workers were sent on leave, one-third of them on unpaid leave. Working hours have been reduced for 14 percent of workers, and this obviously leads to a significant reduction in wages. One-sixth of workers (16 per cent) lost or declined their incomes as a result of the crisis. In the next step, we were curious about the selection principles of our managers trying to get a fresh workforce in the current Hungarian economic environment, which is struggling with labor shortages (Figure 4). The research question was: what is typical for your company's / company's workforce selection? (Up to 3 answers can be marked). Based on the responses, we can say that no significant difference can be identified in terms of the size of the organization. A careful and thorough selection process, an employee referral program and testing on trial days, and anticipation of trust have been emphasized in the selection process for both small and medium-sized enterprises.

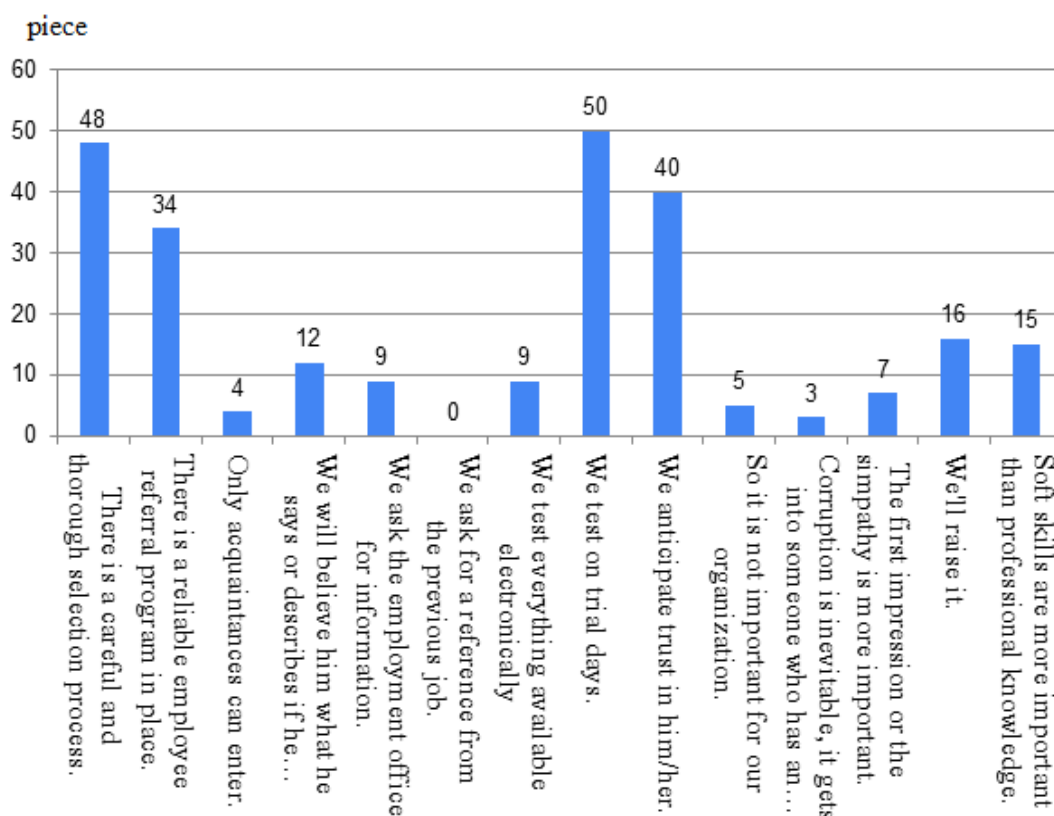


Figure 4: What is typical for your company's / company's workforce selection?

Source: Own research

It is also worth mentioning the “we will bring it up” answers, the significance of which is that managers have a narrower recruitment opportunity, it is difficult to impose a system of serious conditions on candidates, so the opportunity remains to train the prospective employee and wait patiently until acquires the skills needed to perform the job. According to the Adecco Group's Generation Z research in 2050 the emphasis will be on social skills that cannot be acquired with an exam instead of a degree, and leadership skills should not necessarily be acquired on the desk, but on the job ladder. So it is worth saying a few words about soft skills, also known as social skills. According to a Harvard study, they can determine job success by as much as 85%, so these suggest that for some employers, having these skills is more important than professional knowledge. There are now countless measurement methods for mapping these, think for example. Assessment Center. Based on today's labor market trends, it can be said that not only has it become increasingly difficult to attract and select talent, but also to integrate and retain them (Table 1).

All respondents reported using some strategy / tool to integrate and retain the workforce. The answers to this question were compared with the industry distribution. It can be seen that the procedures used in each industry are distributed differently depending on the activities performed. Involvement in management decisions in the field of services and trade, the development of skills and competencies through various trainings in agriculture, while the operation of the mentoring network in the field of informatics have been emphasized.

The next question was to explore the manager's own position, in which we asked what factors do you think play a role in retaining the workforce (Figure 5)? We can see the answers broken down to the management level.

Table 1: Methods used to recruit and retain labor

	employ a mentor	we provide a longer learning time	we involve the employee in the management decision	we organize trainings	yes, other and
agriculture	1	1	5	9	2
IT	8		5		
trade	3	3	7	4	1
services	5	1	8	4	1
building industry	1		4	3	2
car industry	1	3	1		
health	2		3		
mechanical engineering	3		3		
hospitality			2		
metalworking	1	1	2	1	1
electronics	1				
electrical industry				1	1
printing industry	1	1	1		

Source: Own research.

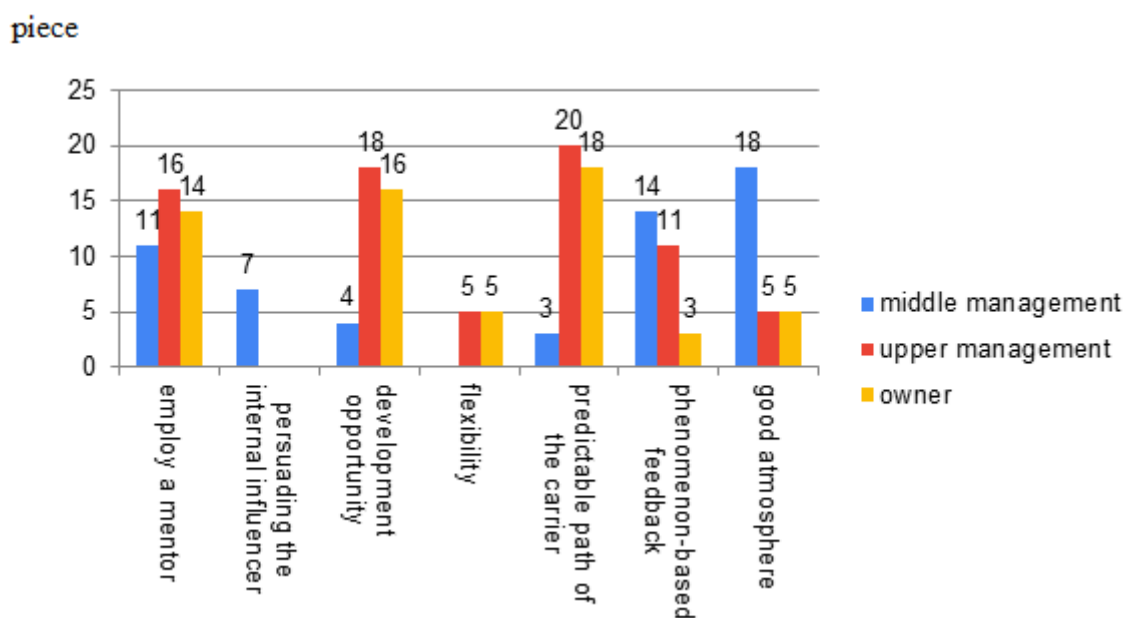


Figure 5: Which factors play a role in retaining the workforce

Source: Own research.

Based on the responses, we can conclude that the managerial perception of the strategies used to retain the workforce is closely related to the managerial level. The middle management layer is responsible for the performance of daily operational tasks, they often work together with the employees, so strategies for ensuring the efficient performance of daily tasks for them have come to the fore. Thus, good atmosphere (29%) came first, followed by phenomenon-based feedback (22%) and the mentor, who received 17% of the responses. At first, the appearance of internal influences in the responses may be surprising, but they are also part of the organizational culture, their role in creating a workplace atmosphere is very important, as they are the ones whose opinions affect others, which can be motivating or even destructive. The role of senior management and the ownership layer is in strategic planning, which is why they consider the tools to ensure long-term operation to be expedient. In their responses,

predictable career, development opportunities, stability, and mentor recruitment are emphasized. Labor shortages in organizations and retention within the organization are important issues for the organizations surveyed, to which different incentives are applied (Table 2).

Table 2: Means used to retain staff (%)

Program	5	4	3	2	1
Transformation of the wage payment system	5.55	14.81	23.14	19.44	37.03
Participate in salary increases and incorporate experience into the remuneration system	7.04	15.74	12.03	20.37	44.44
Higher than market average salary	1.85	12.96	50.55	16.66	37.96
Long-term incentive program	2.77	12.96	21.29	29.62	33.33
Life insurance	9.25	23.14	40.74	7.40	19.44
Pension insurance	14.81	22.22	42.59	6.48	13.88
Performance evaluation system	1.85	15.74	13.88	21.29	47.22
Company car allowance	5.00	20.37	25.92	7.40	41.66
Transformation of the job system	5.55	14.81	37.96	23.14	18.51
Employee satisfaction and engagement survey	2.77	11.11	19.44	24.07	42.59
Use of flexible working hours	2.77	12.03	13.88	16.66	54.62
Atypical forms of employment	20.37	18.51	32.40	6.55	23.14
Career management	11.11	25.92	37.03	12.96	12.96
Internship program	6.48	25.92	25.00	10.18	32.40
Scholarship program	11.11	29.62	39.81	7.40	12.03
Use of dual learning models	13.88	26.85	34.25	7.40	17.59
Cooperation with educational institutions	8.33	19.44	22.22	16.66	33.33
Individual development program	7.40	15.74	23.14	26.85	26.85
Employee brand building	13.88	18.51	25.92	18.51	23.14
Organization of trainings	3.70	13.88	19.44	17.59	50.00

Source: Own research.

Notation: 1: we are currently using it, 2. we are planning to use it, 3. we are not planning to use it, 4. it is not applicable to us, 5. I have little knowledge about it

According to the “Best Workplace Survey” in Central and Eastern Europe by Aon Hewitt (2016), 69 percent of company executives believe that workforce retention and motivation will play a key role over the next 5 years. According to the research, the focus will shift in the direction of employee well-being, where the most important task will be to build and maintain employee engagement. More and more leaders have realized that money is not the only motivational tool to increase commitment and retain the workforce. A favorable offer may be suitable for attracting employees to a company, but there are very few to retain the workforce. Today’s career models are no longer about decades of loyalty. If the employee has a better chance - and in the meantime the organizational commitment has not developed – he immediately changes jobs. In line with the above, the company managers we interviewed consider flexible forms of employment (eg flexible working hours) to be the most suitable for retaining the workforce, but also attach importance to developing group cohesion (eg organizing trainings) and involving employees in wage increases. We believe that the introduction of flexible forms of employment can help workers reconcile work and family, thus making the workplace more attractive. This idea is supported by Vámosi (2020), who writes that from the employee's point of view, a flexible workplace can mean finding a valuable workforce faster and retaining it more successfully in the long run. Life insurance and pension insurance proved to be the least used instruments.

However, we would like to emphasize that the explanation for this is linked to the current political will. The success and eligibility of all programs depends on current tax / taxation rules, which must be taken into account by all employers. Adopted by the Parliament and Resolution 117. XLI of 2018 published

in the Hungarian Gazette. the law left cafeteria benefits narrowly from 1 January 2019. With a few exceptions, popular benefits are all taxed as wages. Accordingly, additive benefits, with the exception of the company car, have virtually disappeared from the programs used. Among the planned tools, the long-term incentive program, the assessment of employee satisfaction and commitment, and the development and implementation of a performance appraisal system stand out, so that respondents feel that their current practice can be improved in these areas. It follows from the above that in order to deal with the anomalies of the labor market and to retain the labor force, enterprises alone are not enough, effective government steps and measures are needed in the field of both training and tax policy.

4. Conclusion and limitation

More and more organizations are struggling with a shortage of skilled manpower, so retention management has become one of the key areas of the HR profession over the past few years. Surveys related to the topic approach the issue mainly from the point of view of employees, therefore we considered it important to explore how the managers of the company think about the effectiveness of the measures aimed at retaining the employed workforce. Our study presents some of the results of a 2020 study. The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- the COVID-19 virus directly or indirectly affected 73% of medium-sized enterprises surveyed and 46% of small enterprises.
- Businesses reacted differently to the epidemic situation, the most common being the so-called "home office" work, followed by time off and then reduced working hours. One-sixth of workers have lost or reduced their incomes.
- The selection process of the examined companies is characterized by: careful and thorough selection, operation of the employee recommendation program and testing on trial days, and anticipation of trust.
- All the companies surveyed used retention strategies, which developed differently according to the sectoral activity. Involvement in managerial decisions in the field of services and trade, the development of skills and competencies through various trainings in agriculture, while the operation of the mentoring network in the field of informatics have been given a more prominent role.
- Managers' perceptions of strategies used to retain the workforce were closely correlated with management levels.
- The company managers we interviewed consider flexible forms of employment (eg flexible working hours) to be the most suitable for retaining the workforce, but also attach importance to the development of group cohesion (eg organization of trainings) and the involvement of employees in wage increases. Among the planned tools, the long-term incentive program, the assessment of employee satisfaction and commitment, and the development and implementation of a performance appraisal system stand out. The least used labor retention program elements are life insurance and pension insurance.

This research uses to explore e.g. which factors play a role in retaining the workforce, what is typical for a company's workforce selection and how did companies react to the economic consequences of the Covid-19 virus. The central contribution of the study to labor retention is that the managerial perception of the strategies used to retain the workforce is closely related to the managerial level. The appearance of internal influences in the responses may be surprising, but they are also part of the organizational culture, their role in creating a workplace atmosphere is very important, as they are the ones whose opinions affect others, which can be motivating or even destructive.

The empirical result of the study showed that the focus will shift in the direction of employee well-being, where the most important task will be to build and maintain employee engagement. We believe that the introduction of flexible forms of employment can help workers reconcile work and family, thus making the workplace more attractive.

This work suggests and arouses some notes about limitations for future research: only 108 enterprises located in Southern Transdanubian are considered in this research. So that, the sample used in this research can be only considered representative and the results cannot be generalized of all enterprises,

and it cannot be generalized to any other region. The second and third waves of Covid-19 could be sensitive to most Southern Transdanubian enterprises. It is worth further research and analysis of the effects of the changes.

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