APPLYING AGE MANAGEMENT IN HRM: EVIDENCE FROM CZECH COMPANIES

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Abstract - Environmental changes can have significant effects on organizations, particularly demographic changes such as aging of the population, changes in age structure, and changes in employee behavior. All of these factors must be taken into account in human resources management. This paper presents the results of a survey conducted in Czech companies, which aimed to identify whether organizations consider the diverse needs of different age groups, apply age management measures, and observe benefits. The survey found that the biggest benefits were the retention of key employees, the reduction of employee turnover, and the increase of employee motivation. The most commonly used measures include adapting work programs to suit different age groups, reassigning staff to more suitable positions, providing employee healthcare, promoting physical fitness and healthy eating, and supporting personal and career development through skills training at all stages of an employee's career.

Keywords - Age Management, Human Resources Management, Age Management Measures.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizations are currently facing various changes in their environment, including demographic trends that reflect an aging population, changing age structure, and employee behaviors, particularly among members of the so-called "Generation Y and Z". Coupled with the growing emphasis on work-life balance, it has become necessary for organizations to adopt measures that can help all employees realize their potential and achieve job satisfaction. An approach that incorporates diverse employee requirements across different age groups to optimize their contributions to the organization is termed age management and is a part of diversity management.

The aim of this article is to present the results of a survey carried out to investigate the application of age management in companies in the Czech Republic. The primary objective was to determine whether organizations are addressing this topic and to identify the measures and goals that are being pursued in this area.

II. AGE MANAGEMENT AS A HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT CONCEPT

In age management, 'age-related factors should be taken into account in daily management, including work arrangements and individual work tasks, so that everyone, regardless of age, feels empowered in reaching their own and corporate goals (Ilmarinen, 2012, p. 2). Although age management isoften associated with aging workers (50+), age management measures must be aimed at all groups of workers. The organizational personnel policy should aim to leverage the strengths of employees at every age (Štorová, 2013). The ultimate goal of using age management is to maintain the long-term work ability of each individual, which benefits not only the employee and the organization but also the entire society.

The concept of age management is closely related to Work Ability, which was introduced by Ilmarinen et al. (1997). Work Ability refers to the balance between an employee's resources and the demands of their job. Initially, age management was mainly associated with older workers and their ability to continue working (Gould et al., 2008). However, it is now evident that to maintain the work capability of older workers, appropriate measures need to be implemented earlier, and it is not sufficient to only focus on aging groups. Instead, the specificities and requirements of all workers of all ages should be considered. The ultimate goal of age management is to maintain the long-term work ability of each individual, which benefits not only the employee but also the organization and the entire society.

2.1. The Benefits of Age Management at Individual, Organizational, and Social Levels

Age management has significant benefits for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. At the individual level, age management practices facilitate the effective use of employees' abilities and support their longer-term employment. Measures aimed at maintaining good health, changing attitudes towards planning for the future, and promoting lifelong learning are essential for improving work ability (Nilsson, 2020). Such practices ultimately lead to a reasonable quality of professional and personal life, which contributes to individuals' overall satisfaction.

At the organizational level, age management is important for retaining experienced and highly qualified employees, responding to organizational changes, and promoting socially responsible behavior. HR managers can implement measures that improve the organization's image, promote a positive internal climate, and support employee development

(Horváthová et al., 2021). This leads to better relationships with employees, greater satisfaction and loyalty, and a desire for career growth. Satisfied and healthy employees also contribute to the company's prosperity through higher work productivity and efficiency, as well as indirectly through reduced incapacity for work and presenteeism.

On a societal level, the application of age management practices is crucial for addressing macroeconomic issues related to labor market policy. Demographic developments require the use of pension and social policy instruments to maximize the contribution of aging workers to economic and social development (Fabisiak and Prokurat, 2012). The public interest in the retention and development of aging workers is aligned with the benefits to economic and social development. Age management practices support older workers to remain active in the labor market, resulting in increased productivity and economic growth, as well as social benefits.

III. APPLICATION OF AGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE CZECH ORGANIZATIONS

Age management is an effective way for organizations to deal with demographic changes. By adopting a planned approach, organizations can not only prepare for the future and thrive in the global market, but also mitigate the risks associated with employee turnover (Pillinger, 2008). Implementing appropriate measures can help prolong employees' working lives, leverage the potential of parents on parental leave or those who care for both their families and aging parents, and ensure attention is given to new graduates entering the labor market.

Age management is a relatively new concept that has gained significant attention in recent years. Many organizations have already adopted age management practices in response to the aging of their workforce and the potential loss of employees across different age categories. Age management has been introduced both reactively, as a response to the retirement of older employees, and proactively, to prevent the loss of employees in different age groups.

In March 2023, a research study on age management in organizations was conducted, with the participation of 189 Czech organizations as the focus. The purpose of the study was to determine whether managers were aware of the varying needs of employees at different ages and whether these needs were taken into account in their human resource management practices. Additionally, the study sought to identify the objectives of organizations in the area of age management and the measures used to implement such practices.The questionnaire was developed based on a comprehensive literature review that outlined the current state of age management implementation both within the Czech Republic and internationally (Vraňková and Stareček, 2022; Blomé et al., 2020; Urbancová, 2017; Ciutiene and Railaite, 2016; Fabisiak and Prokurat, 2012). The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, including 15 research-related questions and 5 identification questions. Respondents were given multiple options to select from for most of the questions, with the ability to provide additional comments independently. The questionnaire was administered using the MS Form platform, enabling anonymous data collection.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results of Research

The following information emerged from the survey. Based on the identification questions, 7 organizations (4%) from the primary sector, 126 organizations from the secondary sector (66%) and 56 organizations (30%) from the tertiary sector took part in the survey. With regard to the size of the organization, 72 of the organizations (38 %) addressed have up to 50 employees, 78 of the organizations (41%) have 50 to 250 employees, and 39 of the organizations (21%) have more than 250 employees. It was also found that 100 of the organizations (53%) are family businesses and 89 (47%) are not.Generally, we can say, that 96% of organizations recognize that employees of different ages have different (specific) needs and 76% of them consider age as a factor in their human resource management. However, only 54% of these organizations take into account the needs of all specific age groups. The next most common responses were that they target aging workers (39 organizations), graduates (38 organizations), and parents on parental leave (30 organizations). Often, organizations experience a mix of preferences among these groups. Interestingly, only a small number of organizations focus on the needs of the "sandwich generation" (11 organizations), and 33% of organizations do not take employee age into consideration at all. Furthermore, from the follow-up question, it was found that these organizations have no plans to address this issue in the near future. On the other hand, 71% of organizations are actively dealing with this issue, and 11% have plans to address it in the near future.It was also found that although the organizations does not intentionally consider age in their human resource management, they use some measures that are linked to age management. The most common argument for not considering age in HRM is that, according to a survey, 62% of organizations have not yet noticed that employees of different ages have different needs. Organizations that do not consider age in their human resource management have admitted that they would address the issue if faced with certain negative consequences. Specifically, increasing employee dissatisfaction (26%), decreasing labor productivity (23%), increasing employee turnover (19%), and increasing sickness absence (17%) were mentioned as factors that would motivate them to take action.

In the following question, we asked organizations to select from a list of measures they apply to manage age in the workplace. In Table 1, we can see which measures organizations commonly apply.

We can say that there are four significant measures that organizations typically use to manage age in the organizations: adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups, reassignment of staff to more suitable positions, provision of employee healthcare, promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating, and support for personal and career development through skills training at every stage of an employee's career.

Age management measures	**Answers**	
	Absolutely	Relatively
Adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups, e.g., adaptation of the working environment or working hours	113	60 %
Reassignment of staff to the more suitable position	103	54 %
Provision of employee healthcare, promotion of physical fitness, and healthy eating	97	51 %
Support for personal and career development through skills training at every stage of an employee's career	94	50 %
Development of health and safety measures	63	33 %
Workforce planning for age diversity and promotion of a positive age policy	56	30 %
Creating tools to support intergenerational learning	29	15 %
Incentive programs according to the needs of different generations	28	15 %
Use of mentoring and reverse mentoring	22	12 %

Table1: Age management measures

Organizations had the opportunity to express their opinions on other measures and practices regarding age management that they implement. Among the mentioned measures are taking vacations taking into account different age groups and employee needs. The company applies flexible working hours and an individual approach to employees to take into account their needs and facilitate work-life balance. Health support and disease prevention are another important measure that organizations implement. For example, employees have access to health days, stress management, healthy eating, and tailored education.

Other measures include support for parents after maternity leave and free psychological support. Organizations also focus on the care of physical and mental health and ergonomics at work. Employees are supported in developing their talents and mentoring. Companies also offer part-time jobs and participation in mentoring for older employees. Shared extracurricular activities and an inclusive approach are further measures related to age management.An important measure is also the long-term transfer of managerial positions to allow continuity and stability in leadership roles. Companies offer educational programs and internships for graduates and allow for a shorter workweek. Different approaches to different job professions and employee needs are another measure that companies implement.

The aim of the following question was to determine the benefits that respondents had observed with respect to age management measures. Participants were presented with a list of potential benefits to choose from and were also given the opportunity to provide their own experiences. The results are presented in Table 2, which displays the most frequently reported benefits in descending order of prevalence.

The retention of key employees was identified as the most frequently observed benefit of age management measures, with 83% of organizations reporting this result. Reductions in employee turnover and increases in employee motivation were also commonly cited. Although other benefits did not exhibit the same prevalence as thesethree main outcomes, their impact remains notable.

If we look in more detail at the answers obtained, we find the following connections. To retain key employees, adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups is 104 times applied followed by reassignment of staff to more suitable positions (86 times), provision of employee healthcare, promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating (83 times), and support for personal and career development through skills training at every stage of an employee's career (80 times). For turnover reduction and increasing employee motivation are used an adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups, reassignment of staff to more suitable positions and provision of employee healthcare, promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating.

Age management benefits	**Answers**	
	Absolutely	Relatively
Retaining key staff	156	83%
Reducing employee turnover	121	64%
Increasing employee motivation	107	57%
Improving organizational culture and positively impacting employee values	80	42%
Developing employee education, knowledge, and skills	73	39%
Enhancing the company's reputation	72	38%
Improving employee performance	70	37%
Enhancing employee health	65	34%
Acquiring new talent	41	22%

Table2: Age management benefits

Other following benefits have been identified by organizations that implement age management. Age management increases the productivity and competitiveness of the organization by optimizing the utilization of the abilities and experience of employees, regardless of their age. It helps the organization to retain and develop its most valuable resources, experienced and qualified employees who might otherwise retire or seek employment elsewhere. Additional benefits are observed in improving intergenerational relationships and increasing collaboration, which can lead to a greater sense of community and teamwork. Through age management, organizations can adapt to demographic changes in the workforce, such as population aging and labor shortages. It increases the motivation and engagement of employees who realize that the organization values their abilities and experience, regardless of their age. Additional benefits observed are the reduction of costs for recruitment and training of new employees by allowing existing employees to develop their skills and qualifications and improving the image of the organization as a responsible employer that cares about its employees' well-being. Lastly, the benefits of organizational sustainability can be mentioned through the reduction of employee turnover and the improvement of work efficiency and productivity.

4.2. Discussion

The results of thesurvey indicate that age management practices are gaining ground in human resource policies. Urbancová (2017) stated that age management practices are used in 29% of organizations. Therefore, we can say that this number has grown significantly.

Comparison with a study by Krestová and Kresta (2021a) showed that thefocus of organizations on age management practices remains relatively stable. However, the previous survey only surveyed signatories of the Diversity Charter, who were presumed to be knowledgeable about age management. In contrast, the current study sampled organizations in the Czech Republic in general, revealing slight variations in certain areas.

Regarding the most commonly used measures, there were notable differences between the two surveys. In the survey (Krestová and Kresta, 2021a), the four most common measures were support for personal and career development (75.9%), provision of employee healthcare and promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating (72.2%), adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups (66.7%), and development of health and safety measures (64.8%). The present study found that the main measures were adaptation of work programs to suit different age groups (60%), reassignment of staff to more suitable positions (54%), provision of employee healthcare and promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating (51%), and support for personal and career development through skills training (50%).

The previous study found that the top three benefits of age management practices were the retention of key employees (83%), the increase of employee motivation (74%), and the improvement of organizational culture and employee values (66%). On the contrary, the current study found that the most significant benefit, the retention of key staff, remained the same (83%), but the other two most significant benefits were different. Specifically, the current study showed that reducing employee turnover was the second most significant benefit (64%), followed by increasing employee motivation (57%).

These differences could be attributed to the fact that the previous survey only sampled Diversity Charter signatories who may have different goals than average organizations. In addition, age management is becoming increasingly recognized and more organizations are adopting it. However, some organizations may lack precise knowledge in this area, leading them to select only the most well-known measures, which may not be directly related to age management and overlook other benefits (such as improving organizational reputation or attracting new talent).Numerous organizations continue to face the challenge of identifying suitable age management strategies. To address this issue, Ilmarinen (2012) has formulated a tangible approach utilizing the Work Ability Index, whereas Krestová and Kresta (2021b) or Franek and Krestová (2023) have suggested a methodology based on the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

Future research could investigate whether the implementation of age management practices differs depending on factors such as organizational size, industry sector, or family business status. To uncover such differences, statistical analysis methods can be utilized.

V. CONCLUSION

Age management is a set of organizational strategies and practices designed to effectively manage an aging workforce. This concept offers significant advantages to organizations seeking to maintain and develop their workforce during demographic and economic changes. One of the main benefits of age management is its potential to improve productivity and competitiveness. By optimizing the utilization of workers' abilities and experiences, regardless of their age, organizations can reap benefits in the form of improved work efficiency, reduced errors, and enhanced overall performance.

Additionally, age management has the potential to retain and develop an organization's most valuable resources, experienced and qualified workers who might otherwise retire or seek employment elsewhere. This approach enables the organization to

take advantage of the long-term experience of its workforce and maintain a competitive advantage in the job market.

The aim of this paper was to present the results of a survey conducted to investigate the application of age management practices in companies in the Czech Republic. The findings revealed that age management practices are currently implemented in human resource management practices, with adaptations of work programs to suit different age groups, staff reassignment to more suitable positions, provision of employee healthcare, and promotion of physical fitness and healthy eating being common practices. The benefits of these practices were found to include the retention of key employees, the reduction of employee turnover, and the increase in employee motivation.

Future research can explore how age management practices vary by organizational size, industry sector, and family business status. Such investigations may provide additional information on the effectiveness of age management practices and their impact on organizational outcomes.

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