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## **The Relationship of Managers with Subordinates as a Development Enabler of Enterprise in the SME Sector**

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Ireneusz Żuchowski<sup>1</sup> Agnieszka Brelik<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:**

*The theoretical part discusses the factors determining and limiting the development of enterprises in the SME sector. The significance of the relationship between the supervisor and the subordinates and their influence on selected aspects of the company's functioning was also presented.*

*The aim of the research was to get acquainted with the opinion of managers and employees of SME enterprises on the importance of the relationship between their supervisor and subordinates and the influence of the level of relations on various aspects of the company's development.*

*The research results indicate that high quality of relations between superiors and subordinates has a positive impact on the development of the surveyed enterprises.*

**Keywords:** relationship, development, SME sector, managers

**JEL Classification:** L14, L20

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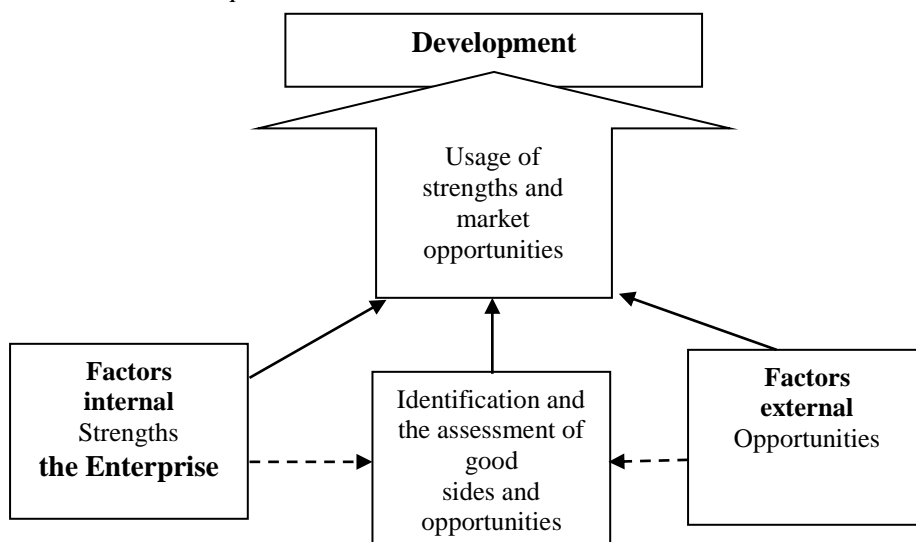
<sup>1</sup>Higher School of Agribusiness in Łomża, Faculty of Applied Economics, Agribusiness Department, email: [ireneusz.zuchowski@wsa.edu.pl](mailto:ireneusz.zuchowski@wsa.edu.pl)

<sup>2</sup>West Pomerania University of Technology, Szczecin, Faculty of Economics, Department of European and Regional Studies, email: [Agnieszka.Brelik@zut.edu.pl](mailto:Agnieszka.Brelik@zut.edu.pl)

## 1. Introduction

SME Sector is of great importance for the Polish economy. There are about 1.8 million enterprises, which constitute the 99.8% of all active enterprises (Łapiński, *et al.*, 2016). Companies in the sector have a high over 70% share in the creation of GDP, employ approximately 70% of persons working in enterprises. The importance of this sector also results in a high share in the cost of investment in the economy. Therefore, an important issue is the development of this sector of the economy. Polish SME sector is characterized by high survival rates of 1 year (over 86%) while the survival rate of the first 5 years is almost 41%. Therefore, it is important to develop this sector. The possibilities and the pace of development are a prerequisite for a variety of factors, which in the literature are often classified as external and internal factors. This subject is widely discussed by Szczepaniak, (2007), Fic, and Jedrzejczak-Gas (2004).

**Figure 1.** Place of internal and external factors in the development of small and medium business enterprises



*Source: Matejun M., (2008)*

## 2. Factors determining and limiting the development of the SME sector

The SME sector is important for all economies in the world. In the literature you can find a lot of research on the development of enterprises in this sector in various countries around the world.

Studies in Egypt led to the formulation of proposals, among which it is important to indicate the needs of enterprises in improving the quality of human capital, which is an important factor limiting the growth opportunities. In addition, development

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constraints generated by the business circles, and connected i.a. with a poor level of law enforcement, lack of skilled workers, the access to market information, and the access to funding were identified. The authors clearly show that the success of the SME companies, to a large extent, depends on the abilities the owner has, Loewe, *et al.* (2013). Derese (2014) also indicates the need to improve the quality of human capital as a determinant of the effective development of small and medium enterprises.

The access to the capital, financing is one of the major barriers to the development of the SME sector. This factor always appears in the research results of Polish authors such as Skórska, Jeż, Wąsowicz (2007), or Matejun (2007). Fic, Jędrzejczak-Gas emphasize the importance of access to the capital very strongly (2004) stating that the most important barriers, regardless of the level of education of the owner or manager of the company, are the financial factors (lack of funds, the unavailability of credit). The lack of capital also translates into low innovativeness of small and medium-sized enterprises Urban Michałowska (2014).

The problem of access to capital concerns SME entrepreneurs around the world, which is consistent with the research results by different authors, which were carried out to shed light on the challenges entrepreneurs face. For example, in South Asia, the lack of access to the capital is a fundamental obstacle for entrepreneurs. They point to a study by Chowdhury, Alam and Arif, (2013) and by Chowdhury, Islam and Alam (2013).

An important problem identified as a barrier to the development of the SME sector is the lack of competence in the field of entrepreneurship and business management. It manifests itself in many ways. As it was researched by Ndege (2015), companies in the sector do not have a business vision, a clear strategy, project management skills and entrepreneurial skills. Also, Benzazoua Bouazza, Ardjouman and Abada, (2015) by listing several factors hindering the development of the Algerian SME sector (unfair competition from the grey economy, cumbersome and costly burdensome procedures, regulations, rules, inefficient taxation, lack of access to the industrial real estate, lack of access to external sources of financing), among them they also point to the low skills of human resources management. Management skills is one of the factors of development shown by Chowdhury, Islam and Alam (2013).

While Ngima Kinyua, (2014), states that the ability of management has the potential to affect the performance of SMEs significantly and positively. The situation is similar in Turkey, where the importance of financial support for the SME sector is stressed, but the need to enhance managerial skills of SME owner / managers and general management skills are mentioned as an important factor for the development of these enterprises, Karadag, (2015). Identified in many studies the need to improve management skills is even more important as the surveys show Zahiruddin Yahya Othman, Sukri and Shamsuri, (2012), training has a positive impact on productivity (MSP profits, revenue and volume). It is found that one can significantly improve

the ability of the development of the SMEs sector in support of the training enhancing business management skills (Havlicek *et al.*, 2013; Breckova and Havlicek, 2013; Hapsoro and Suryanto, 2017; Breckova, 2016).

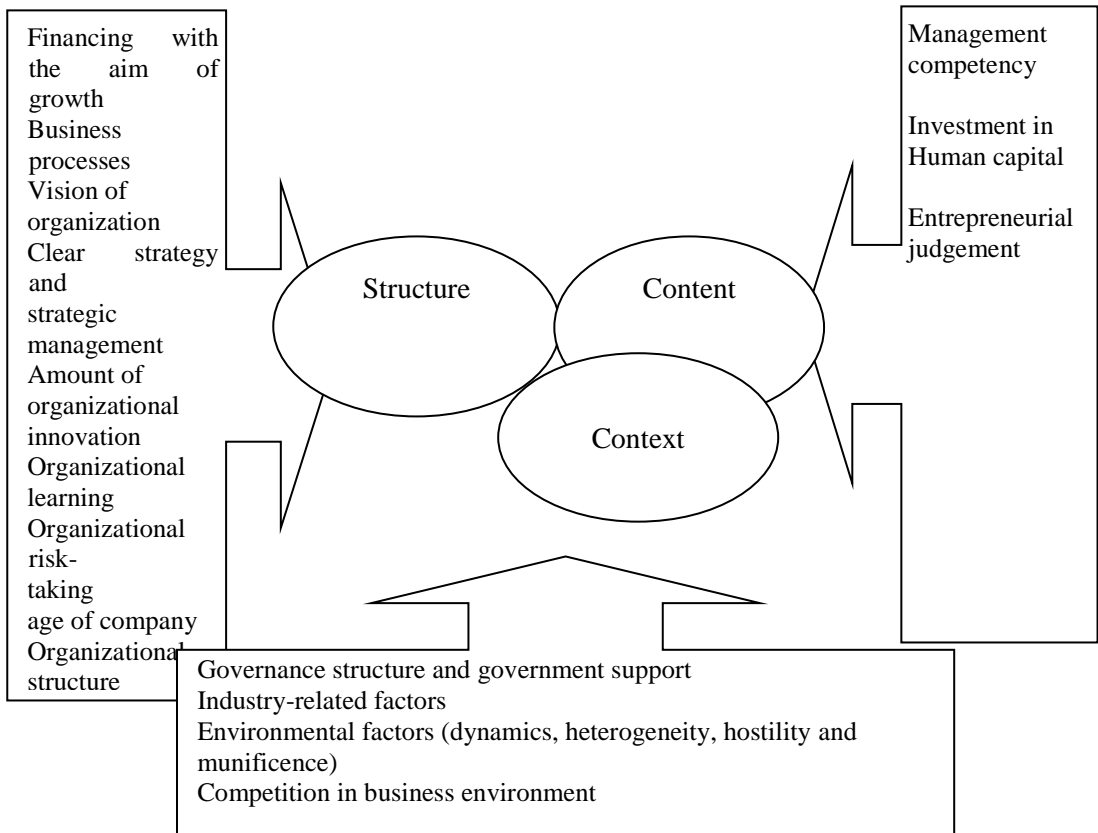
Companies on the SME sector and their development opportunities are limited primarily by the poorer market position in relation to large enterprises and multinational corporations which do not encounter obstacles in the development typical for SME sector. They do not have a problem with the access to the capital which makes SMEs more difficult to compete with large companies in many areas, including highly skilled workers and managerial staff. These factors and the high market risk, which are subject to the company SMEs due to their nature of business, the small size and weak abilities, indicate as the characteristics of Chinese enterprises in this sector Chen (2006).

Factors such as age and education of the owner of the company influence the dynamics of the development of the company. Czerwińska-Lubszczyk, Michna and Męczyńska (2013) based on the analysis of the literature found that the younger the owner, the more dynamic the growth of the company is and the higher level of education results in more dynamic development of enterprises.

Farrokh, Kordnaej, Reza and Zali, (2016), conducted an extensive analysis of research carried out by many authors over the factors of development of the SMEs sector. Considering the conclusions of various studies, the authors state that all development factors that were analysed in this study can be classified to one of three groups of factors:

1. Structural factors: business processes, vision, clear strategy, the amount of innovation, organizational learning, organizational risk-taking, age, organizational structure, technical capacities.
2. Behavioral factors: investment in human resources, management competence, entrepreneurial judgment (knowledge of entrepreneurship, opportunity recognition and growth motivation, proactivity).
3. Contextual factors: governance structure and government support, industry-related factors, environmental characteristics (dynamics, heterogeneity, hostility and munificence), competing in the environment.

Internationalization seems to be a natural step in the development of companies. Zaniewska (2012) presents a multi-layered analysis of the results of research on the internationalization of family businesses, which concludes that the extreme views presented in publications indicate a low level of knowledge about the process of internationalization of family businesses. Some studies cited by the author show that the management skills of managers in family businesses in the field of internationalization are lower than the non-family managers in other companies. This probably constitutes a barrier to those development trends of enterprises, while others indicate a high propensity to risk and innovative behaviour which results from

**Figure 2.** Context, Content and Structure

*Source: Farrokh, Kordnaeij, Reza Zali, (2016).*

high entrepreneurial culture. On the other hand, the study conducted on a sample of 1324 small and medium-sized Italian companies confirmed that the involvement of family members in the management of their business negatively affects the setting up of export (Cerrato and Piva, 2010; Helisek, 2016).

### 3. The importance of the relationship of managers with subordinates

Airila *et al.* (2014) classify interpersonal relationships in the workplace into relationships with superiors and colleagues. A level of support obtained from the supervisor and the way of work control by the supervisor create relations with superiors. In contrast, the relations between colleagues arise through the interaction of cooperation and conflict.

A different approach to the relationship can be found in LMX theory, which assumes that managers build bilateral case by case basis relations with subordinates (Ilies, Nahrgang, and Morgeson, 2007; Ender, Altunoğlu, Bulgurcu and Gurel, 2015; Grahamab, Witteloostuijnbc, 2010) and they do not treat the subordinates with the same deference (Turek, Wojtczuk, Turek and Horodecka, 2014). The quality of interpersonal relationships with colleagues and managers with subordinates has a positive impact on the commitment to work (Kulikowski, 2015).

An important element in building positive relationships with employees is trust, which is an essential element of management. Grudzewski *et al.* (2008), writes extensively about the importance of trust and its key role in the management of staff, insisting that trust forms productive relationships, creating an environment conducive to creative activities. According to Królik (2015), the trust that employees have towards managerial staff can provide the company the prevalence over rivals. Undoubtedly, this situation has a positive effect on the development of the company.

The study conducted on a sample of 144 Japanese small and medium-sized enterprises have shown that for 75.7% owner-managers of SMEs 'trust' is the most important value (Pushpakumari, 2009), trust is an important element determining the relationships between people (Rudzewicz, 2013).

Nimalathan (2008) cites Freeman (1996), stressing the importance of developing relationships with people who are the key to the success of the new venture. Such an action, in his opinion, determines the efficiency of the entrepreneur / manager.

The analysis of the studies of two cases carried out by Ratajczak and Mrozek (2014) has shown that the main factors affecting the ratio of personal relationship on the emergence of opportunity associated with the possibility of internationalization are trust and mutual understanding. At the same time, the author stresses that as these relationships help create opportunities, for their realisation and the relation on the internationalisation and the growth of company, you need additional identified social factors (entrepreneurial attitude) and economic factors (quality and competitive prices).

According to Moczydłowska (2013), making mistakes in building relationships with employees can be a source of internal crises in the enterprise, which indicates the importance of this management area. The author discusses the concept of Employee Relationship Management (ERM) and indicates the source of the crisis around customer relationships management with employees. The manifestation of this may be a loss of valuable employees. One of the factors that affect retention of employees in an organization is a good supervisor-subordinate relation. The author concludes by pointing out that good employee relations can become the foundation of a rapid overcoming of the difficulties, and even using the crisis to the further development of the company.

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Riggio and Reichard (2008), conducted a research on emotional and social intelligence of effective leadership. The results proved that the development of the relationship between leaders and subordinates, as well as the team is critical to the leadership and management effectiveness.

Imrani Anis-ul-Haque, (2011) have obtained confirmation that transformational leadership enhances the behaviour of innovative work indirectly through the creation of an organisational atmosphere in which employees are encouraged to generate innovative ideas and approaches. The conclusions of these studies were reached after researching 320 managers of 16 Pakistani FMCG companies.

Wojtczuk and Turek (2013), has conducted the research on a group of 201 employees, among which she showed that *'the quality of the relationship between the leader and the employees in the context of their impact on innovation shows that predictors of innovative behaviour are the three dimensions of relationships exchange: emotional, participation and loyalty'*. Also, the research conducted by Altunoğlu and Gürel, (2015) for companies located in the technology park in Denizli, Turkey showed that LMX has a positive impact on organisational innovation.

The relationship with your supervisor is an important aspect of employee innovation, because managers decide on the ultimate introduction of new ideas in the company (Purc *et al.*, 2015).

Ingram (2016) by analysing the practices constituting an organizational pattern based on the analysis of literature, proposed that the list of items to be enriched with the concept of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), which is expressed in the quality of the relationship between employees and supervisors. The author also notes that by creating a positive relationship between the supervisor and the employee, the manager has an impact on employee engagement. This is important because, as Ingram stresses (Miller, 2005), the practice of forming an organizational pattern is becoming a more and more central element allowing to explain not only the current performance, but also the results of the company. Good relations of subordinates with a superior as Żuchowski (2016) stresses are the basis for the proper functioning of the enterprise and its development.

#### **4. Characteristics of respondents and methodology of research**

A great number of managers working in small and medium-sized enterprises of Masovian and Podlaskie Voivodeship were involved in a study contacted by the authors where the characteristics of managers include gender, age, education, number of years doing business and the number of employees in the company, which employs the manager. Personal characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Two hundred employees participated in the studies - direct subordinates (two from each company). Women accounted for 33% and men 67% of people involved in the study.

**Table 1.** *Characteristics of managers involved in the study*

Factor	Number	%
Sex		
Women	35	35
Men	65	65
Age		
To 30 years	5	5
Over 30 years to 40 years	28	28
Over 40 years to 50 years	37	37
Over 50 years	30	30
Education		
Higher	68	68
Secondary education	32	32
Number of years in a managerial position		
To 5 years	15	15
Over 5 years to 10 years	32	32
Over 10 years to 15 years	32	32
Over 15 years	21	21
The number of employed workers		
Up to 9 people	10	10
10 to 50 people	30	30
51 to 250 people	60	60

*Source: own research.*

Purpose of the study was to get to know the opinions of managers and employees from SMP sector about the importance of the superior-subordinate relationships and the impact of those relationships on various aspects of the development of the company.

The research was conducted during the period between May and November 2016.

## **5. Research results**

Managers that were the subject of the research said that the quality of the relationships between subordinates and a supervisor has a positive effect on enterprise development (Table 2). The analysis of the results indicates, however, the diversity of the views of managers based on gender. Most women managers (71.4%) completely and rather agree that the quality of the relationship results in development of the company. In the case of men, such a phrase was expressed by 61.5% of respondents. Age differentiates the views of the managers in this regard and so, most people (40%) under the age of 30 are unlikely to agree that such a relationship exists. By far the greater proportion of managers with higher education than the average, believes that such a relationship exists. The largest proportion of



managers - 81,3%, who believe that the high-quality relationship has a positive effect on the development of the company, are the holders of the length of service in a managerial position from 5 years to 10 years. The analysis of the responses of the managers based on the number of employees indicates that the larger the enterprise, the higher the proportion of managers who consider that the quality of the relationship affects the development of the company.

**Table 2.** *The impact of the quality of the superior-subordinate relationship on the development of the company in the opinion of the managers (%)*

Factor	The high quality of the superior-subordinate relationship has a positive effect on the development of the company				
	completely disagree	tend to disagree	I have no opinion	tend to agree	totally agree
Sex					
Women	0.0%	8.6%	20%	31.4%	40%
Men	4.6%	12.3%	21.5%	27.7%	33,8%
Age					
Up to 30 years	0.0%	40%	40%	20%	0.0%
Over 30 years to 40 years	3.6%	3.6%	28,6%	39.3%	25.0%
Over 40 years to 50 years	2.7%	10.8%	13,5%	21,6%	51,4%
Over 50 years	3.3%	13.3%	20%	30%	33.3%
Education					
Higher	2.9%	5.9%	14.7%	27.9%	48.5%
Secondary education	3.1%	21,9%	34.4%	31.3%	9.4%
Number of years in a managerial position					
Up to 5 years	6.7%	13.3%	20%	33.3%	26.7%
Over 5 years to 10 years	3.1%	3.1%	12.5%	34.4%	46.9%
Over 10 years to 15 years	3.1%	12.5%	21.9%	25.0%	37.5%
Over 15 years	0.0%	19.0%	33.3%	23.8%	23.8%
The number of employed workers					
Up to 9 people	30%	40%	20%	10.0%	0.0%
10 to 50 people	0.0%	16.7%	26.7%	26.7%	30%
51 to 250 people	0.0%	3.3%	18.3%	33.3%	45.0%

**Source:** *Own research*

Managers' opinions about the impact of good relationships of subordinates with managers allow to indicate the factors on which these relationships have the greatest impact (table 3). According to the managers participating in the study, the relationships transfer in great part into commitment, satisfaction of workers and the company's image among employees. To a lesser extent, according to the managers, good relationships result in the innovation of employees. On the other hand, the managers, just like employees, evaluated the impact of good relationships on the

competitiveness of the company. While a higher percentage of managers than employees sees a positive effect of good relationships with employees on the economic results of enterprises.

**Table 3.** The impact of good relationships of the managers with subordinates on selected aspects affecting the development of the company in the opinion of the managers (%)

Factor	completely disagree	tend to disagree	I have no opinion	tend to agree	totally agree
innovativeness of employees	22,0	16,0	0,0	28,0	34,0
involvement of employees	2,0	5,0	11,0	39,0	43,0
satisfaction of employees	7,0	9,0	0,0	44,0	40,0
economic results	10,0	12,0	3,0	41,0	34,0
the competitiveness of enterprises	9,0	11,0	5,0	36,0	39,0
a better image among employees	5,0	9,0	4,0	49,0	33,0

Source: Own research

Employees that were the subject of the research said that the quality of the relationships between subordinates and a supervisor has a positive effect on enterprise development (table 4). Analysis of the results including the gender indicates that a larger proportion of women (66.7%) believe that the quality of the relationship of superiors with subordinates affects the development of the company. For men this figure is 55.2%.

**Table 4.** The impact of the quality of the superior-subordinate relationship on the development of the company in the opinion of the employees (%)

Factor	The high quality of the superior-subordinate relationship has a positive effect on the development of the company				
	completely disagree	tend to disagree	I have no opinion	tend to agree	totally agree
Women	0,0	15,2	18,2	28,8	37,9
Men	6,0	13,4	25,4	24,6%	30,6

Source: Own research

Employees' opinions about the impact of good relationships of subordinates with managers allow to indicate the factors on which these relationships have the greatest impact (table 5). According to the employees participating in the study, the relationships transfer in greatest part into commitment and satisfaction of the workers. To a lesser extent, according to the managers, good relationships result in the innovation of employees.

**Table 5.** The impact of good relationships of the managers with subordinates on selected aspects affecting the development of the company in the opinion of the employees (%)

Factor	completely disagree	tend to disagree	I have no opinion	tend to agree	totally agree
innovativeness of employees	27,0	18,0	5,0	23,0	27,0
involvement of employees	1,0	3,0	6,0	41,0	49,0
satisfaction of employees	5,0	7,0	2,0	41,0	45,0
economic results	12,0	14,0	7,0	37,0	30,0
the competitiveness of enterprises	8,0	12,0	8,0	35,0	37,0
a better image among employees	9,0	12,0	9,0	33,0	37,0

*Source:* Own research

Managers evaluated the economic situation of enterprises in which they work and their relationships with subordinates (Table 6). Analysis of the results of the studies indicates that the better relationship of managers with subordinates, the better the economic situation of the companies. None of the managers assessed the economic situation of the company, in which he is employed as bad or very bad. In enterprises, in which managers pointed out the economic situation as very good, the relationship as very good and good was rated by 53.4% of managers in this group. At the same time, 19.9% of managers in this group rated their relationships with subordinates as bad and very bad. In enterprises where the economic situation was rated as good, 47.8% of the managers assessed their relations with subordinates as very good and good. At the same time, 26% of managers rated their relationships with subordinates as bad and very bad.

**Table 6.** The subjective assessment of the economic situation of the company by managers and the assessment of the relationship with the staff (%)

economic situation	Assessment of the relationship with the managers				
	very good	good	average	bad	exceptionally bad
very good	22,4	31,0	27,6	15,5	3,4
good	17,4	30,4	26,1	21,7	4,3
average	10,5	36,8	42,1	5,3	5,3
bad	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
very bad	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0

*Source:* Own research

Employees evaluated the economic situation of enterprises in which they work and their relationships with managers (Table 7). Analysis of the results of the studies

indicates that the better relationship of subordinates with managers, the better the economic situation of the companies. None of the employees assessed the economic situation of the company, in which he is employed as bad or very bad. In enterprises, in which employees pointed out the economic situation as very good, and the relationship as very good and good was rated by 54.7% of employees in this group. At the same time, 21.8% of employees in this group rated their relationships with managers as bad and very bad. In enterprises, in which employees pointed out the economic situation as good, 41.4% of employees rated their relationship with managers as very good and good. At the same time, 31% of employees rated their relationships with managers as bad and very bad.

**Table 7.** *The subjective assessment of the economic situation of the company by employees and the assessment of the relationship with the managers (%)*

economic situation	Assessment of the relationship with the managers				
	Very good	good	average	bad	exceptionally bad
very good	26,4	28,3	24,5	18,9	1,9
good	20,7	20,7	27,6	24,1	6,9
average	16.7%	27,8	22,2	22,2	11,1
bad	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
very bad	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0

*Source: Own research*

## 6. Conclusion

The relationships of employees with subordinates are an important area of interest for the research. This is one of the many factors that influence the development of the company. Although this area of research is included in many studies, it is not considered as primary. Among various concepts such as, Employee Relationship Management, and LMX Theory it is shown that employee relations should be one of the key areas for managers, which respectively developed could bring positive results for the company. The research results presented in publications covering both the shaping of relationships, but also their impact on the functioning of the companies explicitly confirm it. The own research, admittedly on a small research sample, allows us to observe certain trends and it also acknowledges the importance of good relations of managers with subordinates, although it does not allow to draw conclusions about their impact on the economic performance of companies from the SME sector.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a further need for research into the meaning and the effect of the superior-subordinate relationship on the development of enterprises, including SMEs. This is because of changes taking place in the labour market, the need to compete for workers by enterprises and the changes in expectations and the needs of employees from the successive generations entering the labour market. These changes will have a significant impact on the way

businesses are managed, its employees, and the relationships of managers with subordinates and the relationship between colleagues at all levels will grow increasingly important.

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