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THE USE OF COUNSELLING SERVICES IN CZECH REPUBLIC

The aim of this research being realized in April 2015 was to find out and to evaluate the interest of Czech organizations in counselling. Interviews with the selected respondents served as the information base. Two important factors in counselling service choice are grounded – the recommendation from friends, relatives or other businessmen, and the other one – qualification of a counsellor.

Keywords: counseling; survey; recommendation; qualification.

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ЗАТРЕБУВАНІСТЬ ПОСЛУГ З КОНСУЛЬТУВАННЯ У ЧЕСЬКІЙ РЕСПУБЛІЦІ

У статті представлено результати дослідження, проведеного у квітні 2015 р. для виявлення та оцінювання інтересу чеських організацій до консультування. Для збору даних було проведено опитування. Виявлено два ключові фактори, що впливають на вибір у даній сфері – рекомендації від друзів, родичів або колег, а також кваліфікація консультанта.

Ключові слова: консультування; опитування; рекомендація; кваліфікація.

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ВОСТРЕБОВАННОСТЬ УСЛУГ КОНСУЛЬТИРОВАНИЯ В ЧЕШСКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ

В статье представлены результаты исследования, проведённого в апреле 2015 г. для выявления и оценки интереса чешских организаций к консультированию. Для сбора данных был проведён опрос. Выявлены два ключевых фактора, влияющих на выбор в данной сфере – рекомендации от друзей, родственников или коллег, а также квалификация консультанта.

Ключевые слова: консультирование; опрос; рекомендация; квалификация.

Introduction. At present, companies do not employ all professionals to deal with all the problems the company or employees face. For this purpose, counselling has been introduced aiming to identify client's problems and search for their solutions. Many companies in Czech Republic are not sufficiently aware of the options to use counsellor services. The aim of this article is to present the research, by which the authors wanted to find out and evaluate the interest of Czech companies in counselling. The research aimed to gain the updated information as it comes to the use of counselling service. To achieve this, questioning was provided among the selected business subjects.

Counselling. Counselling can be defined in many ways. B. Poczatkova et al. (2014) defined counselling as the activity focused on client's problems' solution and an increase in client's competences to be able to solve these problems. This activity is realized mainly by information provision. Counselling belongs to the services field. Such service can be offered by particular benefits or activities being provided by one subject to another subject.

The reasons for counselling use differ depending on a particular business type and the level of economic development.

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Research. Although there is much information on the Internet on the subject matter, more comprehensive work dealing with the interest in counselling is missing. The aim of this research was to gain updated information about the given area. The main interest of this research was to evaluate the interest of the selected companies in counselling service. To find out whether and how often companies use counselling service, which areas this counselling deal with and whether companies are satisfied with this service. Above that, the research should have provide information how companies choose a counsellor and where they search for him/her or why they have not used the counselling yet. The last but not least, the research should bring information on what opinion business subjects have as for counsellors qualification and counselling in Czech Republic overall.

1. Hypotheses formulation. Before the research began, the hypotheses were determined basing on the results gained by investigation of secondary sources dealing with counseling. In the frame of research, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1. There exists statistically significant relation between the number of employees in investigated company and not using counselling in Czech Republic.

H2. There exists statistically significant relation between the number of employees in investigated company and dissatisfaction with the level of awareness of counseling in Czech Republic.

The research was based on a survey. The questionnaire included 17 questions, most of which were closed ones, 5 questions – semi-open. This survey was conducted by electronic way as well as verbally during April 2015. The respondents of all Czech regions participated in it. As for the number of employees, the companies with 10–49 employees were willing to contribute to this research the most, 31% of them answered the questions. Also big companies having more than 250 employees were engaged in this research.

As the turnover is concerned, the companies of all sizes participated in the research; the biggest number was represented by the companies with the turnover up to 2 mln EUR (51%), followed by the companies with the turnover from 2 to 10 mln EUR. Big companies with the turnover over 50 mln EUR represented 12%.

Based on CZ-NACE classification, the biggest number of the respondents belongs to the engineering industry, manufacturing and the other fields. There were 137 respondents involved in the research overall.

2. Research results. The first question investigated whether the respondents have used counselling in the past and how many times. Counselling has been used by 64% of the respondents; 7% of the respondents have used counselling once, 23% of the respondents have used it 2–3 times and 34% of the respondents – even more than 3 times. 36% of the respondents did not have any experience with counselling.

If we take a look at the answers structure by the number of employees, we should pay attention to the fact that as smaller companies (up to 49 employees) are concerned, 40 and more percent have not used counseling yet while companies with above 50 employees tend to use counselling more. It is also seen that bigger companies have used counselling more often – more than 50% of big and middle-sized companies have used counselling more than 3 times. Dependence between company size and using counselling is quite obvious.

The second question investigated which counselling areas the respondents have been interested in. They could choose up to 5 options. The biggest interest belongs to taxes, legal services and accounting, insurance, and also projects elaboration aiming at the EU grants had significant representation as well. No interest was seen in terms of products development, design, patents and debt counselling.

Table 1. Question # 2: What counseling services have you used?, authors'

Answer	Number	%
Taxes	27	43
Legal services	26	41
Accounting	24	38
Insurance	20	32
Projects aiming at the EU grants	18	29
Personnel issues	13	21
Financing	12	19
Organization in company, people management	10	16
Sale and marketing	9	14
Supplier selection	7	11
IT, VT	7	11
Quality	5	8
Ecology	5	8
Company establishment	4	6
Production	4	6
Business plan	4	6
Company strategy	3	5
Supplying and purchase	3	5
Other	2	3
Transport	1	2
Study of business environment	1	2
Product development, design, patents	0	
Debts	0	

As for small companies, such areas as insurance, accounting, legal services and financing are represented equally. With the increasing number of employees, areas as taxes, organization, people management, IT, supplier selection and mainly projects related to the EU grants are seen. This item mentioned 69% of big companies. It is interesting that any other companies tend to use counselling in insurance field, big companies though have not showed such tendency as such.

The aim of the following question was to find out how the respondents are satisfied with counseling services in general. 73% of the respondents stated they are rather satisfied, 16% were even satisfied. Only 11% of the respondents said they were rather dissatisfied. Absolute dissatisfaction was not expressed at all. Dissatisfied respondents have used counselling 2–3 times, noteworthy.

The question 4 dealt with satisfaction with particular factors of counselling services. The respondents were asked to express their satisfaction by the scale "very satisfied – rather satisfied – rather dissatisfied – very dissatisfied". Although the best evaluation was used only in small number, most of the answers belong to the category "rather satisfied"; only few respondents were "rather dissatisfied". Slightly higher dissatisfaction was seen at the factor "price" but the difference is not significant.

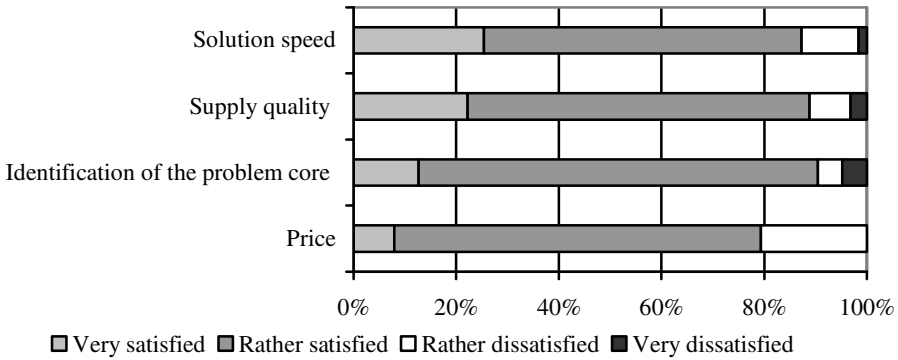


Figure 1. Question # 4: Evaluate your satisfaction with specific factors of counselling, authors'

The fifth question investigated where the respondents searched for counsellors. Out of the offered options they could choose up to 3 answers; one of the options was "other" and here they could mention their own answer. The most often, the respondents were given recommendation by other businessmen – 62% of all the cases. Microcompanies rather listened to advice of friends and family. With the increasing number of employees, situation is clearly different; recommendations of friends and family are decreasing and advice of other businessmen is increasing. The respondents also often search for counselling on the Internet.

The sixth question investigated how the respondents chose counsellors thus what factors (maximum 3) were deciding. They could choose one of the offered options or give their own answer. Also here, recommendations of friends and family played significant role (63 % of all the respondents). The second significant factor, counsellor’s qualification was 44% and references on the Internet – 27%. Significance of references on the Internet increases proportionally with the number of employees.

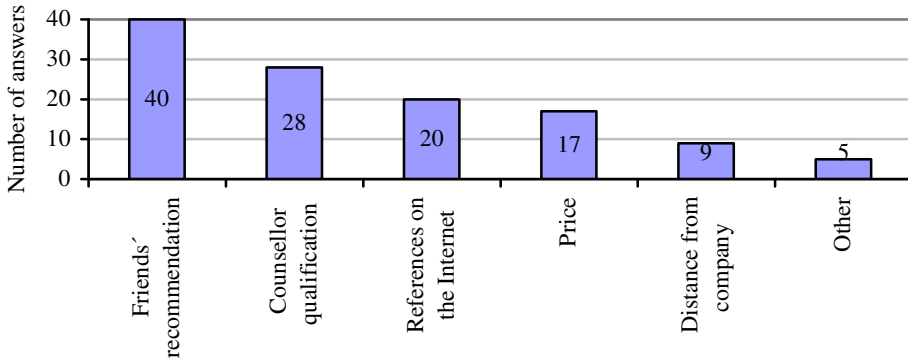


Figure 2. Question # 6: By what factors you chose counsellor?, authors'

The following question investigated whether the respondents would recommend counselling services. Big part of the questioned would do so (68%), 32% did not recommend it.

The 8th question addressed only the respondents who have not used counselling services yet. The aim of this question was to find out what was the reason for not doing

so. The absolute majority of the respondents (80%) said they did not feel like doing that.

The ninth question asked whether the respondents would use counselling in the future; 36% said "rather yes" and 33% said "rather no"; 24% said "definitely yes" and 7% said "definitely not"; 30 answers of 39 negative ones (77%) were given by the respondents, who have not used counselling yet. The positive aspect is that 94% of the respondents, who have used counselling, would use it again.

The following 3 questions dealt with counselling in Czech Republic. The first interest was how the respondents perceive counselling in Czech Republic. They were given the options "very positively – rather positively – rather negatively – very negatively". More than one half of the respondents (59%) perceive counselling rather positively, 30% are inclined to rather negative evaluation. Only 6% evaluated counseling very positively, and 5% – very negatively.

The respondents were further asked whether they think Czech businessmen are sufficiently aware of counselling opportunities. The biggest number of the respondents said "rather yes" (45%); 35% expressed their skeptical opinion saying "rather no"; 13% of the respondents expressed their positive opinion and 7% – negative one. If this question would be perceived by the number of employees, the biggest number of negative answers belongs do small businesses – 67%. With the increasing number of employees, companies agree on better awareness, as it comes to the companies with more than 250 employees, here only 19% of the respondents are dissatisfied with awareness.

The last question dealt with the perception of counsellors' qualification. 4 options of answers were offered: "high level – quite good – bad – very bad". 68% of the respondents perceive counsellors' qualification as quite good, which is rather positive; 24% consider it bad, 3% – very bad; 4% of the respondents think it is very good.

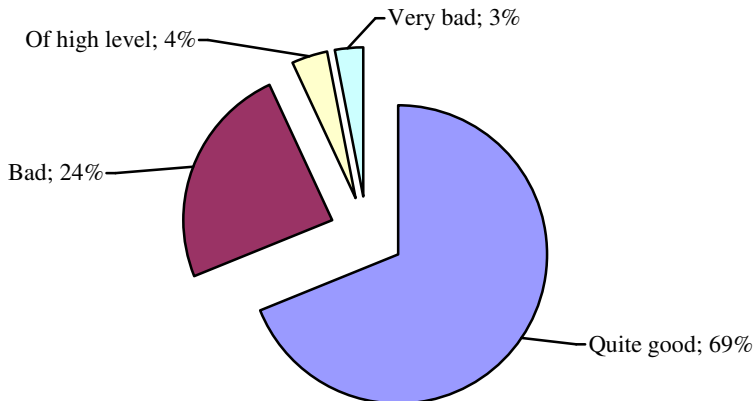


Figure 3. Question # 12: How do you perceive counsellors' qualification in Czech Republic?, authors'

3. Testing of statistical hypotheses. Statistical testing of the formulated hypotheses was the part of the research. The hypotheses were determined based on information gained from the secondary research. The hypotheses were verified by the Chi-square test, with testing criterion χ^2 . By this test, testing value is calculated as follows:

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(P-O)^2}{O}, \quad (1)$$

where P – monitored frequency; O – expected frequency.

The result of H1 hypothesis testing based on Chi-square test showed there exists statistically significant dependence between the investigated variables. Company size has impact on decision whether to use counselling service or not.

Also in the second case, hypothesis H2, it was proved that there exists a statistically significant dependence as it comes to the number of employees and dissatisfaction with the awareness of counselling services.

Summary of results and recommendation. The research results showed that business subjects are interested in counseling. Big share of the subjects has used counselling more than 3 times. Although the respondents avoided edge expressions, almost 90% were satisfied with counselling. Almost 70% of them would recommend it further counseling. Recommendations given by friends or family members being indicative of counsellor's quality were the main factor, by which the respondents chose a counsellor. The price of counselling also played a significant role. 60% of the respondents would use counselling in the future. Generally, counselling in Czech Republic was evaluated rather positively, 35% the respondents evaluate this area very or rather negatively. The respondents did not express their positive opinion as it comes to awareness of counselling use; 42% of them were dissatisfied with it. Hypotheses proved that smaller companies are less aware of counselling.

Based on the abovementioned results, we can outline particular recommendations for counselling subjects. The counsellor should follow ethic and good manner rules, maintain relationship with clients even after cooperation is finished. Mainly smaller companies put bigger stress on recommendations. Bigger companies also make decisions based on recommendations but they often search for counsellor on the Internet. Because of this reason, counselling companies are recommended to launch and regularly update their websites. On these websites, counselling companies should specify their services in detail together with concrete references. Counsellor qualification was another important criterion when choosing. He/she should educate himself/herself continuously and keep track of the newest trends in the field of advice. To the question whether counsellors in Czech Republic are sufficiently qualified, 68% of the respondents said yes. Such evaluation is not bad but there still is a space for improvement.

Conclusion. Counseling is a young service but it has already found its place among other services. Business environment is changing continuously, IT field and people management in particular go through big changes, thus, using counselling can be more expected in the future. The aim of this research was to gain updated information about counselling field in Czechia. For this purpose, the research was provided among the selected business subjects. It was found out that the most important factor when choosing a counsellor, references from friends and other businessmen are. Another important factor was counsellor qualification. Counsellors should be aware of these key characteristics and purposely work on their maintaining and improvement. Counselling field in Czechia generally was evaluated positively but the respondents still find space for improvement.

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