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## **Talent and passion management by the seniors living in Canada**

### **Zarządzanie własnymi talentami i pasjami przez seniorów zamieszkałych w Kanadzie**

#### **Introduction**

The moment they retire, older people enter a new stage in life. Oftentimes, they feel as they have been deprived of experiences that used to give meaning to their lives (work, interactions with work colleagues etc.) and fall into an apathy. Re-formulating one's vision for life, it is not easy for older persons. It requires overcoming the tendency to reduce one's focus exclusively to personal matters, the growing feeling of being useless etc. Closing up in one's own world and focusing on own problems leads to withdrawal and strengthens the negative attitude towards the outside reality and, often, the self. Thus, it contributes to resignation from social roles and passive acceptance of "whatever comes". Of course, retirement does not have to mean giving up social life. It depends on

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many factors such as health, needs, ability to adapt to the new life (old age) through focus on self-fulfilment and development of passions, hobbies, talents that were neglected during the professional activity due to lack of time.

The paper focuses on the talents and passions of the seniors living in Canada (Polish immigrants) in the context of the talent management and values they bring to their lives and everyday functioning (giving meaning to life).

### **Attitudes towards old age and the sense of meaning in life among seniors**

There are many typologies of seniors' approaches to life. S. Reichard identifies five attitudes towards old age: constructive, dependence, defensive, hostility directed at others, inward-directed hostility (cf. Kotlarska-Michalska, 1999, pp. 150-151). Each of these attitudes is based on the relationships with others, with the world and with self, as well as on the assumption that individuals who find meaning in their lives and pursue goals can effectively overcome difficulties and find fulfilment in new activities. It is so because humans have to make their lives meaningful in order to live. The value of life – as emphasized by V. Frankl – is found not only in survival but in the fullness of meaning given to it and lived out (cf. Frankl, 1976). K. Popielski adds that meaning in life is connected with and found among other people or in relations with them or the world (cf. Popielski 2008). Some negative aspects of old age, like anxieties and fear, should be also taken into account. They result from the sense of security being threatened, absence of community and social acceptance and from fear of disability, pain, suffering, loss of fitness, dependence on others, being placed in a nursing home, lack of support and psychological imbalance (cf. A. Kotlarska – Michalska 1999, p. 156). That is why seniors' adaptation to new life depends on the attitudes they assume towards their age. And that is why these attitudes can be positive or negative (resulting from anxiety and fears). S. Reichard describes the above-mentioned attitude types as follows:

- Constructive attitude – individuals with this approach to life maintain positive mood, inner balance, satisfactory relationships with others, ability to enjoy life, tolerance and sense of humour. They accept their old age. For them, death is a natural element of life and it does not cause despair or grief. They are optimistic about the future as they keep a positive balance and can count on support from their social environment.

- Dependent attitude – noticed in persons who are passive and dependent on others (a spouse, a child). It is typical for individuals who have no high aspirations in life and happily withdraw from their professional roles. They need their family to provide them with the sense of security and maintain inner harmony. Persons with this attitude do not show signs of emotional imbalance, hostility or anxiety.
- Defensive attitude – typical for “psychologically armoured” persons, overly reserved, strictly following their habits, absorbed with their professional activity, self-sufficient. Their views and attitudes are conventional, they avoid expressing their own opinions, they are unable to talk about their problems and are more focused on their external life than inner experiences. They fear death and disability, and they try to hide their anxiety behind constant activity and focus on external actions. They show slight signs of nervousness and envy towards younger people.
- Hostility directed to others – typical for “old and angry” individuals who are aggressive, bad-tempered and suspicious. They tend to blame others of their own problems and failures. They are not realistic and treat old age as a time of sacrifice, poverty, infirmity and weakness. They envy young people and cannot accept their own age; they rebel against it and are afraid of death.
- Inward-directed hostility – this attitude is characteristic for persons with a clearly negative life balance, who avoid thinking about their life due to numerous failures and difficulties. It is typical for passive and less capable individuals. They do not rebel against their age but passively receive whatever the cruel fate brings upon them. Their inability to satisfy their need for love results in depressive mood. People with this attitude feel self-regret and blame themselves. They also feel lonely and useless. They are realistic about their old age and think of death as liberation from their miserable existence (see Kotlarska-Michalska, 1999, pp. 150–151).

One's attitude towards old age is determined by multiple factors (personality traits, health, economic situation etc.). The characteristics presented above indicate that factors connected with one's activity aimed at developing self, hobbies or talents, regardless of age, can be critical. In addition to its individual context, this type of activity is relational as it involves being with others and

participating in social interactions. Active lifestyle, together with one's previous experience, reflection upon life and attempts to balance it, helps seniors find meaning in life (previous, present and future – defined by goals and completion thereof). It is worth mentioning that without active commitment to the discovery and realization of their dreams, desires, passions, hobbies and talents, seniors' life loses its value (absence of meaningful activities) and they are not able to function effectively. It means that their life activity is inadequate to their abilities, lacks direction and is evaluated as negative (cf. Obuchowski 2000).

Activities of seniors, focused on developing passions and talents which make life meaningful, can be viewed from two perspectives: dynamic and static (Klamut 2002, 2012, Prężyna 1996). The dynamic aspect is understood "as the need for meaning in life, that leads to actions oriented on experiencing this meaning and is expressed in the tension caused by the absence of such actions)" (Klamut 2012, p. 139, cf. Frankl 1971, 1978; Popielski 1993). The static aspect is described as a sense of meaning in life, "as conviction that one's life matters and as a state of satisfaction resulting from a generally positive evaluation of one's own actions and references (attitudes)" (Klamut 2012, p. 140, cf. Frankl 1978, 1984, Juros 1984). Considering these aspects from the perspective of self-development activities, it can be said that the need for meaning calls for satisfaction and motivates to actions aimed at experiencing this meaning (in this paper, defined as focus on developing one's passions, hobbies, talents). The sense of meaning is a byproduct of these activities (implementation thereof) which lead to satisfaction and conviction about the value of one's life (Ibid.)

### **Talents, passions and hobbies of seniors in the context of development management**

Talents, life passions and hobbies are important for seniors as they help them experience meaning in life through individual activity and development of their personal resources. They contribute to the positive evaluation of life thanks to active lifestyle, change and personal development, what is consistent with both the dynamic and static aspect of experiencing meaning in life. Through change and development, an individual believes that their life has meaning. It results from the satisfaction felt thanks to an overall positive evaluation of their own actions and attitudes.

Talent is most frequently defined in the context of individual abilities, as well as general and targeted predispositions. Given the first criterion, talent

is an extraordinary intellectual potential, while according to the other, it means “abilities within specific functional domains” (Brzeziński, 2016, p. 128). Talented persons are aware of their talent and develop it by reflecting on it, understanding their own individual, unique interests and predispositions and recognizing how they can be used in a professional and leisure activity (Pocztowski, 2008, p. 38). According to Sękowski (2005), in addition to the above mentioned, a talented person’s characteristics include: creativity (revealed in sensitivity and deep emotionality, original thinking, unconventional approach, courage to take up new challenges and risk, tolerance of uncertainty and acceptance of change) and commitment (revealed as inner discipline, diligence, perseverance in pursuing goals, faith in one’s own abilities).

Seniors have more time which they can spend on developing their talents, hobbies and passions. How they use it will depend on many factors, including their attitude towards old age, themselves and others. Thus, the attitudes classified by S. Reichard as “dependent”, “defensive”, “hostility directed to others” and “inward-directed hostility” will not favour the activities aimed at self-development resulting from inner motivation to experience a satisfactory personal change. The “constructive” attitude focused on positive engagement in action empowers seniors to invest in activities connected with their hobbies, talents or passions and thus, experience personal growth. Thanks to these activities, seniors give meaning to their life and achieve goals, overcome obstacles, define and perceive themselves in the light of new activities and experiences. Older persons can develop their passions and talents through self-management or with inspiration and support from other people from both their nearest environment (children, grandchildren, friends) and professionals working in facilities or institutions dedicated to older citizens. The literature on the subject provides many definitions and concepts of talent management. The most general definition – in regards to organizations – says that talent management is a “process which will lead to identification and acquisition of talents according to the organization’s strategy, their retention, and that will motivate these talents to achieve the best possible results and facilitate their development so that it is beneficial for both the organization and the talents” (Borkowska, 2005, p. 117). In relation to senior self- or talent management, we can assume that management will be a process of personal identification, where the key elements (from the individual perspective of seniors) will include: commitment, utilization of talent-related potential for

self-development and its materialization as activities associated with passions and hobbies. It is also worth adding that, in terms of seniors, talent management can be a type of management which allows individuals to feel that they are constantly developing and share their talents and preferences with others. It happens as they pursue their developmental goals, remain active, feel well and are satisfied with their achievements. In case of seniors, talent management involves selection of activities adequate to individually identified talents. M. Buckingham & R.M. Vosburgh (2001) claim that talent management is an art of recognizing the domains in which every person has a natural talent, and considering how to help them develop these skills and knowledge to translate them into results that give satisfaction and are visible in achievements, actions, outcomes noticed by other people. For seniors, it is important mainly as it gives them a sense of satisfaction, fulfilment and meaning in life. When they complete their developmental (short- and long-term) objectives oriented to talents, passions and hobbies, they prove to themselves that their life has a value and that it is worth being active and share their experiences with others.

### **Methodological assumptions**

The paper presents a study into the talents and passions of the seniors living in Canada, and the values older people assign to these talents and passions. The main goal of the study was to identify the talents, passions and hobbies of the seniors in Canada, in the context of talent management and finding meaning in life through the development thereof. The research problems were formulated as the following questions: *What are the talents, passions and hobbies of the seniors – Poles – living in Canada?* and *How do seniors value their talents and passions viewed from the context of their age?*

The research was conducted using the method of qualitative interview with specific instructions. The interviews were conducted in August 2023. The sample consisted of 12 seniors from Toronto (convenience sampling), 10 women and 2 men, aged 69-89 years, who had been living in Canada for more than 50 years. For the purpose of this paper, a simple data analysis was performed to identify the dominant categories of talents, passions and hobbies identified by the respondents, expressed through typical activities within each category and the value these passions and talents represent to the seniors.

The adopted strategy enabled identification of individual, subjective and unique experiences of the respondents and, consequently, exploration and

description of individual meanings attributed to their own passions and talents from the perspective of age (the present developmental stage). It also allowed the researcher to investigate common experiences and create some universal descriptions within the shared (and separate) categories. The respondents' statements were coded as follows: the first letter symbolizing gender and the number of an interview, e.g. (K1), (M1).

The main analysis categories (Gibbs, 2011) identified were: hobbies and their value (meaning) for one's individual development. These two categories set the direction and the order of the further data analysis and interpretation.

### Seniors' talents, passions and hobbies in the light of results of original research

Developing talents, as well as passions and hobbies, is particularly meaningful for older people. It not only favours individual growth but also allows to spend time actively with people who share similar and/or different talents or interests. This, in turn, enriches individuals, facilitates their development and stimulates/inspires others to do the same. A comparison of hobbies and passions of seniors by gender is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Passions and hobbies of seniors – Poles living in Canada

Women	Men
Trips, travelling, learning about the world and interesting sites; singing (patriotic, folk, religious songs), listening to classical music; movies: psychological, historical, based on true stories; movie festivals; reading: press, the Bible, psychological novels, biographies of saints, famous people; spending time outdoors, enjoying nature, gardening, growing flowers; cooking, housework, looking after grandchildren on weekends, meetings with friends and family, crocheting, going to church, listening to religious podcasts and podcasts about the history of the catholic church; solving crossword puzzles, putting together puzzles; gaining theoretical and practical insight into healthy diet; fashion	Meetings with people, psychology, politics, sports, recreation, activities in a local church, growing plants, history of science, discoveries and inventions

Source: Authors' own research

Talents mentioned by the respondents include art: singing, playing instruments, crafts (treated as an art, a folklore cultivated and passed on to others as part of Polish identity and culture); culinary: cooking, baking; physical activities: outdoor and indoor; related to nature: growing flowers, gardening; social: meetings with family and friends (mainly from Poland); and recreation: trips, remote travels, exploring new cultures. The research results suggest that seniors prefer active lifestyle with various activities, especially artistic ones performed at home, as well as social and physical. While studying seniors' hobbies and passions, and the way they are developed, we can notice significant differences between the seniors in Poland<sup>2</sup> and the Poles living in Canada. The Polish senior citizens are engaged in many more various, recreational, physical, cultural and educational activities outside home, as well as bigger social events in non-family communities than the Poles living in Canada. Most likely, it is due to several reasons. First, during their adaptation to new living conditions, the Polish seniors in Canada were building relationships with the family and people who, like them, came to Canada for work and, due to poor language and lower socio-economic status, formed their social networks with those who had similar social, economic, linguistic and religious background. What is interesting, is that religious identity is extremely important for the Polish seniors in Canada. They speak about their relationship with God, everyday activities which bring them closer to God and their engagement in the life of their local church. This aspect is not mentioned at all by the seniors living in Poland. It most likely results from the fact that local church communities were a source of support for the Poles abroad, they helped them cultivate their traditions, culture, relationships or piety/religious practices – the elements which reminded them about Poland, their family homes and life before emigration. It was something that united them in a foreign land, gave them a sense of security, where they could find people with similar attitudes towards life and work; these communities helped them take some actions to adapt to the new reality (multicultural, with diverse values and ideas). The phrase “take actions to adapt” has been used intentionally as we can notice that despite living in Canada for more than 50 years, the Polish seniors still meet almost exclusively with other Poles, speak Polish, cultivate their traditions, pass on fundamental values, especially patriotism and Polish identity (through history,

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<sup>2</sup> Data regarding Polish seniors are presented in: N.G. Pikuła (2023). Life passions of seniors in the context of personal resource management. *Edukacja Ustawiczna Dorosłych* 4, pp. 223–233.



traditions and holiday and religious celebrations, patriotic, folk or religious songs sang and taught to the next generations). Thus, seniors develop their passions and hobbies in a certain scope and the most traditional forms. They do not benefit from the publicly available offers dedicated to seniors but take part only in activities organized by the Polish community or local catholic churches. It can also be noticed that activities supporting adaptation to the new social reality have not resulted in a new lifestyle, integration of new social principles or values. Quite contrary, living abroad has strengthen their sense of national identity, of being Poles, motivated them to live according to traditional values and transfer these values to the younger generations in their traditional, unaltered form. It could be argued that their hobbies and passions might be developed less than in other senior groups due to cultural, linguistic and economic limitations. However, the sense of happiness and fulfilment that radiated from the respondents as they talked about their life, economic and family successes (children, grandchildren), time they spent on personal development, cultivating family bonds and preserving Polish traditions, is evidence of satisfactory, meaningful and worthy life (cf. Obuchowski 2000, Popielski 1993, 2008, Frankl 1984). According to S. Reichard's classification, Polish seniors in Canada represent the "constructive" attitude towards old age. They are cheerful, internally balanced and have satisfactory relationships with others. They can enjoy life, accept their own old age and can share themselves, their passions, hobbies and values with others.

From the perspective of the analyses conducted, it was also important to further specify the value that seniors assign to their passions and hobbies. The respondents appreciate in the first place the very fact that they have some passions and hobbies because they "help see the meaning and purpose, bring joy and satisfaction and drive curiosity" (K3, 89y). They facilitate "spiritual and intellectual growth. Despite age and different ailments, one can enjoy life and can be constantly enriched by interactions with other people. One can also be a support for others – kids, grandchildren and friends" (K4, 82y). Thus, if developed, passions and hobbies give direction and meaning to human life, both to the respondents and people around them. Thanks to their passions and willingness to share them, seniors spend time together. They see it as "the desire to survive, friendships, satisfaction with meetings over a cup of coffee, discussions about the present affairs, thanking God for each day" (K1, 83y). Polish seniors in Canada constantly refer to their religious

and spiritual life. These domains are very important to them, not only in the context of life balance but also as a preparation to death, to meet God. One of the respondents says that thanks to her passion – religious books, prayer and activity in her local church community – she can prepare herself “for eternal life in heaven with the Lord” (K2, 85y). Another respondent adds: “Developing my passions and experience with family, friends and numerous people from different countries helps me constantly grow in my spiritual life and my everyday life with God” (M1, 79y).

Time spent on developing passions and hobbies also helps keep distance to life and different experiences. It is a time when one can “sit in peace and dive into a book. You forget about everything. And, also crafts – it is the best way to grow and relax” (K5, 70y). Thanks to passions, “you never get bored, there is no routine” (K7, 68y). Time dedicated to hobbies and personal development allows the respondents to re-discover themselves. One of the seniors, a retired doctor, says: “I keep discovering my talents. Hobby is a time of relax, a time for myself when I learn for fun. It is also a time for new friendships. It helps me escape from loneliness, opens new horizons. It keeps opening new ways of thinking, new experiences. I learn something all the time, gain knowledge, it fascinates me; this and travelling. Thanks to this passion, I have visited almost all continents, I got to remote places, learned about their history, culture, nature. I can fill gaps in my thinking, discover my talents. Passions are an excellent escape from the daily reality” (K8, 74y). This indicates that, apart from relational and spiritual, seniors also value the developmental, learning aspect of their passions and hobbies. The educational value [“cultivating hobbies stimulates brain cells to think” (K6, 86y)] is emphasized by all the respondents. One of them pointed out that people should prepare children to developing their passions and hobbies as soon as possible. In his opinion, passions and hobbies present unlimited developmental opportunities for seniors “but one should prepare for it and start from the early age, and cultivate it and be very serious about it so it does not turn out that old age has come but one lacks wisdom” (M2, 74y).

Thus, seniors see numerous values in developing/pursuing their passions and hobbies from the previous years (spiritual, educational, social, overall development). They think that one should prepare from the very young age to developing passions and hobbies to be able to continue discovering one’s potential and developing it in various areas (age is not a barrier, the only

obstacle is health). They underline that passions and hobbies make them persons who have positive approach to life, find it meaningful and pursue their past, present and future goals (cf. Buckingham, Vosburgh, 2001; Borkowska 2005; Popielski 2008). This, in turn, strengthens their sense of meaning in life and self-worth regarding age, social or economic status.

For the majority of them, active life is the result of their passions, hobbies and life experiences (emigration). They engage in physical, recreational, social, artistic (singing, listening to music, DIY) and environmental (growing flowers). They spend a lot of time cooking, as well as reading and watching movies. They recognize the developmental, educational, affiliation and recreational value of these activities. The Polish seniors living in Canada are culturally and socially rooted in the Polish tradition, values and culture. Their experiences from life in Poland have the deepest impact on their present way of living and, despite numerous social and technological changes, their present functioning in Canada is still based on their past experiences. However, it does not limit their development but (due to poor adaptation to the multicultural and multireligious society) only narrows down the scope of their relationships and activities to people from their families and religious or national communities.

## Summary

The development of passions and hobbies is one of the factors that motivate seniors to live, be active, overcome age barriers like diseases or reduced functional abilities. Focused on development, the need to act in order to become better, more excellent in new areas, or caring about self and own comfort in life by fulfilling one's dreams, using one's own potential and learning new skills, is the best way to ensure the sense of satisfaction with life. The motivation to act and the desire to grow have become an excellent tool to manage their own potential, based on their own resources and with support from other people from the same cultural background (Poles). In terms of self-management of potential among the seniors living abroad, activities that would facilitate full participation and development of their personal resources should be introduced. These activities include:

- support in learning foreign language (English) which becomes their official language;

- improved language competencies will allow them to benefit more fully from the cultural and educational offer both before and after the retirement;
- linguistic competencies will allow them to build inter-cultural relationships and benefit from the government's offer dedicated to seniors (various activities);
- access to senior education will help them better recognize their own potential and, consequently, develop new passions, hobbies and talents, thus, expand their personal resources with institutional support addressed to seniors.

Of course, Polish associations or church communities favour senior development, but their offer can be always enriched with other activities offered by the governmental institutions, programmes or initiatives for the senior citizens in Canada. From the perspective of seniors living abroad, stronger linguistic competencies and education on multicultural society is what they need to be able to fully manage their talents, passions and hobbies. This will not contradict their socio-cultural values and experiences gained in their country of origin but rather help them use the benefits offered by the Canadian government to older people. They will also be able to develop, discover and cultivate their passions and, consequently, evaluate their life situation even more positive and stay motivated to change themselves and others.

**Abstract:** Like personal development, managing own talents and hobbies is a lifelong process and activity. The paper focuses on the passions and hobbies of the seniors who have been living in emigration (Canada) for several decades, and on values they assign to these passions and hobbies in the context of the meaning and satisfaction in life. To confirm that passions can be developed also in late life, a study, using a qualitative interview, was conducted among 12 seniors from the Polish diaspora in Canada. The interview procedure as well as the direction of data analysis and interpretation are described in the empirical part. Conclusions in the final section confirm that developing passions and hobbies gives meaning and purpose to the life of seniors and helps them feel fulfilled. There are also some postulates formulated regarding recommended activities dedicated to seniors living abroad to help them fully manage the development of their passions, hobbies and talents – not only as part of their home activities and interactions with other Poles, but also by participating in initiatives offered by the institutions that support senior citizens in Canada.

**Keywords:** passion, talent, senior living abroad, personal resource management

**Streszczenie:** Zarządzanie własnymi talentami oraz pasjami podobnie jak rozwój człowieka jest procesem i aktywnością całościową. W prezentowanym artykule skoncentrowano się na pasjach i zainteresowaniach seniorów żyjących na emigracji (Kanada) od kilkudziesięciu lat oraz na wartościach, jakie im nadają w perspektywie sensu życia i życiowego spełnienia. Aby potwierdzić, że pasje można rozwijać również w okresie późnej dorosłości przeprowadzono badania z wykorzystaniem wywiadu jakościowego wśród 12 seniorów z Polonii Kanadyjskiej, żyjących w Toronto. W części empirycznej sformułowano procedurę prowadzenia badań oraz określono kierunek analizy i interpretacji danych. W konkluzjach końcowych potwierdzono, iż pasje i zainteresowania rozwijane przez seniorów nadają ich życiu sens, cel i pozwalają czuć się w pełni zrealizowanymi. Ponadto sformułowano postulat, jakie działania należy podjąć – w odniesieniu do osób żyjących na emigracji – aby mogły w pełni zarządzać rozwojem własnych pasji, zainteresowań, talentów nie tylko poprzez aktywność domocentryczną i skoncentrowaną wokół Polonii, ale również podejmowaną w profesjonalnych instytucjach działających na rzecz wsparcia i rozwoju seniorów żyjących w Kanadzie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pasja, talent, senior na emigracji, zarządzanie zasobami osobowymi

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