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Article

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Navigating the age mosaic of employees: unveiling insights into age diversity strategies in modern workplaces

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ABSTRACT

Diversity management is a contemporary human resource (HR) trend that underscores the development of human potential through the respectful consideration of age, gender, culture, health, sexual orientation, race, religion, and overall organizational diversity. However, the effectiveness of these practices remains inconsistent. With regard to demographic developments, the importance of age diversity is increasing. Organizations are starting to realize that age diversity is a problem and that it matters. The current findings help elucidate major considerations for this urgent matter. This article seeks to illuminate the existing research gap by identifying the nuanced factors characterizing organizations concerning age management and the promotion of intergenerational cooperation. Conducted through quantitative research (ordinal and nominal data) utilizing the Computer Assisted Web Interviewing method ($n_1 = 201$) in diverse organizations representative of the Czech Republic's composition (we use factor analysis and ANOVA), as per the Czech Statistical Office, our findings emphasize the prevalent concern for age-related aspects within organizations. Three key factors emerged as pivotal in characterizing organizations based on their approach to age diversity and intergenerational cooperation: (1) diversity, equality, and inclusion; (2) age management implementation; and (3) flexible employment. Notably, our research revealed a statistically significant disparity in organizations' approaches to age diversity based on their sector and size. This study not only contributes valuable insights into the current landscape of age diversity strategies but also underscores the existing research gap, emphasizing the need for further exploration and targeted interventions in this evolving field of organizational behavior and HR management.

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1. Introduction

The current labor market offers many attractive jobs, but there is also an emerging threat of a shortage of skilled workers (Brunello & Wruuck, 2021; Li et al., 2021). One of the ways in which organizations can differentiate themselves in the labor market and attract skilled and talented employees (Morukian, 2022) is through HR marketing that is based on the promotion of diversity management (Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019; Urbancová & Vrabcová, 2022; Urick et al., 2017), and especially age management (Falát et al., 2023). An effective setting of diversity management, including age management, can support organizational innovation (Chaudhry et al., 2021), effective human resource management (Falát et al., 2023), improve HR marketing (Li et al., 2020), and increase employer brand attractiveness (Urbancová & Vrabcová, 2022).

Potential job candidates look for what added value they can bring to the organization and what added value the organization can bring to them (Van der Voordt & Jensen, 2023; Nweiser & Dajnoki, 2022). If employees are satisfied, they perform their jobs better, which remains a key parameter for all

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employers and gives them a competitive advantage (Wisuchat & Taecharungroj, 2022; Martos-Pedrero et al., 2022). Diversity management and age management are integral parts of an organization's human resource management strategy (Sobrino-De Toro et al., 2019). Age management, as part of diversity management, refers to strategies and practices aimed at maintaining good health and well-being as employees age. It encompasses a holistic approach (Urbancová & Vrabcová, 2022) that goes beyond merely addressing medical problems and includes lifestyle, preventive health measures, and the overall quality of life.

In recent years, there have been significant demographic changes, especially due to population aging and the associated crisis in the pension system, which is why age diversity is the most discussed and widely supported in practice (Csoba & Ladancsik, 2023; Li et al., 2021). Together with globalization, the implementation of diversity management is becoming an essential necessity and also an opportunity to revive the labor market through the better inclusion of the so-far neglected workforce: women and men with young children, disabled workers, 50+ older people in the labor market, or, on the contrary, graduates with no work experience, etc. (Graczyk-Kucharska et al., 2020; Chillakuri, 2020; Seliverstova & Pierog, 2021). These workers represent untapped labor reserves that organizations should primarily focus on and support by implementing age management.

The management of an organization always has the opportunity to influence what employees and people outside the organization say about them and how the organization is perceived as employers. Based on these signals, it is the responsibility of the organization's management and human resources department to present the organization in such a way that will attract the best talents (Latukha et al., 2022) and move the organization forward. Proper and effective diversity management (along with age management), including working conditions for all employees without exception, will not only help the organization save costs but also attract the best of the best employees.

Based on the literature review of current global research results, a knowledge gap can be identified in terms of the lack of comparison across sectors and diverse types of organizations focusing on age diversity, or more precisely, age management. So far, the theory has not fully answered the question concerning differences in the setting of age management in organizations and specific job performance requirements depending on sector, size, type, annual turnover, or majority ownership. The second issue that has not been clearly addressed by research so far is the identification of factors that influence age management settings. These factors have not been identified in a wide range of organizations, which should help to understand age management and avoid errors and discrimination when implementing it. In summary, these factors can be used to achieve long-term competitive advantage and social sustainability when the conditions are right (Van der Voordt & Jensen, 2023; Wisuchat & Taecharungroj, 2022; Urbancová & Vrabcová, 2022). Therefore, this study will answer the question of the organizations' appropriate approach to ensuring age diversity and supporting socially sustainable business.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify factors characterizing organizations according to their approach to age management and promotion of intergenerational cooperation.

2. Theoretical background

Human capital is considered to be the unique and most important resource of any organization, capable of responding proactively to changes in its environment while at the same time being very difficult to replace. In line with Kumar (2023), Hitka and Ližbetinová (2023), the management of organizations must focus on improving the conditions for talent retention (internal HR marketing) in addition to effectively acquiring talented candidates (external HR marketing). Organizations must make it a priority to take care of their own employees, to create suitable working conditions for them (Finsel et al., 2023; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2020), and to increase their satisfaction and loyalty, as such employees can be continuously developed and can also grow further personally, i.e. to develop their potential on the whole (Van der Voordt & Jensen, 2023; Martos-Pedrero et al., 2022; Graczyk-Kucharska et al., 2020). The more heterogeneous the employee composition in an organization, the more complex management is expected to be (Mousa et al., 2020), however, with greater opportunities for the development of individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole and greater opportunities to achieve a competitive advantage (Narayana, 2022). By promoting a positive work culture that supports diversity in

all respects (age, gender, disability, skin color, etc.) and by creating favorable working conditions, organizations can contribute to increasing employee satisfaction (Finsel et al., 2023; García-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Alam & Duck, 2021), reducing employee turnover (Gyurák Babelová et al., 2020), and ultimately to improving CSR and organizational sustainability (Martos-Pedrero et al., 2022).

Given the evolution of the labor market and the employee structure, working conditions must be set in accordance with the diversity elements that the organization supports (Graczyk-Kucharska et al., 2020; Chillakuri, 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2021). The largest number of organizations support age diversity and then gender diversity, but this is not always implemented correctly. The improper implementation of diversity management (e.g. preferring women over men in management positions regardless of professional skills and competencies, or automatic wage and salary increases for women only without analyzing the salary development of all employees regardless of gender) leads to demotivation, performance stagnation (Li et al., 2021), feelings of discrimination, and an increase in affective behavior leading to employment termination by the employee.

At present, significant changes are taking place in the structure of the economically active population not only in the Czech Republic but also in the EU and globally, which is reflected in changes in both the domestic and international labor markets (Csoba & Ladancsik, 2023). In addition to the increasing length of working life as a result of the growing human life expectancy and the pressure exerted by governments in developed countries, the changes in the labor market with focus on adaptability is equally an important factor in these changes. Job preferences and requirements change for employees with respect to their age. Younger employees promote diversity in organizations (different communication languages, balanced teams according to gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.); on the other hand, they are very specific regarding the setting of their working conditions and work organization, which is in line with Sobrino-De Toro et al. (2019) or Fasbender and Gerpott (2022). It is precisely age management that helps promote intergenerational cooperation of all employees in organizations regardless of their age and harness the potential of all groups of workers in the labor market and organizations.

Age management emphasizes the use of all employees' knowledge regardless of their age, ensuring the knowledge continuity, achieving a competitive advantage for organizations, and, at the same time, measures that help to support different age categories of employees in organizations and detect and reduce the negative effects of agism. Burmeister et al. (2020) confirm that knowledge transfer may fulfill psychological needs of age-diverse workers therefore management of the organization must support effective communication. Stakeholders in the area of age management have different ambitions at different levels. However, at the organizational level, the development of human potential through continuous training and increasing labor productivity must be emphasized. Age management can be viewed as a social responsibility of the organization. More and more organizations are linking responsible business to human resource management.

Nowadays, it is becoming more and more common that human resource management should focus not only on improving the quality of working life and the development of employees of all ages but also on increasing their productivity, employee satisfaction, and readiness for change, emphasizing the need to present the organization as a good employer both internally and externally. This is because organizations can only achieve their predefined goals and visions through appropriately chosen HR strategies supported by a suitable, continuously analyzed organizational culture and by building a strong good employer brand by the application of current trends in human resource management (Kumar, 2023; Mahmoud et al., 2021). Given the current demographic trends, age management is a must for organizations.

Chillakuri (2020) adds that every employee of an organization regardless of age is different in terms of education, experience, values, expectations, family, lifestyle and work ethic, which has a strong influence on the orientation of organizations. Understanding the specifics and differences between employees can help organizations successfully introduce new employees, regardless of age, into the work environment. For graduates (starting their first job), the most important aspects of work are career options, financial remuneration and meaningful work that is non-discriminatory, i.e. equal opportunities for women, men, healthy and disabled people, etc. It is also about the job itself as well as the balance between work and private life. Then they are motivated to stay in their job for a long time. Research by Anisic et al. (2020) support this claim and also state that the main expectations and requirements of

university graduates before entering employment include work-life balance, opportunities for further education and development of their existing skills.

However, the career option is important regardless of the employee's age. North (2024) adds that different career stages want different things, yielding potential benefits for all.

Although stereotypes about generations of employees are still ubiquitous (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015), they must be viewed as generalized information that does not say anything about the potential of a given employee at a given age. All knowledge workers are needed for the organization regardless of their age. The authors of the article identify with Rauvola et al. (2019) and Trzesniewski and Donnellan (2010) who state that the manager should recognize the ability of employees to change themselves and their environment rather than relying on generational labels, and Rudolph and Zacher (2022) add the importance of a critical perspective in managerial evaluation of so-called generational differences.

Unfortunately, any current view of defining and categorizing workers into so-called generations does not contain everything that managers in organizations need to understand each employee in every age category to support their stabilization, increase motivation and satisfaction.

3. Materials and methods

The empirical research was designed in four sequential phases. In the first phase, we identified the research gap based on a literature review. The qualitative data from this phase was subsequently used in the next phase, where we formulated the research objective, identified the target group, decomposed the objective into attributes (identification markers, aspects of age management), and further into questions along with defining variable types and scales for ordinal variables. The survey was then launched, and data was collected within the designated period using CAWI. In the third phase, we tested the consistency of the data (e.g. using scale reliability) and employed tools of descriptive and inferential statistics to obtain empirical results. Finally, in the fourth phase, we interpreted the results and formulated our own implications, which were expanded to include theoretical and practical perspectives that our findings provide.

The quantitative data ($n_1 = 201$) were obtained through Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (i. e. CAWI) interviews with the respondents from the organizations, with the respondents being approached as representatives of middle and senior management, and in the case of smaller organizations, the owners. Respondents were selected to ensure the representativeness of the sample set according to size and sector according to the composition of the Czech Statistical Office. Contacts were selected from a database of organizations owned by an external organization that ensured data collection, representativeness, validity and reliability. Respondents were sent an e-mail with a link to a website with a questionnaire and unique login details, after opening which the questionnaire was made available on Google Form. Respondents' answers were automatically sent to the server and continuously checked. The time and place of questioning depended entirely on the respondents, they could answer at home or at work, interrupt the questionnaire at any time and then continue it again. Responses were recorded in electronic form compatible with statistical tools. The data were evaluated using descriptive statistics and multivariate statistics. For ordinal data, a scale from 1 to 4 was used. This scale measured the level of maturity of a given aspect – the higher the value, the more developed the aspect was in the organization. For example, if a respondent indicated a value of 1 for the aspect of Age Management, it meant that this aspect was practically not implemented in the organization. Conversely, a value of 4 would indicate a high level of maturity for that aspect. A reliability test was carried out within the framework of statistical testing, using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient by IBM SPSS Statistics. The value of this coefficient was 0.664, which can be considered a sufficient level on a four-point scale, and the scale can hence be considered reliable.

The research was conducted in March and April 2023. The basic identification questions of the questionnaire survey include the following variables (see Table 1).

To identify the mutual relationships between variables, factor analysis (multivariate statistics) followed up on the results of descriptive statistics. The factor analysis (after the correlation analysis and principal component analysis) used the Varimax method and the Kaiser-Guttman rule for the selection of substantial factors, according to Anderson (2015). The objective of the analysis was to determine what factors

Table 1. Organizations that participated in the research – basic data.

| Characteristics | Categories | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The sector of organization's operation | Primary 11 | Secondary 60 | Tertiary 131 |
| The size of the organization | ≤50 74 | 51–250 61 | >250 67 |
| Majority ownership | Domestic 157 | Foreign 45 | |
| The type of organization | Private 130 | Public 46 | Non-profit 26 |
| Annual turnover* | ≤10 mil. EUR 70 | 11–50 mil. EUR 34 | >50 mil EUR 38 |

Source: own survey; * - The annual turnover was not known for 60 respondents.

influence the approach of the organization to the individual aspect of the age management. Since this is an exploratory factor analysis aimed at identifying latent factors without prior assumptions, it is methodologically unnecessary to use a validated instrument. Exploratory studies, such as ours, typically use exploratory factor analysis as a tool to examine the structure of data (Urbaniak et al., 2022). The goal is not to confirm the mutual consistency of predetermined variables (as in the case of confirmatory factor analysis), and therefore, the use of a validated instrument is not essential. Factor analysis was based on a correlation matrix. Before the application of factor analysis, the correlation matrix was created and subjected to further analysis and interpreted with a view to the suitability of further calculations using multidimensional methods. The Varimax method, chosen for its ability to simplify the factor structure by maximizing the variance of squared loadings, was employed.

According to the Anderson (2015) is the factor analysis employed in the contribution studies and evaluates mutual linear relations between the variables observed, which are perceived by the factor analysis as the result of the existence of directly unmeasurable known or hypothetical general influences. It must be noted that, in the case of the factor analysis, the approach is more heuristic, requiring a profound understanding of the issue at hand, but also extensive knowledge and experience with the selected method of analysis for the correct interpretation of results.

This method enhances the interpretability of factors by promoting a clear, simple structure. The factor Z-score was recorded for further analyses associated with the identified latent factors, and its calculation was based on linear regression. The evaluation of factors and their statistical differences was performed using a one-way ANOVA.

IBM SPSS Statistics 28, statistical software, was used to evaluate the results. In accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1970), using this statistical approach to sample size computation and based on the above-mentioned rates, the minimum number of respondents was set at 164 which requirement was met by the conducted survey (n=201).

4. Results

4.1. Age management aspects and exploring latent factors

The maturity of organizations in implementing age management was assessed through nine targeted questions. The questions focused on various aspects of the organization's internal environment, knowledge of age management, and the existence of plans and practices in this area. The intensity of each aspect of age management was, except for the first question, measured on an ordinal scale from value 1 (representing the lowest level of maturity, e.g. no specific practices) to value 4 (representing the highest level of maturity, e.g. the existence and elaboration of plans). The first question was a dichotomous type of measurement. Organizational maturity could be analyzed through descriptive statistics and metrics. The results are presented in Table 2.

Organizations reported the highest values for the 'Age development information' and 'Knowledge sharing practices' variables. At the notional midpoint of the scale, with a value of 2.50, three aspects scored below average (i.e. the organizations' level of maturity was rather below average in these aspects): 'Different approach' (with a value of 2.00), 'Educational programs' (2.03), and 'Age structure plans' (2.26). The results are in line with the current trend of organizations in developing diversity, equality, and

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of age management aspects.

| Aspect (variable) | Mean | Geometric mean | Std. deviation | Kurtosis | Skewness |
|----------------------------------|------|----------------|----------------|----------|----------|
| Age management (q1) | 0.37 | 0.00 | 0.48 | −1.73 | 0.54 |
| Age development information (q2) | 3.23 | 3.11 | 0.77 | 0.31 | −0.81 |
| Age structure plans (q3) | 2.26 | 2.09 | 0.84 | −0.53 | 0.22 |
| Different approach (q4) | 2.00 | 1.80 | 0.88 | −0.46 | 0.54 |
| Educational programs (q5) | 2.03 | 1.85 | 0.88 | −0.45 | 0.51 |
| Activities support (q6) | 2.62 | 2.36 | 1.07 | −1.22 | −0.17 |
| Knowledge sharing practices (q7) | 2.90 | 2.75 | 0.84 | −0.32 | −0.43 |
| Flexible working hours (q8) | 2.76 | 2.58 | 0.89 | −0.60 | −0.32 |
| Addressing the retired (q9) | 2.56 | 2.37 | 0.91 | −0.77 | −0.10 |

Source: own survey.

Table 3. Correlation matrix of age management aspects.

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Age management (1) | 1 | .199** | .454** | .273** | .461** | .207** | .190** |
| Age development information (2) | .199** | 1 | .321** | −.057 | .143* | .190** | .213** |
| Age structure plans (3) | .454** | .321** | 1 | .311** | .492** | .193** | .313** |
| Different approach (4) | .273** | −.057 | .311** | 1 | .271** | −.018 | .013 |
| Educational programs (5) | .461** | .143* | .492** | .271** | 1 | .241** | .256** |
| Activities support (6) | .207** | .190** | .193** | −.018 | .241** | 1 | .419** |
| Knowledge sharing practices (7) | .190** | .213** | .313** | .013 | .256** | .419** | 1 |
| Flexible working hours (8) | .083 | .132 | .132 | −.027 | .170* | .121 | .135 |
| Addressing the retired (9) | .068 | .179* | .223** | −.059 | .175* | .067 | .211** |

Source: own survey.

inclusion. Organizations are most concerned with the agism aspect due to demographic trends in the economy that pose a threat to organizations in terms of a shortage of qualified labor and especially a productive workforce. Age management was viewed as a superfluous matter by the management of organizations ten years ago. However, the development shows that age management is a priority and that it is necessary to share information on its managerial implications. Some information on how to set the conditions for age management can already be accessed by the management of organizations, either through training from experts or by sharing information through research results. Based on this, 'best practices' can be developed in the organization, and this experience can further be shared while respecting the organizational characteristics that influence the success of age management in the organization and among the employees themselves. In order to set the right conditions for supporting age diversity and intergenerational cooperation, it is necessary to use training programs, flexible working arrangements, and organize working time and job tasks with respect to the health condition of employees to effectively use their potential. Age management is a key element of HR strategies, and the management of organizations must be able to adopt and set age management in the organization as an integral part of strategic management, or more precisely, as an indispensable part of securing and retaining human capital. The impact of age management on work performance is already evident in the implementation phase.

To better understand the relationships between the variables analyzed, a bivariate correlation analysis was conducted. The Pearson's linear correlation coefficient was the metric used to express the strength of the relationships. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

The table shows that the correlation structure between the variables analyzed is quite complex and difficult to interpret. The complex correlation structure may indicate the existence of latent constructs that could explain a certain degree of variability in the data more easily with fewer items being interpreted. To examine the hypothesis of the existence of latent constructs, or factors, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used. The Kaiser, Meyer, and Olkin (KMO) Measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity metrics were used to assess the suitability of the data structure for EFA. Also, the values of the communalities of each variable were assessed to ensure their relevance for the next EFA steps. Selecting the number of factors was based on the Kaiser-Guttman rule, which simply states that the number of factors is equal to the number of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. After conducting the tests, the KMO

was 0.738 (the minimum recommended value is 0.700), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed the Chi-Square at approx. 284.94 while the p-value was below 0.001 (the recommended value is below 0.050). The testing of communalities did not identify an inadequate extraction rate for any variable (all had values greater than 0.300, with a minimum recommended value of 0.200). Thus, these tests confirmed the hypothesis of the existence of latent factors.

The next step was to decide the number of factors and calculate the factor loadings of each variable for the given factor configuration. The number of factors was selected using the Kaiser-Guttman rule. According to this rule, three factors were identified, and together they explained 57.69% of the variability of the data, which is considered a sufficient value according to Anderson (2015). The results of determining the optimal number of factors can be found in Table 4.

Factors were extracted using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), and the Varimax Rotation Method was used to ensure that they were mutually distinguishable. The use of Varimax ensured that the factors were independent of each other (we also applied other rotation methods – Quartimax, Equamax, Promax, and Oblimin, and all these rotations achieved the same factor composition as when Varimax was used. Table 5 shows the rotated factor matrix containing the factor loadings of individual variables. The rotation converged into the final form of the matrix in four iterations.

Thus, the EFA proved the existence of latent factors—three factors explaining approximately 60% of the variability were extracted from the nine variables analyzed. Each factor can be characterized by the intensity of factor loading in each variable. Table 5 shows the color differentiation of the most significant factor loadings for each variable. Hence, Factor 1 is mainly composed of four variables, Factor 2 is mainly composed of three variables, and Factor 3 is mainly composed of two variables. With respect to the composition of the given variables, the factors can be named as follows:

- Factor 1: **'Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion.'** This factor consists mainly of the Different approach, Age management, Age structure plans, and Educational programs variables. These variables have the promotion of diversity, equality, and inclusion in organizations at their core, emphasizing age diversity, individual development plans, and age-specific employee plans. They represent a crucial strategic advantage that is critical to the ability to innovate, win in the market, and create sustainable success in organizations. Organizations that embrace this factor will find it easier to achieve their organizational goals and create a relatively sustainable competitive advantage through integrity,

Table 4. Total variance explained (3 factors configuration).

| Factor | Total variance | % of variance | Cumulative % of variance |
|--------|----------------|---------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | 2.708 | 30.088 | 30.088 |
| 2 | 1.411 | 15.679 | 45.767 |
| 3 | 1.073 | 11.928 | 57.694 |
| 4 | 0.892 | 9.911 | 67.605 |
| 5 | 0.755 | 8.386 | 75.991 |
| 6 | 0.666 | 7.404 | 83.396 |
| 7 | 0.547 | 6.072 | 89.468 |
| 8 | 0.516 | 5.729 | 95.197 |
| 9 | 0.432 | 4.803 | 100.000 |

Source: own survey.

Table 5. Rotated factor matrix.

| Variables | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Different approach | 0.724 | -0.249 | -0.177 |
| Age management | 0.720 | 0.220 | 0.021 |
| Age structure plans | 0.714 | 0.267 | 0.244 |
| Educational programs | 0.708 | 0.229 | 0.186 |
| Activities support | 0.085 | 0.818 | -0.072 |
| Knowledge sharing practices | 0.146 | 0.748 | 0.131 |
| Age development information | 0.123 | 0.445 | 0.325 |
| Addressing the retired | 0.053 | 0.084 | 0.791 |
| Flexible working hours | 0.047 | 0.046 | 0.734 |
| Total % of variance | 30.088 | 15.679 | 11.928 |
| Factor name | Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion | Age Management Implementation | Flexible Employment |

Source: own survey.

diversity, equality, and inclusion, caring for their employees, and promoting intergenerational collaboration.

- Factor 2: '**Age Management Implementation**'. This factor consists of three main variables: Activities support, Knowledge sharing practices, and Age development information. These variables have set organizational processes reflecting the employee age structure at their core. Organizations need to apply appropriate management practices that ensure equality, respect, recognition, and engagement of members belonging to the majority minority in a way that contributes to achieving their organization's strategic and tactical goals or implementing age management.
- Factor 3: '**Flexible Employment**'. As for this factor, the highest factor loading was observed for two variables: Addressing the retired and Flexible working hours. Unlike the previous case, these variables are more related to the person of the employee himself or herself, his or her work competencies (skills, knowledge, and abilities), and also communication with his or her supervisors about retirement plans, with a focus on ensuring the continuity of knowledge. This was the basis for naming this factor.

4.2. Comparison of age management factors with ID variables

When extracting the factors, we calculated the so-called factor score of each case (i.e. of the respondent) for the sake of broader analytical possibilities. The factor scores were calculated based on the linear regression and allowed to quantify and interpret the intensity of the factor. For example, if a respondent had a high factor score for Factor 1, it meant that the factor was more intense in that organization (i.e. it scored above average). The identified factors were then compared with other attributes directly or indirectly related to Age Management. In the first set of comparisons, we examined the intensity of the three factors according to the identifying attributes of the organizations. Figure 1 shows the results of the factor intensity analysis with respect to sector (top left), size (top right), ownership (bottom left), and type (bottom right). Statistically significant differences for the factors were found using a one-way ANOVA. Factors found to be statistically significant by this procedure were highlighted with a red box.

The figure shows that there is a statistically significant difference in two ID variables: Sector and Size. The statistically significant differences in the Sector variable have been found in Factor 1 and Factor 2. Factor 1 significantly dominates the Primary Sector. The agriculture and forestry sector is highly specific compared to other sectors of the economy and creates conditions for diversity, equality, and inclusion. This is due to the presence of primarily age diversity (the highest average age in the economy, negative demographic trends), where age management is a key component of management diversity; gender (more men than women are employed depending on the nature of work (physically demanding activities)); thus, there is a need to address gender within management diversity and the employment of foreigners (due to seasonal employment) and therefore a necessity to address cultural diversity within management diversity. The disadvantage is the large number of small organizations in the Primary Sector (primarily in agriculture and forestry), and hence a limited organizational capacity for implementation.

The intensity of Factor 2 was found to be very low in the Secondary Sector. The industrial sector is typical for a larger number of large organizations that have already developed an HR strategy and, regarding the global labor market, have implemented diversity management to some extent. Therefore, one can assume that the negatives of implementing diversity management (financial demands, reluctance on the part of both the organization and the individual, etc.) are gradually eliminated.

With respect to Size, Anova identified a statistically significant difference in Factor 1. This reached high values for organizations with more than 250 employees, but it was negative for organizations with fewer than 50 employees. Considering the previous results, one can conclude that large organizations have enough employees who communicate the diversity management strategy, emphasizing age, with all interest groups and have the tools (including HR, financial, organizational, etc.) to effectively set diversity, equality, and inclusion in the organization. In large organizations, management, in collaboration with HR professionals, has the opportunity to adapt to HR trends, the new work environment, the global scope of the labor market, the emphasis on eliminating discrimination, and other issues related to, for example, the inability to find alternative workspace, the inability to separate work and private life within working

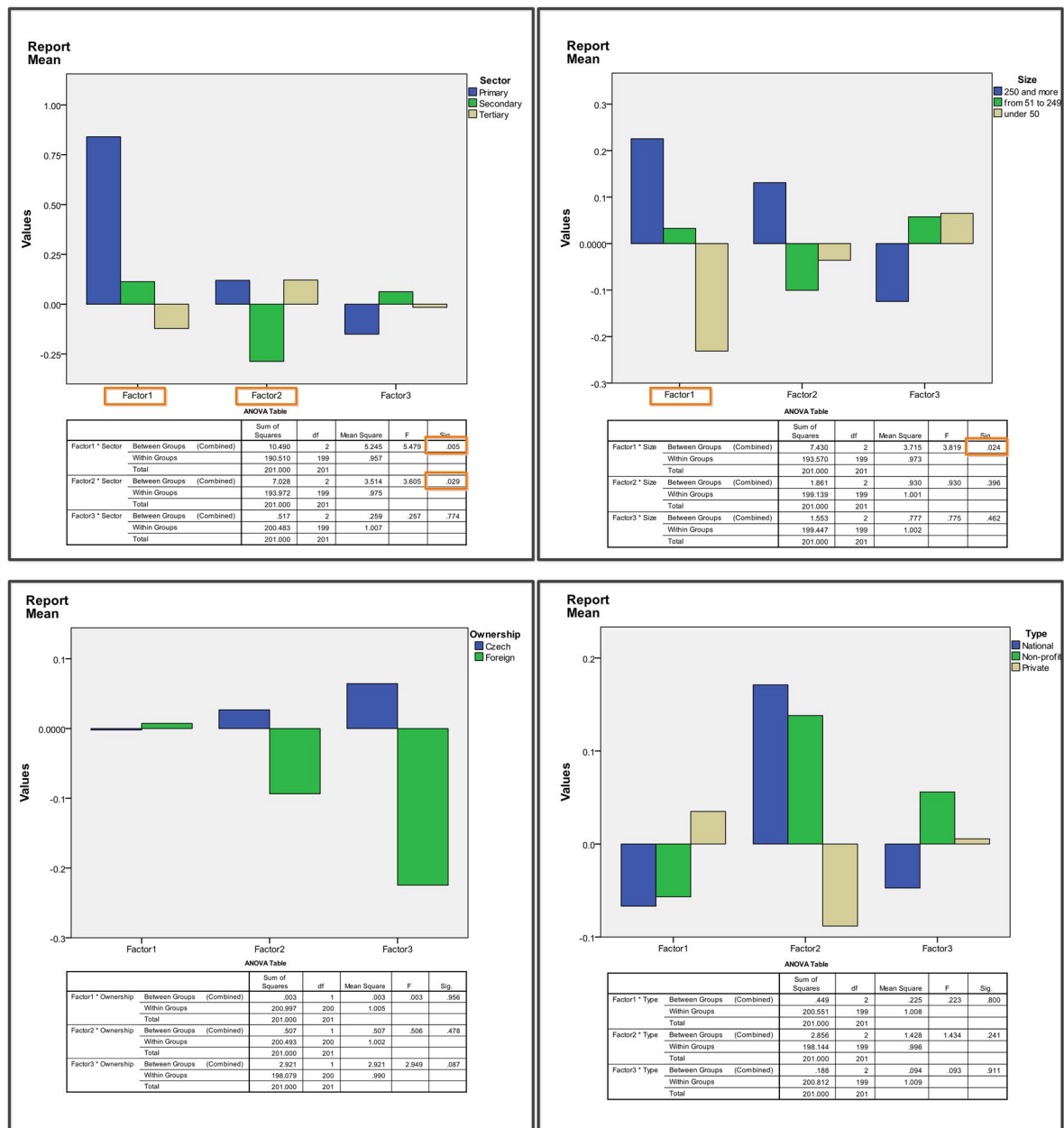


Figure 1. Factors vs. organizations ID variables.
Source: own survey.

from home, employee loneliness, and setting effective communication and intergenerational collaboration. In contrast, small organizations, typically, e.g. family businesses, do not have such conditions, and the influence of the so-called intuitive approach, which is often based on ownership management, on the implementation of diversity management is becoming more prevalent.

4.3. Comparison of age management factors with age category and age barriers

Two other areas, the Age Category of the respondent and Age Barriers, were examined in a similar manner as in the previous case. The results presented in Figure 2 identified statistically significant differences only for Age Barriers. The statistical significance was found for all three factors.

Factor 1 was significantly higher for those organizations that observed that some employees faced barriers because of their age. This factor is characteristic of organizations that regard age diversity as important and have already adopted or are intuitively implementing age management tools to a lesser

or greater extent. However, in the event that age discrimination (agism) occurs, it is necessary to ensure that the undesirable situation is dealt with immediately. In the event that employees themselves point it out, it is the manager's duty to eliminate agism and to establish an equal approach for all age categories of employees, e.g. in employee development, career, remuneration, etc. On the contrary, significantly negative values were found for Factor 2 and also for Factor 3 for those organizations that noticed barriers due to age. These organizations are characterized by the fact that the management does not support diversity in the workplace, not only age diversity. Also, the employees themselves do not support diversity in the workplace.

4.4. Comparison of age management factors with types of cooperation

A further aspect examined was the investigation of ways in which organizations could improve cooperation between different employees. The question gave five options, and the respondents could choose one or more of them. The variables were recoded into dummy variables, with the value of 0 indicating that the respondent did not choose the option and the value of 1 indicating that he or she selected the option. The results were then compared again with respect to the three identified factors. The results are presented in Figure 3.

Statistically significant differences were identified in two types of cooperation. The first difference has been found for those organizations that indicated that organizations should support intergenerational mentoring programs. A high intensity of Factor 2 was found for these organizations. One of the effective goals of age diversity in applying diversity management is a fair approach to learning and development. All employees, regardless of their age, should have the right to develop their competencies because knowledge and information become rapidly outdated. Intergenerational mentoring programs (both mentoring and reverse mentoring) help to increase the knowledge base in the organization and increase the competitive advantage based on knowledge.

There was another finding with organizations that consider providing training on communication and understanding all employees regardless of their age to be important. These organizations were found to have Factor 1 intensity significantly above average. In most cases, these organizations have a diversity management strategy in place, have identified priority diversity elements, in this case age diversity, and have purposefully used two-way symmetrical communication to share information and raise awareness of the importance of equality, intergenerational cooperation, and the need to ensure the

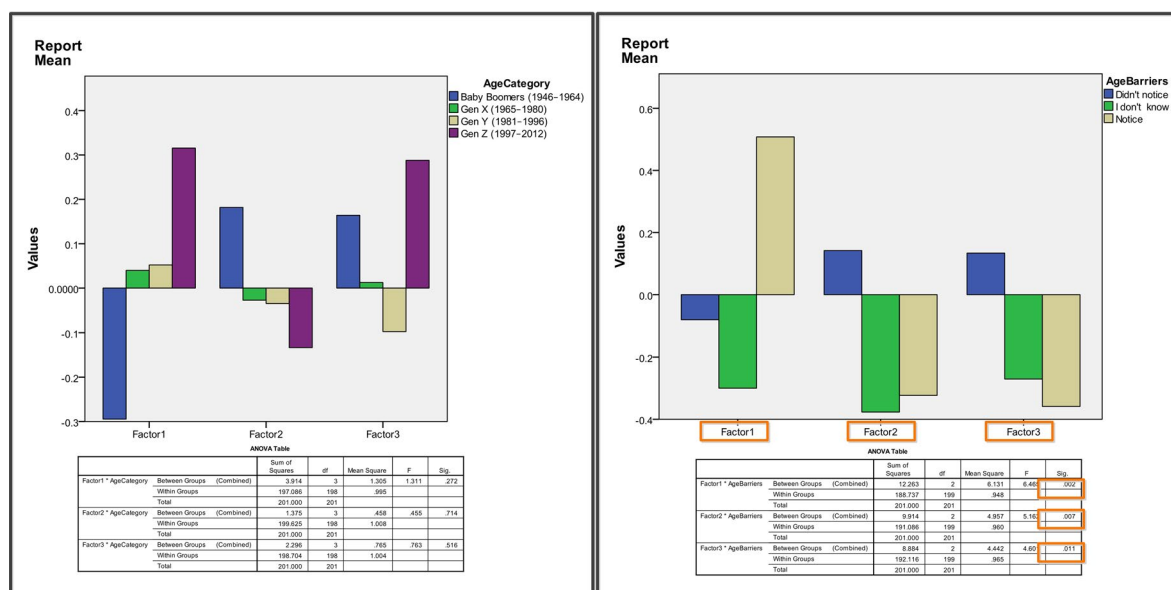


Figure 2. Factors vs. age categories and age barriers.
Source: own survey.

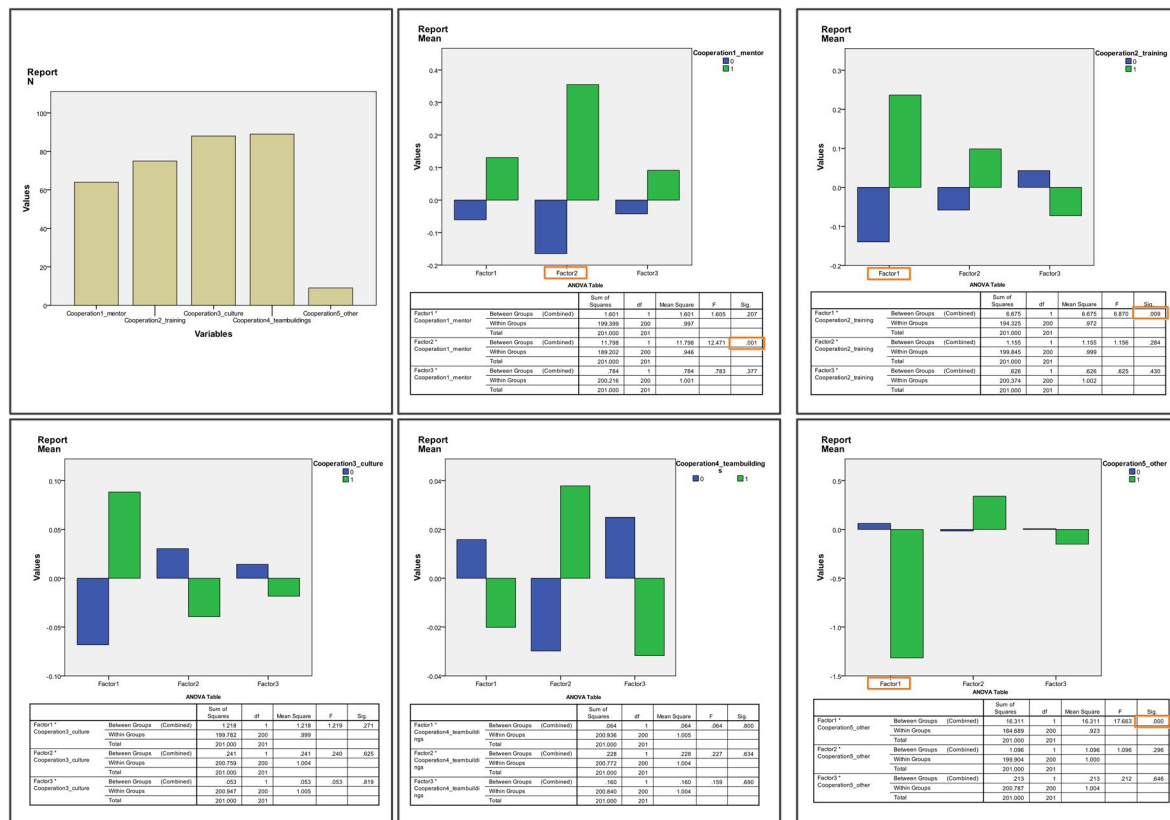


Figure 3. Factors vs. types of cooperation.
Source: own survey.

knowledge continuity. A statistically significant difference was also found in the 'other' attribute, but since the sample consisted of only 9 responses in this case, no reliable conclusions can be drawn from this.

4.5. Comparison of age management factors with intergenerational cooperation influence

The intensity of the three identified factors was also examined in comparison with the intergenerational cooperation influence. To measure the latter aspect, a separate question was used in which the respondents could select one of three options: positive, negative, and I can't state. The results were tabulated in an identical manner to the previous analyses and are graphically presented in Figure 4.

This analysis has revealed that organizations reporting that intergenerational cooperation has a negative impact on the work environment also showed negative values for Factor 3. It is typical of these organizations that employees are not motivated towards intergenerational cooperation; they are not inclined to help younger or older employees, and they view such help negatively, very often for fear of losing knowledge, competitive advantage, and ultimately for fear of losing their jobs.

4.6. Comparison of age management factors with primary factors of competitive advantage

Comparing the intensity of factors with respect to which primary sources of competitive advantage organizations consider most important was the final area of our research. The perception of sources of competitive advantage was elicited by means of a separate seven-question questionnaire. The respondents could select one or more of the options as follows: unique product or service; unique resources (financial, material, or information); unique human resources (competencies); the largest market share; achieving returns to scale; it cannot be assessed; or other (please specify). Only one respondent selected the last option; therefore, it was excluded from the analysis. The results are presented in Figure 5.

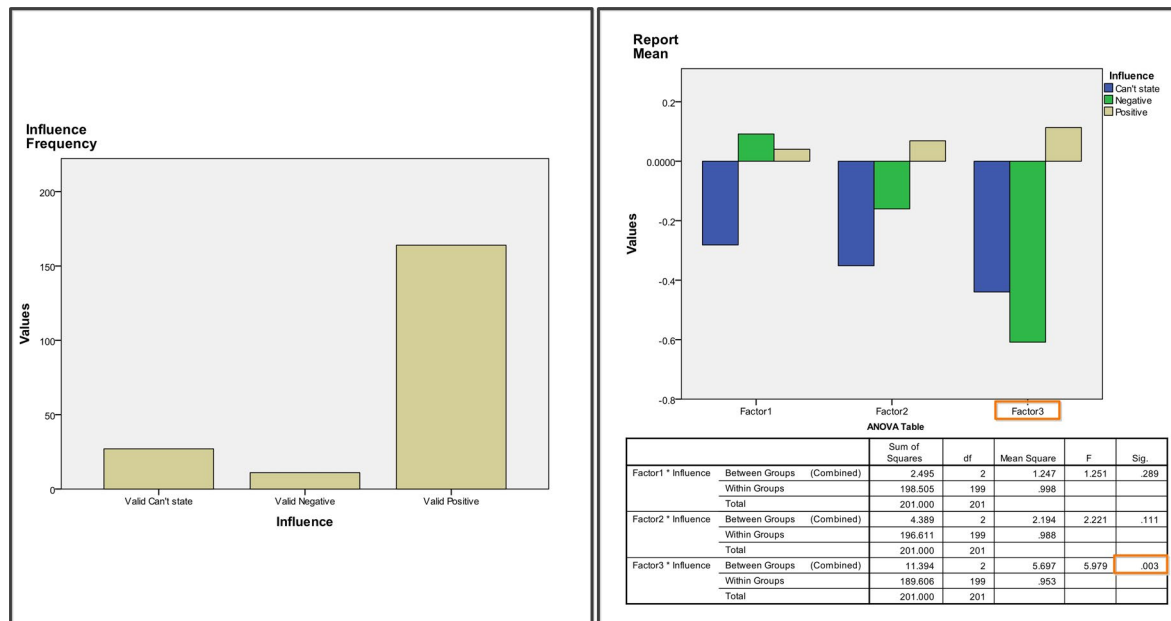


Figure 4. Factors vs. intergenerational cooperation influence.
Source: own survey.

The figure shows that statistically significant differences were found only for Factor 1. Its intensity was significantly higher for organizations that considered unique human resources (competencies) and the largest market share to be the source of competitive advantage. Conversely, the intensity of Factor 1 was negative for those organizations that could not assess the sources of competitive advantage. Organizations that are aware that their greatest assets are employees as bearers of knowledge and job performance purposefully build a competitive advantage on employee knowledge, which increases the market value of the organization. Such organizations follow HR trends, and the promotion of diversity, equality, and inclusion is an ongoing priority that supports the sustainability of human resources. The just-mentioned sustainability is directly proportional to the proper implementation of age management across the entire organization. Management of organizations that do not realize the importance of human resources in creating competitive advantage do not support tools to promote diversity and equality, then fail in employee inclusion.

5. Discussion

Given the results obtained, we can agree with the research of Sobrino-De Toro et al. (2019) and the findings of Csoba and Ladancsik (2023) that age diversity in the labour market are becoming more and more important, and there are many initiatives in human resource management that take into account intergenerational diversity, on the basis of which they design their intervention policies. Diversity management with an emphasis on age diversity is not always implemented in an appropriate way, i.e. in a way that does not create further discriminatory pressures on employees (Urbanová & Vrabcová, 2022). The application and implementation of diversity management is not a simple matter, and one can agree with Chillakuri (2020), who states that the expectations of different age group of employees are complicated for organizations because every age group of employees has 'own idealistic view of work. Younger employees find work boring and stereotypical if it is not intrinsically fulfilling. Therefore, it is the responsibility of managers to help all employees understand their contribution and how their work is significant to the success of the organization, which is in line with the research of Kumar (2023). Sobrino-De Toro et al. (2019) further emphasize the need for cooperation among all employees regardless of their age in organizations. Burmeister et al. (2020) add in accordance with it that older and younger workers who have been identified as key talents and knowledge holders and who might be at risk of leaving the organization, can be brought together in age diverse learning tandem.

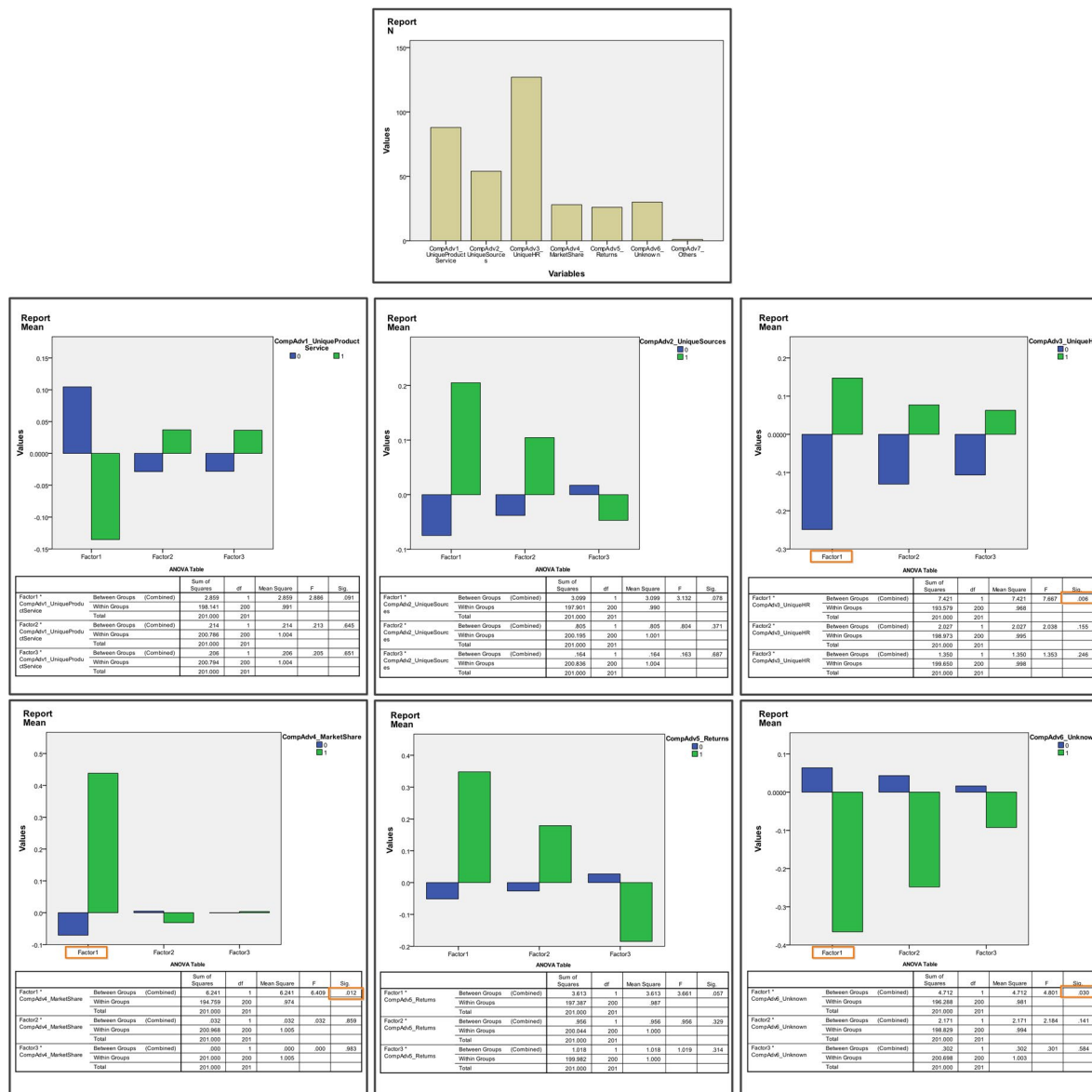


Figure 5. Factors vs. primary factors of competitive advantage.
Source: own survey.

Every organization and its perception by all interest groups can be approached in the same way as perceiving a personality that has certain qualities, communicates in a certain way, and has a certain organizational culture. This culture either supports diversity, or more precisely, age management, or it does not, or supports it only partially, which is the case in most organizations that apply age management. A personalized view of the organization as a whole helps to create a consistent image of the organization, supporting HR marketing and building a good employer brand. The specificity of each organization is determined by its character, and in terms of age management, certain characteristics can be perceived, i.e. the specifics of communication, organizational culture, and the way of cooperating. A comprehensive view then makes it possible to manage and move from a situation where the organization supports age management only partially, which is the most common situation today, to a system setting that includes changes in the understanding of the job classification of the new workers entering the labor market.

Graczyk-Kucharska et al. (2020) describe that young workers in the work environment are characterized by proficiency in foreign languages, rapid adaptation to new conditions, and the acceptance of high risk; Pataki-Bittó adds a work-life balance, with which Chillakuri (2020) and Li et al. (2020) agree. Each

employee in the organization has different preferences, different behavior, e.g. they react differently to unpleasant situations, or there is a different degree of agreement with the goals and values of the organization. However, everyone has their own potential that can be used by the organization. By introducing the system and the correct application of age management, it is then possible to use the specific characteristics of employees, especially the mentioned engagement, and create a work environment that supports diversity as a whole.

The research findings agree that each age group of employees needs a clear understanding of the organization's values, vision, strategic goals, practices, and social impact, with an emphasis on the proper application of diversity management that supports diversity and does not create additional pressures to discriminate. Based on the research conducted, one can agree with the findings of Graczyk-Kucharska et al. (2020); Mahmoud et al. (2021); Urbanová and Vrabcová (2022); Csoba and Ladancsik (2023) and North (2024) that each group of employees has their own career aspirations, willingness to learn, and capacity for innovative thinking that guides them in achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. This requires flexibility, independence, self-confidence, and appropriate working conditions, whether the employee is a woman, a man, a graduate, a woman or man on parental leave, an employee with a different sexual orientation or disability, etc. All employees prefer creating the right conditions, a positive working climate, and supporting cooperation in the workplace within all teams, no matter how diverse they are. In practice, however, one may encounter situations where it is not always possible to fully apply the principles of age management due to the nature of job functions and the fulfillment of job tasks. Typically, this is evident in plants, where high physical performance is required to carry out work activities.

In view of the results of this research, the recommendations for the management of organizations regarding the issues of promoting age diversity and intergenerational cooperation can be summarized as follows:

- To ensure tailored competence development for all categories of employees.
- To promote flexible working arrangements for all age categories of employees.
- To introduce mentoring and reverse mentoring to encourage intergenerational cooperation.
- To promote intergenerational cooperation with an emphasis on ensuring continuity in personnel changes (nurturing talents, shadowing managers with coaching, cooperation with universities, internships, etc.).
- To support the formation of employee groups to promote age diversity and inclusion.
- To conduct and evaluate a regular annual employee satisfaction and engagement survey from which an action plan can be drawn up to address identified problem areas in promoting age diversity and intergenerational cooperation.

Since the level of employee inclusion in diversity programs in organizations in the Czech Republic shows significant gaps, the authors' future research will focus on supporting diversity, equality, and inclusion of employees through appropriate diversity programs that foster equality among all diversity attributes. Research will be aimed at sustainable employability in the labor market in the Czech Republic and the European Union, and it will have to be in line with the possibilities, especially financial ones, of individual organizations.

6. Conclusion

The results have shown that there are statistical differences between organizations' approaches to age diversity. The research has identified three groups of organizations based on their approaches to promoting and supporting age equality and intergenerational cooperation. These are organizations emphasizing diversity, equality, and inclusion; organizations implementing age management and flexible employment. In summary, the agriculture and forestry sector is highly specific compared to other sectors of the economy and creates conditions for diversity, equality, and inclusion compared to other sectors. Large organizations are more likely to set HR strategies with an emphasis on age diversity and intergenerational cooperation.

The theoretical contribution consists in extending the theory of human resource management by identifying variables influencing the promotion and support of age diversity and intergenerational cooperation in organizations. These results will be used in the teaching of subjects in the field of Human Resources (HR). The practical contribution lies in presenting the results of current research in organizations in the Czech Republic and extending managerial implications in the area of age management.

The research presented entails certain limitations that may have influenced the results or the implications arising from them to some extent. The first limitation is the geographical constraints of the research. The research was conducted in the Czech Republic, whose demographic profile belongs to countries with a medium degree of aging (approximately 20% of the population is over 65 years old). Therefore, the findings of our research may not be entirely valid for countries that have a significantly lower or higher degree of population aging, as generational differences in the workforce are also expected to be different compared to the Czech Republic. Another limitation is the sample size and its representativeness. In this research, the sample consisted of 201 organizations, which implies a medium level of detection power of statistical methods. Therefore, only those differences that were large enough to be observable in the given sample have been identified when analyzing the factor differences. It cannot be excluded that, with a larger sample, other (albeit smaller) differences would have been identified. The third limitation is the naming of the three identified latent factors. With respect to the factor loading of the individual variables, we tried to select a factor name that would be as descriptive as possible of its composition. However, by adding a name, we partially remove the interpretability of such a latent factor since it is composed of each variable (only to varying degrees). Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the presented study offers an exploratory perspective on the issue of age management in organizations and may represent a useful theoretical and practical source of information for a broader scholarly discussion.

Authors' contributions

Contributed equally to this work with: Hana Urbancová [HU] – Conceptualization, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision; Peter Madžík [PM] – Roles: Data curation, Statistic analyses, Validation; Pavla Vrabcová [PV] – Roles: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Supervision; Martin Řehoř [MR] – Roles: Visualization, Writing – review & editing

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, HU. The data are not publicly available due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

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