Impact of Employers’ Organisations on Business in Estonia

The paper studies the challenges that business face in Estonia and the satisfaction with employers’ organizations in the country. The study is based on empirical data from the survey undertaken by the employers’ bureau of the Geneva-based International Labour Organization in collaboration with Cranfield School of Management in the United Kingdom and Estonian Business School in Estonia.

Keywords: employers’ organizations, business facing challenges, Estonia.

Introduction

The paper explores the understanding about the role of employers’ organizations in Estonia. The purpose of this research is to help employers’ organizations to improve their services for enterprises.

The research problem is to discuss whether employers’ organizations in Estonia can help business organizations to solve the problems they face. The research task is to analyse what kind of problems make companies turn to employers’ organizations. The objective of the research is to find out which of employers’ organizations has been the most helpful one.

In order to do this, first, business organizations have been interviewed asking to point out the main problems and challenges they face. Second, the same organizations were asked how employers’ organizations help to solve these problems.

In the current paper the overview about the most important employers’ organizations in Estonia is followed by the results of an empirical study in Estonia: which challenges were considered important by Estonian organizations and how satisfied are Estonian business organizations with employers’ organizations in Estonia.

Employers’ organizations in Estonia

The state of Estonia gained independence in 1991. According to the EU’s 2000 report, Estonia is a functioning market economy where market forces play their full role...
Entrepreneurs’ organizations have grown in Estonia since the beginning of 1990’s. Several employers’ organizations have been established or reestablished. Below is presented a brief overview about the main two employers’ organizations in Estonia today.

**Estonian Employers’ Confederation**

In November 1991, associations of industrial branches formed the Estonian Confederation of Industry (ETKEL), which in the following year started to function also as a representative of employers in social partnership.

An economic crisis hit Estonia in 1992, when the first government was established. In January 1992, Estonia rejoined the International Labor Organization (ILO). Becoming a member of this organization created for Estonia the obligation to acknowledge international labor laws, including the primary demand: to solve the core issues of social guarantees among the government, employers and the employees by consultations and negotiations. The Estonian Council of ILO was formed in May 1992 and its main function was the preparation of the ratification of ILO labor standards.

In May 1995, the organization of employers ETKEL was reorganized into the Estonian Confederation of Industry and Employers (ETTK). As a result of the reorganization and also with the objective to protect common interests of employers, the largest organizations and associations of infrastructure, such as the Association of Car Enterprises, Association of Ship Owners, Estonian Railways, Estonian Energy and Confederation of Agricultural Producers also joined the ETTK. On November 20, 1995, the associations of economic branches of the service sphere formed the second Estonian confederation of employers – the Estonian Confederation of Employers Organizations (ETÜKL). Both the ETTK and the ETÜKL acknowledged each other as independent associations of employers, engaged in constructive co-operation and participated together in negotiations with social partners.

At the beginning of 1996, the Estonian Confederation of Industry and Employers forwarded its proposals on the solution of economic and social problems to the Prime Minister Tiit Vähi. The proposals had been prepared by the way of questioning its members and included opinions on the development of the industrial policy of Estonia and the main problems with their solutions. This was the first serious attempt by entrepreneurs to have a say in the area of economic policy.

In the first half of 1997, the boards of directors of the ETTK and the ETÜKL took the standpoint (proceeding from the recommendations of the IOE) that the umbrella organizations of employers should be merged in order to protect the common interests and standpoints of employers. Negotiations started in September 1997 and they culminated in November 1997 with the creation of the central organization of employers – Estonian Confederation of Employers and Industry (ETTK). As a result of this, in March 1998 the Executive Committee of the International Organization of Employers decided to accept the ETTK as a member of the IOE.

In October 1998, the Republic of Estonia and the Estonian Confederation of Industry and Employers signed the lease agreement of the House of Employers. With this, the ETTK received its own house and many branch associations also
moved in together with the employees of the ETTK.

In July 1999, ETTK was granted the status of an observing member of the UNICE – Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederations of Europe.

Today Estonian Employers’ Confederation is the most representative employers’ organization in Estonia, representing 24 branch organisations that join more than 1500 companies and 60 single large enterprises that employ 35% of private sector employees of Estonia (Estonian Employers’ Confederation 2007).

**Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

The Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECCI) was originally founded in 1925 and re-established in 1989. In 1927, the ECCI was accepted as a member of the International Chamber of Commerce (Estonian Chamber…, 2007).

The ECCI operated as a successful organization until 1940, when the Chamber and all other private organizations were forced to close down by the Soviet occupation. During the years under the Soviet rule, a branch of the USSR Chamber of Commerce and Industry was opened in Tallinn.

In 1989, the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was re-established with some hundred members into a private, voluntary membership Chamber. Today, the ECCI is the largest business representation organisation in the country. As of 7th February 2005, the ECCI has 3318 members. More importantly, according to a study carried out by Krediidiinfo (Credit Info Estonia), the net turnover of the ECCI members makes more than 49% of the net turnover of ALL Estonian companies, the owner’s equity of the ECCI members makes total about 52% of the capital of all Estonian companies and net profits equal 50% of that of all Estonian companies. The ECCI’s members account for over 85 percent of Estonia’s total exports. These enterprises are predominantly in the textile, metal, timber, construction and food industries.

The majority of the ECCI’s membership represents small and medium size businesses – 95% are SME-s.

The mission of the Chamber is to develop entrepreneurship in Estonia. The ECCI is an active partner to the parliament, government and ministries in designing the economic policy and climate. Whenever tax policies, corporate law, laws on property and obligations, foreign trade and EU-related issues or professional qualification is discussed, the Chamber speaks actively on behalf of the Estonian business community.

The ECCI provides several business-related services – consultation (legal, foreign trade, EU-related), business match-making (trade missions, trade fair visits, presentations), information services (business contacts, co-operation proposals etc.), training and foreign trade documents.

The ECCI also hosts the Arbitration Court, which is the only permanent arbitration court in Estonia.

The ECCI has offices in Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, Jõhvi and Kuressaare. It employs 39 people (ECCI history, 2007).

**Empirical study in Estonia**

**The method and the sample**

This study is a part of a larger project. The employers’ bureau of the Geneva-based
In the second part of the questionnaire, the same organizations were asked, how employers’ organizations help to solve these problems. There was given the list of the problems and organizations had to evaluate how each of the given employer organization had contributed in order to solve these problems.

This paper is focusing on Estonian results. The author conducted this survey in Estonia in summer 2003, one year before joining the European Union. 600 questionnaires were sent to randomly selected Estonian enterprises. The average respondent rate was 13%; 78 responses were received. The follow-up interviews were conducted in selected companies from the same sample. There were 25 companies with less than 10 employees, 39 companies with 10-250 employees, 9 large national enterprises with more than 250 employees and 5 subsidiaries of multinational companies in the sample (Table 1).

**Challenges that Estonian enterprises face**

We asked to point out the three most important challenges that the enterprise faced in 2003 and would face in the future. The results according to a company’s size

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**Table 1**

The sample structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company type</th>
<th>Sample size for questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-enterprises (1-9)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small &amp; medium sized enterprises (10-250)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large national enterprises (more than 250)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidiaries of multinational companies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

International Labour Organization, in collaboration with Cranfield School of Management in the United Kingdom organized the survey of around a thousand enterprises of various sizes in thirteen countries around the world. The selected survey countries were the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and Estonia in Europe; South Africa, Mali, Ghana and Mauritius in Africa; Japan and the Philippines in Asia; and the United States, Mexico, Brazil and Jamaica in America.

In order to point out challenges for business and attitudes towards employers’ organizations two methods were used. Firstly, questionnaires were delivered and secondly, interviews were conducted. The same questionnaire had been translated into local languages and used in countries all over the world.

In the first part of the questionnaire, business organizations were asked, which problems and challenges were the main ones for them. The questions were about challenges that Estonian enterprises faced in 2003 and over the next three to five years. The same questions were asked in the field of human resources. There were also questions about employers’ organizations: how these organizations understand needs of business organizations and how employers’ organizations were effective in serving enterprise interests.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the same organizations were asked, how employers’ organizations help to solve these problems. There was given the list of the problems and organizations had to evaluate how each of the given employer organization had contributed in order to solve these problems.

This paper is focusing on Estonian results. The author conducted this survey in Estonia in summer 2003, one year before joining the European Union. 600 questionnaires were sent to randomly selected Estonian enterprises. The average respondent rate was 13%; 78 responses were received. The follow-up interviews were conducted in selected companies from the same sample. There were 25 companies with less than 10 employees, 39 companies with 10-250 employees, 9 large national enterprises with more than 250 employees and 5 subsidiaries of multinational companies in the sample (Table 1).
The most important challenges that Estonian enterprises faced in 2003 and in 2007, according to opinions of Estonian managers (% from respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Saving and increasing market share</th>
<th>New products and projects</th>
<th>Increasing revenue</th>
<th>Client satisfaction</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>EU rules</th>
<th>Training and development</th>
<th>Performance appraisal</th>
<th>Organization development</th>
<th>Globalisation</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>80</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>10,3</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>12,8</td>
<td>12,8</td>
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<td>12,8</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>26,9</td>
<td>12,8</td>
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<td>16,7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>11,5</td>
<td>23,1</td>
<td>9,0</td>
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<td>25,6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1 – Micro-enterprises
2 – Small & medium sized enterprises
3 – Large national enterprises
4 – Subsidiaries of multinational companies
The most important challenges in the area of human resource management in 2003 and in 2007 according to the opinion of Estonian managers (% from respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Recruitment</th>
<th>Training and development</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Financial compensation</th>
<th>Performance appraisal</th>
<th>Cooperation</th>
<th>Organizational culture</th>
<th>Job descriptions</th>
<th>Performance and development interview</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Client satisfaction</th>
<th>Globalization</th>
<th>Organization development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5,1</td>
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<td>7,7</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>43,6</td>
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<td>5,1</td>
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<td>11,1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>47,4</td>
<td>7,7</td>
<td>14,1</td>
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<td>5,1</td>
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<td>6,4</td>
<td>2,6</td>
<td>5,1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>30,8</td>
<td>51,3</td>
<td>38,5</td>
<td>10,3</td>
<td>6,4</td>
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<td>2,6</td>
<td>5,1</td>
<td>6,4</td>
<td>3,8</td>
<td>6,4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1 – Micro-enterprises  
2 – Small & medium sized enterprises  
3 – Large national enterprises  
4 – Subsidiaries of multinational companies
and ownership are presented in Table 2.

Saving and increasing market share were pointed out as the most challenging thing for Estonian enterprises in 2003. Further, it was followed by new products and projects and clients satisfaction.

The answers to the question „What do you think will be the three most important challenges that your enterprise will face over the next three to five years?” were closely similar but with some differences. In the future Estonian enterprises also found increasing and saving the market share as the most challenging thing. Organizational development was the next challenge, followed by the satisfaction of new clients.

The three most important challenges in the area of human resource management are summarized in Table 3. The results have indicated that challenges in 2003 and over the next three to five years were similar ones. The training and development of personnel was pointed out as the most challenging problem, followed by employees’ motivation. Recruitment was mentioned by one third of the respondents.

**Satisfaction with employers’ organizations**

The respondents were asked to evaluate employers’ organizations. The question was: “Which of the organizations of which you or your enterprise is a member does the best correspond with your needs?” The results in Table 4 indicate that Estonian enterprises found Sectorial Employers’ Organization as the best one understanding their needs. 19 organizations pointed out, that this organization the best understands their needs and 7 organizations mentioned it as a second or third one. In total 26 organizations mentioned Sectorial Employers’ Organization. The second was Chamber of Commerce.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of employers’ organizations in serving enterprise interests. The results were similar to the previous question: 19 Estonian enterprises found Sectorial Employers’ Organization the best one in serving enterprise interests (19 organizations pointed out it as the best), then again followed Chamber of Commerce (see Table 4).

**Results**

The research results indicate that in 2003, before joining the European Union, Estonian enterprises found saving and increasing market share as the most challenging problem, followed by new products, projects, and clients’ satisfaction. Over the next three to five years the first challenge remained the same: saving the market share. The second and the third challenges were different: organizational development and the satisfaction of new clients.

The three most important challenges in the area of human resource management were the same in 2003 and later on: the training and development of personnel, employees’ motivation and recruitment.

From these answers it may concluded, that in 2003 Estonian managers did not think, that joining the European Union could influence the field of human resource management. The reality was different: the research in 2007 showed that finding motivated and qualified employees appeared to be problem (Alas, Kaarelson, 2007).

According to the current survey the most preferred employers’ organizations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-9</th>
<th>10-249</th>
<th>250-</th>
<th>Sub.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Employers’ Organization or Federation</strong></td>
<td>0/8</td>
<td>0/1*</td>
<td>2/14</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Regional Employers’ Organization or Federation</strong></td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sectorial Employers’ Organization or Federation</strong></td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>5/12</td>
<td>11/16</td>
<td>8/25</td>
<td>4/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chamber of Commerce</strong></td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>4/11</td>
<td>8/20</td>
<td>10/28</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade Association</strong></td>
<td>0/6</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Buying Group</strong></td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training Consortium</strong></td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/5</td>
<td>0/5</td>
<td>0/3</td>
<td>0/3</td>
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<td><strong>Marketing Group</strong></td>
<td>0/6</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association of Business Managers or Directors</strong></td>
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<td>2/3</td>
<td>2/16</td>
<td>0/2</td>
<td>0/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Association (e.g. Institute of Directors etc)</strong></td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>3/8</td>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>5/16</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Informal Business Network or Forum</strong></td>
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<td>0/2</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other (specify)</strong></td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>3/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
A - How employers’ organizations understand needs of business organizations.
B - Employers’ organizations effectiveness in serving enterprise interests.
* - Mentioned as first/ total
in Estonia are Chamber of Commerce and Sectorial employers’ organizations. Estonian small and medium sized enterprises prefer to belong to Chamber of Commerce. Micro enterprises and large national organizations prefer to belong to Sectorial employers’ organizations.

Subsidiaries of multinational companies are the most active in using services that the employers’ organizations offer. At the same time large national companies are the least active. These organizations employ specialists themselves.

Micro enterprises have negative attitude towards employers’ unions. They argue that they have not benefited from these organizations. Sometimes they just lack information about the existing employers’ organizations. Micro enterprises need help in law issues, in solving problems with personnel and in finding suitable training courses for their personnel. They look for someone, who could defend their interests at national level in the government, but most of them have not got help from employers’ organizations about these issues.

Small and medium sized organizations also are most interested in getting more information about changes in laws and regulations: what exactly they should do. Also help in the fields of accounting and IT could be useful. They are interested in training and also in foreign experts as presenters. There are different opinions about the existing employers’ organizations in this group: some organizations are satisfied with Chamber of Commerce as meeting the point with people from the same field, and with training and informal events. At the same time others are quite angry and do not find it useful. These organizations that belong to Sectorial organizations are mostly satisfied: they have got help, they like events and visits to large enterprises and forums.

Large national enterprises find most important the lobbying on the government level. They do not expect from employers’ organizations to find new markets for them. This stage has passed for them. This is different with small organizations, which still expect it and may be disappointed. Large national enterprises find very important to change the educational system in Estonia. They are not satisfied with the preparation of workers. They would prefer to train workers themselves in the companies. Also they find important to have events for socializing and getting new information about developments in industry.

As it could be seen from the data, Estonian large national enterprises use the services of employers’ organizations very rare. It may be explained by the policy to try to hire good specialists, who are able to solve most problems themselves. They do not want to spend money paying to consultants and consulting companies. The specialists are not very highly paid in Estonian private companies.

Subsidiaries of multinationals need local advisors about the Estonian legislation in the fields of labor relations and also environmental protection. Consultants are usually employed and paid by headquarters.

The reasons, why employers’ organizations are weak in Estonia could be found in recent history: the Soviet occupation in 1940 was followed by the restructuring of institutions according to the principles of the occupant country (Taagepera, 1993) and destroyed all institutions supporting free market economy.

Strong employers’ organizations usually are formed as a response to pressure
from employees’ organizations. But as a result of the compulsory trade unionisation during the Soviet time, trade unions in Estonia are the weakest ones in Europe (Alas, 2004). Therefore, there is no pressure on employers to form strong employers’ organizations.

To summarize, there is a lot of room for the development for employers’ organizations in Estonia. Moreover, in order to improve the services, micro enterprises should get better informed about the services and benefits they could get from these organizations.

Conclusions

The three most important challenges for Estonian enterprises in the area of human resource management were the training and development of personnel, employees’ motivation and recruitment.

From the answers to the questionnaire it maybe concluded that in 2003 Estonian managers did not think that joining the European Union could influence the field of human resource management. The reality was different: the research in 2007 revealed that finding motivated and qualified employees becomes more and more difficult (Alas, Kaarelson, 2007).

According to the current survey the most preferred employers’ organizations in Estonia are Chamber of Commerce and Sectorial employers’ organizations. Estonian small and medium sized enterprises prefer to belong to Chamber of Commerce. Micro enterprises and large national organizations prefer to belong to Sectorial employers’ organizations.

Subsidiaries of multinational companies are the most active in using services that employers’ organizations offer. At the same time large national companies are the least active. These organizations employ specialists themselves.

Micro enterprises have negative attitude towards employers’ unions. They look for someone, who could defend their interests at national level in the government, but most of them have not got help from employers’ organizations about these issues.

Estonian large national enterprises very rare use the services of employers’ organizations. It may come from the policy to hire good specialists, who would be able to solve most problems themselves.

To summarize, there is a lot of room for the development of employers’ organizations in Estonia. Moreover, in order to improve the services, micro enterprises should get better informed about the services and benefits they could get from these organizations.

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DARBDAVIŲ ORGANIZACIJŲ VAIDMUO ESTIJOJE IR JŲ ĮTAKA VERSLUI
S an t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojami tyrimo duomenys apie darbdavių organizacijas Estijoje ir iškeliamos problemas, su kuriomis susiduria verslininkai besikreipiant į tokias organizacijas. Tyrimas atliktas remiantis tarptautine Ženevos Darbo organizacija bendradarbiaujant su Cranfield'o vadybos mokykla Jungtinėje Karalystėje ir Estijos biznio mokykla.

Šio projekto tikslas – pagerinti bendradarbiavimą tarp darbdavių organizacijų ir įmonių. Iš pradžių buvo apklausotos verslo organizacijos įvairiose šalyse, siekiant išsiaiškinti pagrindines problemas, su kuriomis susiduria. Vėliau tos pačios organizacijos turėjo paaiškinti, kaip joms padeda tai spręsti darbdavių organizacijos įmonių išlygė.


Apibendrinant reikia pasakyti, kad dar daug ką galima nuveikti vystant darbdavių organizacijas Estijoje. Norint pagerinti bendradarbiavimą tarp smulkiių įmonių ir darbdavių organizacijų reikia išsamiai informuoti smulkiių įmonių savininkus apie darbdavių organizacijų teikiamas paslaugas ir naudą.
Рутх АЛАС

РОЛЬ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ РАБОТОДАТЕЛЕЙ В ЭСТОНИИ И ИХ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА БИЗНЕС

Резюме

В статье исследуются данные об организациях работодателей в Эстонии и указываются проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются бизнесмены, обращающиеся в такие организации. Исследования проводились вместе с Организацией работодателей в Женеве при взаимодействии с Cranfield школой управления в Великобритании и Эстонской школой бизнеса.

Ключевые слова: организации работодателей, проблемы бизнеса, Эстония.