

# Behaviours towards creativity of SMEs employees

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**Abstract:** Creativity is a complex phenomenon, a set of skills that allow a different perception of the world and creation of new ideas. The purpose of the paper was to assess some behaviours towards creativity of SMEs employees. The behaviours were analyzed in terms of the characteristics that predispose employees to creative behaviour and selected environmental conditions. In the article the outcomes of the study on the creative behaviour of SMEs employees from the Subcarpathian Voivodeship have been presented. In enterprises, especially small and medium ones, personality traits mentioned in the literature are not always dominant. Experience, persistence, intelligence and knowledge are particularly important for respondents. It is worth emphasizing that there are creative behaviours among enterprises that run various business activities, and that are classified according to different PCA (Polish Classification of Activities), but due to various activity profiles, such behaviours can be described as “medium”. The assessments of respondents’ behaviours in the workplace indicate that most of them can achieve their goals, they are not afraid to take risks and challenges. This can be considered as determinants of creativity.

**Keywords:** business, section, companies, the Subcarpathian Voivodeship, creativity

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## 1. Introduction

In the literature on the subject much is devoted to innovative behaviour of employees (Głód and Kraśnicka, 2015; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2012). The purpose of the paper is an assessment of behaviours towards creativity of employees of the SMEs in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship.

An implementation of the research assignments was carried out among randomly selected 396 companies from various sections operating in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. The problem raised in the work was included in the question: Are employees taken on in small and medium-sized businesses creative? The premises for the problem are related to the role of creativity in innovative processes in enterprises, building

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a competitive advantage, integration of employees, reducing costs after the implementation of new production improvements, and the development of the standard of living (Szara, 2014). The growing importance of creativity in the economy (mainly in culture) and interest in creative industries are also the premises for the implementation of the problem. The specific objective of the study is to promote behaviour towards creativity. There are also relatively few studies on creativity in SMEs, hence this group of enterprises was considered the subject of considerations. The group was not characterized as there are numerous publications where such characteristics appear.

The paper adopts the hypothesis: in the behaviour of employees, imagination is the characteristic conditioning creativity.

## 2. Creativity in an enterprise

Creativity as a human trait and, at the same time the procedure of bringing to light unknown ideas, is directly associated with undertaking something new that is beyond the pattern and routine. Taking the above into consideration, both individuals and a group of people can be creative. Companies should strive for teams of creative employees who have new ideas as one person, in spite of generating an idea, does not mean much to guarantee its implementation (Pomykalski, 2001, p. 80).

Creativity is a complex phenomenon, a set of certain skills that allow a different perception of the world, creating new ideas, an ability to synthesize and express knowledge (Repetowski, 2008, p. 175).

Creativity precedes innovation; it is a process of developing and expressing innovative ideas to solve problems or meet needs (see Koziół, 2006, pp. 153–154; Szara, 2016).

Creativity is essential to spot problems. It is thanks to creativity that ideas appear (Figure 1), and innovations from them.

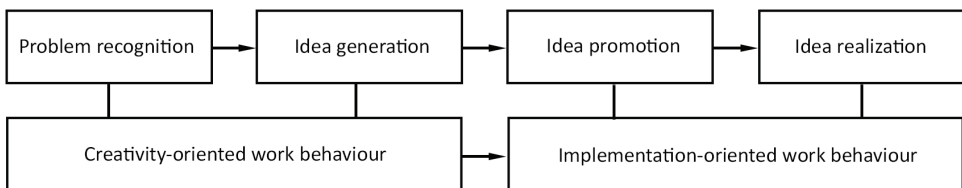


Figure 1. Four stages of innovative work behaviour

Source: Dorenbosch, Engen and Verhagen, 2005, p. 130.

Creativity in Teresa Amabile's theory is formed by professional knowledge, motivation and abilities. Each of the elements interacts with the other and influences innovation. This approach indicates the importance of creativity in creating innovation (Figure 2).

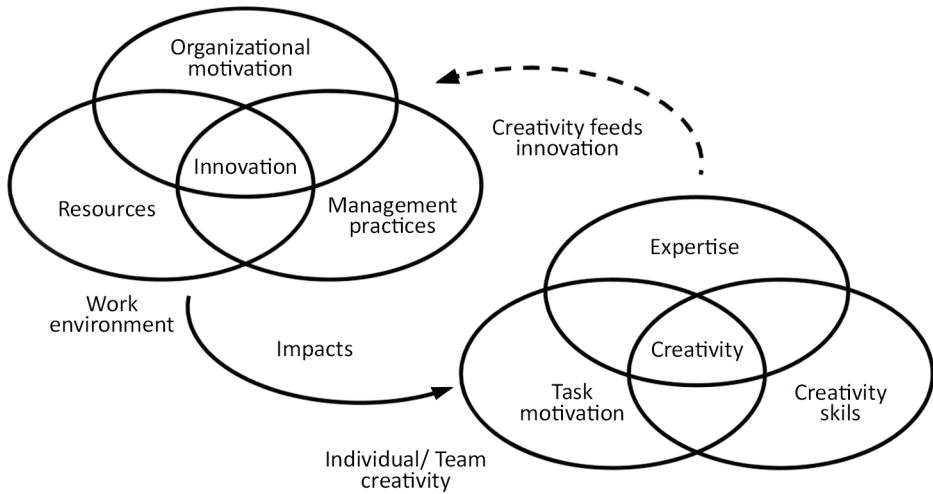


Figure 2. Amabile's componential theory of organizational creativity

Source: Moultrie and Young, 2009, p. 301.

From the behavioural analysis conducted by behaviourists, psychologist Kurt Lewin suggested the equation that was established in social sciences:

$$\textit{Behaviour} = \textit{Personality} \cdot \textit{Environment}$$

Lewin came to the conclusion that our behaviour should be understood as an interaction between two factors: who we are and what we find ourselves in (Miller and Wedell-Wedellsborg, 2014, p. 21).

Robert Sternberg and Todd Lubart created the investment theory of creativity. It concerns the promotion of innovation not only by increasing the creativity potential of employees but the promotion of them being ready to use this potential (Deschamps, 2014, p. 32). The studies of these authors show that people make decisions about creativity based on the results or fear of being rejected by other people.

The behaviours of people towards creativity develop ideas that are turned into innovations. In the case of employees, these ideas come regardless of their position, so they are bottom-ups. They are the results of behaviours that can be described by their action profile. Such a profile of leaders (managers) is described by six attributes which obviously do not occur in case of all managers. Managers activate employees who “usually have their own way of work, instinctively focus either on the creative front of innovation, or naturally follow the executive phase” (Deschamps, 2014, p. 45). An example of the typology of creativity according to Todd Dewett (Table 1).

Table 1. Typology of creativity according to T. Dewett

<b>Problem type</b>	Open	Creativity expected Required solutions for a discovered problem Example: an idea to improve a process—the nature of the result is indefinite Degree of personal risk settlement—moderate	Proactive creativity Voluntary promotion of the solution to the discovered problem Example: a spontaneous suggestion directly related to the work of an individual Level of personal risk settlement—high
	Closed	Responsive creativity Solution to a specific problem required Example: process improvement idea—the nature of the result is defined Level of personal risk consideration—low	Supporting creativity Voluntary promotion of a solution to a specific problem Example: a spontaneous suggestion not directly related to the work of the individual Degree of personal risk settlement—moderate
		Outside	Inside
<b>Sources of engagement</b>			

Source: Dewett, 2004, p. 262.

An evaluation of creativity and creative behaviour is not easy, especially in micro and small enterprises. SMEs enterprises are the most numerous group in the market, they quickly adapt to the environment and are characterized by flexibility of operation in the context of implementing their economic intentions. Also creative employees perform an important role. In addition to personality traits, creativity is favoured by the environment which can be described as the so-called climate for creativity. These are perceived by employees in the workplace, the conditions of their functioning in a particular system: the relationship with colleagues and superiors, mutual trust and openness, as well as conflicts and ways of solving them. Climate is usually a “soft” concept, a metaphor describing the atmosphere prevailing in a group of people, organizations, hence attempts to quantify it may raise doubts (Karwowski, 2009a, p. 11).

Special questionnaires are used to study the conditions for creativity as well as creative behaviour (Ekvall, 1996; Karwowski, 2009b, pp. 23, 55; Kozusznik, 2011). Other research methods are also applied (see studies by Galewski, 2009, pp. 77–105; Karwowski, 2009b, pp. 119–129). Most often in research the method of measuring creative behaviour is used. It is based on proprietary scales; quantitative research, where employees self-assess their creative activity, dominated. They most often refer to the area of pedagogy and psychology and are difficult to compare (see: Szmidt, 2013; Wiszniakowa-Zelinsky, 2014). It is also worth emphasizing that some researchers are more focused on the issues of creativity, i.e. the first aspect of innovative behaviour, although they also “touch” the issues of implementing creative ideas to some extent (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2007; Moghimi and Subramaniam, 2013).

An analysis of the world literature on the subject of creative behaviour among employees of enterprises, including SMEs, shows that enterprises are looking for creative employees to obtain specific benefits. These include the situations in which:

- Creativity Brings New Solutions for Difficult Problems;
- creative People Find New Opportunities;
- creativity Ushers Enthusiasm to Learn (Turner and Sanborn, 2019).

A study by Forrester Consulting concluded that “companies that embrace creativity outperform peers and competitors on key business performance indicators, including revenue growth, market share, and talent acquisition.” The same survey found that 69% of those creative firms were winners of “best place to work” awards (Sambandam, 2019).

In fact, a recent Gallup study of more than 16,500 employees shows that the three foundational factors needed to foster creativity in the workplace are all too rare:

- 1) expectations to be creative at work;
- 2) time to be creative;
- 3) freedom to take the risks necessary to be creative.

As a result, businesses are missing value that they should be capturing (Wigert and Robison, 2018<sup>1</sup>).

Creativity and innovation within well-run companies have always been recognized as a sure path to success. Stimulating creativity and exploring completely new and unknown territories results in an increase in the productivity of the organization. Encouraging employees to think outside of the box and giving them time and resources to explore new areas for innovative ideas is the key to cost-effective business solutions. Creative ideas and innovative approaches can come from almost anywhere—from partners, customers, target groups, or employees (Dimitriadis et al., 2018, p. 8).

Richter, Hirst, van Knippenberg and Baer (2012) studied 176 employees in 34 R&D teams in a single multinational organization, examining the relationship between individual creative self-efficacy (belief in their ability to produce creative outcomes) and supervisor-rated individual creativity. They also explored how team level processes mediated this relationship.

It was found that team members Knowledge of Who Knows What and team diversity (regarding professional specialism) mediated the relationship between creative self-efficacy and creativity. That is, team members are rated as more creative when they have self-belief in their creativity, they know what their other team members do and they work within a professionally diverse team.

Yoshida, Sendjaya, Hirst and Cooper (2013) studied 154 teams and found that individual creative performance, as assessed by managerial ratings, was the highest when team members felt a close relationship to their leader and in the presence of a supportive climate for team creativity. This indicates that individual creative performance is part of a complex system that includes leadership behaviours and team climate.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was based on the data from Gallup’s 2017 American Workplace Survey, a Gallup Panel study conducted via the web 19 April – 7 May 2017, with 16,571 full- and part-time employees. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults; the sample is weighted to be demographically representative of the U.S. adult population based on the Current Population Survey.

Sung, Cho and Choi (2011) conducted a longitudinal study via 40 executive interviews in a large Korean consumer products company to explore who is involved in the adoption and implementation stages of the innovation process, in a sample of 94 innovations. It was found that the employees who played the major roles in encouraging the organization to adopt an innovation would also remain heavily involved in the implementation of the innovation, as employee-driven implementation was moderately and significantly correlated with employee driven adoption. That is, individuals interact with different organizational innovation processes to influence the success of innovation. It may be argued that this study is not multilevel as the relationships between levels were not subject to quantitative analyses. These individually-focused empirical multilevel studies demonstrate that individual creativity does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, individual creativity unfolds within a complex system that includes the team and environment (Walker and Batey, 2014, p. 120).

Research in enterprises pay attention to individual and team creativity. Not only is the behaviour of employees creative, but also the conditions in which they work (see: McFarlane, 2016). Literature analysis shows that researching creative behaviour is not easy due to the intangible nature of creativity. However, they are needed because of the effects that are the result of human creativity.

### **3. Research methodology and characteristics of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship**

The research was carried out among enterprises of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. 380 entities constitute the designated sample for all enterprises in the province. The selection of enterprises for the study was random and it was based on the list of companies, while the selection of the respondent in the enterprise was random. In order to prepare the database there were used the followings: the database of portals enabling searching and locating companies by name, sector or area, and the search engine for the Central Registration and Information on Business (CGIB) using searching by the type of an activity (PCA code). Initially, the sample was determined proportionally to the size of enterprise groups according to the size of employment, while difficulties were encountered in obtaining an agreement for the survey. In order to achieve the assumed sample size, an additional random selection was used and a greater than assumed return of questionnaires, i.e. 430 was obtained. The analyzed enterprises constituted 0.26% of enterprises in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. In the analyzed group there were 155 micro entities (constituting 0.10% of this group separated due to employment), 152 small entities (2.55%), medium entities 89 (7.11%) and large 34 entities (21.66%).

From the group of the entities analyzed, the companies that belong to the so-called creative sector, for which creative behaviours are the basic ones, were excluded deliberately. These enterprises were the subject of another analysis (Szara, 2019).

396 surveys were accepted for the analysis after the elimination of large enterprises. The survey consisted of 15 questions, which were related to, among others, defining creativity, innovation, characterization of dimensions affecting the development of creative capital, determinants of internal and external development of this capital. This study presents the assessment of fea-

tures that are also elements of the employees' personality and a question assessing behaviour at work towards creativity. The research began at the end of 2015 and was completed in March 2016. The basic research methods were used. They included: an analysis, a synthesis, a reduction. The descriptive method was also applied. The data in this study were analyzed using simple statistical measures.

The purpose of the survey was an empirical verification of the author's modified M. Rhodes' model, which was used to assess the level of creative capital (see Szara, 2019).

The measure of creative behaviour of respondents, adopted by the author, refers to the assessment of the possibility of acting in the context of potential creativity, where behaviour towards creativity is explored. The questions describing behaviours towards creativity were established on the basis of the literature on the subject, including creativity questionnaires (Charzyńska and Wysocka, 2015). The descriptions of the questionnaires and measuring scales used can be found in previously cited studies, among others Szmids (2013, pp. 564–666) and Karwowski (2009a, pp. 23, 55).

#### 4. Research results and discussion

52.8% women participated in the study, the others were men. People aged 36–45 dominated (32.1%). Respondents over the age of 45 accounted for approximately 27%, the employees aged 25–35 accounted for 22%. The remaining percentage represented the age range 18–24.

Creativity is a personality trait. For 73.23% of respondents it is an ability to think creatively, broadly understood ingenuity and adaptive flexibility resulting in the ability to find creative, original solutions that go beyond the accepted schemes. It is also the ability to create ideas and a form based on a new approach to existing problems and reinterpreting reality and seeking new opportunities, which 17.68% of respondents chose. However, for 9.09% it meant an attitude, a style of action that allowed overcoming routine, habits, thinking patterns.

61.6% of respondents considered themselves to be creative. About 8.33% had a different opinion, while the others chose the "I don't know" option.

At work, for 36.4% of respondents creativity is a spontaneous form of an idea born and implemented. It is important that 20.5% of respondents said they were a conscious action. For 30.06% it is a way of solving problems, while for 6.57% it is a behaviour forced by the market. For 6.06% of respondents creativity in their work did not matter.

A creative person is described in the literature using a set of features. Respondents were asked which of the features had the greatest impact in their work. The features were rated on a scale: 0 means no, 1 means very little impact, minimal differences, 5 means very high, maximum impact, dominant position.

Experience was the most important feature for respondents (average 4.09), contrary to the case of enterprises in the creative sector where imagination was the dominant feature (Szara, 2019, p. 97). It should be added that knowledge came in the fourth place according to its impact and use (3.89). Intelligence (3.91) came the second, and persistence (3.90) came the third. Values and originality were the least significant features and they obtained the same average grade (3.22) (Figure 3).

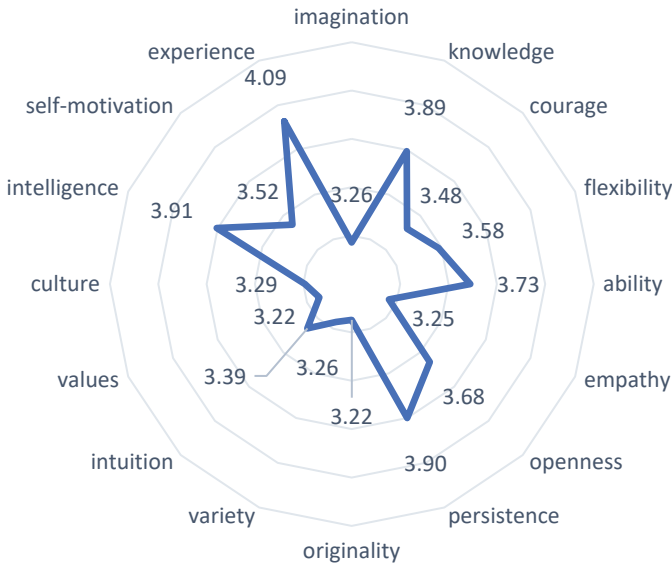


Figure 3. Features that determine the attitude towards creativity

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The most frequently mentioned features of a creative man in literature include:

- imagination (Finke, 1990), which in the case of SMEs employees was underestimated;
- memory—it is believed that creativity requires atypical, alternative and selective coding; it is based on assigning an unusual, rare “identification label” to a remembered object (Nęcka, 2003 p. 68);
- openness which manifests itself, among others, through a critical attitude to professed values, intellectual curiosity, having extensive knowledge in various fields, not being dogmatist or non-conformist (McCrae, 1987). In the presented study this feature was rated the lowest.

Personality and psychological conditions are related to the employee (Mroczo, 2014, p. 46; Poskrobko, 2015, p. 60) and in most combinations these are repetitive features: courage, independence, inquisitiveness, persistence, commitment, responsibility. In the literature presenting psychological or pedagogical research one can find descriptions of these features through the exact characteristics of human behaviour (Nęcka, 2003). The characteristics are also made by systematically ordering the collected data by cognitive, emotional, volitional-motivational, characterological and social functions (Popek, 2001, pp. 49–52). A comparison of own research results is not possible due to different business profiles of entities. The degree and the scope of creativity of employees are determined by numerous factors that can be assigned to three groups. Creativity depends on the following factors:

- on the employee's side, including: personality traits, type and level of education, professional experience;



- related to the nature of the work performed, such as: occupational tasks performed, working conditions, freedom of action, interesting tasks;
- on the side of the organization, e.g. stimulating employee's creativity, motivating creative behaviour, rewarding creativity, way of communicating in the organization, organizational culture or its structure.

The interaction of these factors shapes the aforementioned scope and the degree of creativity of the employee in the area of work (Król, 2015, p. 33).

Table 2. Individual evaluation of behaviour towards creativity (in %)

No.	Specification/ frequency	Never	Occasionally	Often	Very often	Always
1	I can achieve my personal goals at work	9.85	39.39	31.57	13.38	5.81
2	I am not afraid to face challenges at work	9.09	13.38	37.63	28.03	11.87
3	I show originality at work	6.31	27.02	34.85	20.20	11.62
4	I like taking risks at work	12.12	32.83	26.52	21.21	7.32
5	Time pressure does not affect the quality of my work	11.62	27.27	31.57	21.21	8.33
6	They do their work by themselves	5.56	9.60	27.78	29.55	10.35
7	Personal problems do not distract me at work	12.37	29.04	24.24	23.99	10.35
8	My work is diverse	9.34	21.46	34.09	23.74	11.36
9	I'm an optimist	5.56	17.42	30.56	29.29	17.17
10	I work easily in a team	5.05	10.86	31.57	32.58	19.95

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 2 shows how the assessment of the intensity of creative behaviour in the occupied position at work was shaped. There was no situation when the employee could not develop creative ideas to solve the problem or did not share knowledge with others. For the most part, the sum of the answers "never" and "occasionally" divided equally to the answers "often", "very often", "always". This meant that half of the employees could achieve their goals at work. The vast majority of employees were not afraid to face challenges at work, and 66.67% showed originality; admittedly at different frequencies, but responses that confirmed this behaviour prevailed. Also in the case of a larger percentage of employees, people took risks in their positions, and time was not a barrier at work. Most respondents did their work by themselves, they did not connect it with personal problems. The fact that the work done by the respondents was diverse was positive for the development of creativity. The fact that most of the respondents were optimistic and did not have problems with teamwork should be assessed positively also for creative behaviour.

In comparison to the creative climate questionnaires used by other authors, the exemplary statements were compiled as the scale (e.g. challenges, freedom, openness, time, etc.) or creative attitudes (nonconformity, neuroticism, extroversion) (Karwowski, 2009a, p. 96). In the case of our own research, there were no groupings due to the fact that the number of questions in the questionnaires of other authors oscillated around 50–60 questions. The assessment of the intensity of creative behaviour made by respondents can be described as average as the answers with the intensity of “often”, “very often” and “always” prevail.

In the PCA section layout, the average answers to the above questions are higher in section J—information and communication, section R where the enterprises from divisions 92, 93 were not included in the creative industries and represented sports and recreational activities. In the comparison of the intensity of creative behaviour in the average value analysis system, the companies representing section M, professional, scientific and technical activities, were the least favourable. This may be due to the situation when enterprises belonging to the creative industries are excluded, hence lower ratings compared to other sections. Lower ratings regarding the intensity of creative behaviour were recorded in the case of section K—financial and insurance activities, B—mining and mining, S—other service activities, C—manufacturing. In the case of entities included in these sections, lower notes are related to the type of activity.

However, it can be seen that in the PCA sections higher average answers characterized the question assessing the behaviour of “easy” teamwork, which positively indicates cooperation for creativity, as well as the question assessing taking up challenges at work. Higher average answers were also noted for the question describing optimistic behaviour.

## 5. Conclusion

This work presents behaviour towards the creativity of SMEs employees. This was done by presenting personality traits and individually assessed behaviour at work stations.

Creativity is a complex phenomenon preceding innovation. It is associated with the personality traits mentioned in the literature, such as: imagination, courage, openness. These features are not always dominant, especially in small and medium enterprises.

The hypothesis adopted in the work is that imagination is the hallmark of creativity in employees’ behaviour. In the case of employees belonging to the SMEs sector, this feature is not so significant. Experience, persistence, intelligence and knowledge are of particular importance for respondents.

Creativity is an activity that occurs among SMEs. Among the enterprises conducting various economic activities, classified into different PCA divisions, creative behaviours occur, which is the confirmation of egalitarian theory of creativity, while due to different activity profiles it can be described as medium-intensity behaviours. This may constitute a scientific research undertaken and an original contribution to science due to the low level of empirical analyses conducted among SMEs regarding the research problem undertaken.

The assessments of respondents’ behaviour in the workplace indicate that most of them can achieve their goals, and are not afraid of risk or challenges. It can be said that these are positive behaviours that result in creativity. In turn, this in enterprises is materialized in the form

of innovation. The research undertaken is extremely difficult due to the intangible nature. It should be noted that employee behaviour is also affected by a number of other factors that have not been presented in this study.

In the own research, which aimed at assessing creative capital in the enterprise, no exact characteristics of innovation was made, which makes it impossible to assess the impact of creative behaviour of employees on the innovation of enterprises. It is very difficult because of individual treatment of creativity. This limitation can be eliminated in future studies.

Distinguishing creative behaviours in various PKD sections may have practical significance related to motivating employees to undertake such activities and translate them into effects. It seems important to use the possessed potential by enterprises, which in the form of creative behaviour occurs in SME enterprises. Due to the author's implementation of similar research among creative sector enterprises, it may be interesting to compare the behaviour of employees of these enterprises and those included in various sections of the PKD, described in this study. This may be the basis for searching for a relationship between the company's membership in the section and the creative behaviour of employees.

The research presented has practical value mainly for business managers. The results of the study may allow taking actions that will contribute to the activation of creative behaviour among employees.

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## Zachowania ku kreatywności pracowników małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw

**Abstrakt:** Kreatywność to zjawisko złożone, zbiór umiejętności pozwalających na inne postrzeganie świata, tworzenie nowych idei. Za cel pracy przyjęto ocenę zachowań ku kreatywności pracowników MŚP. Zachowania analizowano pod kątem cech predestynujących pracowników do zachowań kreatywnych i wybranych warunków środowiska. W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badania dotyczącego zachowań kreatywnych pracowników MŚP z terenu województwa podkarpackiego. W przedsiębiorstwach, zwłaszcza małych i średnich, nie zawsze cechy osobowości wymieniane w literatu-

rze dominują. Szczególne znaczenie dla respondentów mają: doświadczenie, wytrwałość, inteligencja, wiedza. Warto podkreślić, że wśród przedsiębiorstw prowadzących różną działalność gospodarczą, sklasyfikowanych do różnych działów PKD, zachowania kreatywne występują, natomiast ze względu na różne profile działalności można określić zachowanie ku kreatywności jako „średnie”. Oceny zachowania respondentów na stanowiskach pracy wskazują, że w większości mogą oni realizować swoje cele, nie boją się podejmować ryzyka, wyzwiać, co można uznać za wyznaczniki kreatywności.

**Słowa kluczowe:** biznes, sekcja, przedsiębiorstwo, województwo podkarpackie, kreatywność