

## AGE MANAGEMENT IN ADULT EDUCATION POLICY IN SLOVAKIA

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**Abstract:** *The research study addresses the demographic trend of population aging which is at the beginning of the 21st century not only a social risk but also a significant social challenge. Responding to the need for fair access to employees of different ages in employers' organizations is the concept of age management which originated in Finland in the early 1980s. Age management covers the different dimensions of human resource management within an organization, with an emphasis on adequate representation of age groups. In this context, the intention is to increase the readiness of employers' organizations to create an environment with adequate representation of individual age groups, to create working conditions "friendly to the elderly" and to apply forms and methods of education with respect to the age specifics of the workforce. The study was based on the absence of a politically guided approach to the application of age management in the field of human resources management in employers' organizations in Slovakia. The aim of the study is therefore to define the competency framework for an age management advisor for the needs of employers' organizations and their employees when implementing age management practices. The study has a theoretical-empirical character. The theoretical and methodological bases of the studied subject are the biodromal concept of human development, the theory of lifelong learning, the theory of intergenerational learning, the theory of activity and the theory of continuity. In the theoretical part, the research focuses on the analysis of relevant age-related resources (transnational and national policy papers, research studies and examples of good practice). The study also provides an overview of the demographic situation in Slovakia, which confirms the trend of population aging, as well. A questionnaire was selected for data collection in the empirical part of the research.*

**Keywords:** *aging population, age management, age management advice, adult learning, education policy, human development.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Slovakia is starting to address the issue of age management along the lines of other European countries at a time when Slovakia is also preparing for changes in the labor market resulting from demographic aging of the population. Effective addressing of age management issues includes the implementation of research in this area, the practical application of age management tools in employers' organizations, but also the creation of an effective policy framework in relevant areas – work, social affairs, family and adult education. On all these levels, Slovakia is only at the beginning of its activities. It learns from the practical experiences of countries that are a few steps ahead in this area, inspired by their research studies and policy measures in the area of age management.

The study identifies age management counseling as an effective means of introducing age management in the practice of personnel activities and human resources management. The aim of the study is therefore to define

a competency framework for an age management consultant for the needs of employers' organizations and their employees in implementing age management practices. The readiness for the application of age management procedures is gradually becoming a natural part of the competencies of human resources and personnel management.

The study was developed in accordance with the international project Age Management Uptake ERASMUS + (Key Activity 2, Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices, Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education). The project is accrued out by the Association of Adult Education Institutions in the Slovak Republic together with partner institutions from the Czech Republic (Charles University in Prague, Association of Adult Education Institutions of the Czech Republic), Austria (Institute of Lifelong Learning in Vienna), Poland (Education Center for Intergenerational Integration in Łódź) and Slovakia (Comenius University in Bratislava, Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy of the Faculty of Arts). The project aims to provide education professionals, recruiters, human resources managers and policy makers with an age management curriculum to acquire relevant knowledge and skills that will broaden and develop their competencies to become age management advisors.

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## 2. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASES OF AGE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

Age management is currently being developed in connection with the concept of active aging. The concept of active aging was adopted in the late 1990s by the World Health Organization in response to the phenomenon of population aging. The first more systematic work to define and formulate the policy framework for 'active aging', which basically relies on virtually all later work, comes from the World Health Organization in preparation for the Second UN General Assembly in Madrid for Aging in April 2002. Active aging is defined in the document as follows: "Active aging is the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and safety to promote quality of life in the aging process" [1]. The attribute "actively" captures the continuity of participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual and civic life, not just the ability to be physically active and participate in the paid labor market.

By focusing on the issues of promoting autonomy, independence and quality of life, the 2002 concept differed from the original concept adopted by the World Health Organization as a concept of healthy aging in the 1990s. Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century, a clear transition from a needs-based approach, when older people are perceived as a passive target group, to a rights-based approach was communicated. The latter recognizes the rights of people to equality in the provision of opportunities and treatment in all areas of life in the process of aging when they are primarily perceived as active beings. Such an approach encourages people to take responsibility for participating in the political process and other areas of community life ([1] apud [27], p. 9–10).

Taking into account the gaps in the WHO concept of active aging, in particular in the absence of a measure of progress in quality of life achieved through the active aging strategy (Active Aging Index), a revised definition has been developed [2]. In 2012, declared the Year of Active Aging and Solidarity between Generations, A. Zaidi introduced a revised basic definition of the concept of active aging "Active aging is a phenomenon of social aging when people are expected to participate in the formal market by increasing their average life expectancy, work, as in other unpaid productive activities, and that they will be able to live independently and autonomously" (apud [11], p. 16).

### 2.1. Population aging in Slovakia and changes in the labor market

Population aging affects all areas of social life and the labor market situation is changing under the influence of population aging. Population aging significantly affects the abundance and structure of the workforce. The National Active Aging Program [10] states that while the European Union will lack 15% of the workforce in 2050 as a result of an aging population, it will be as much as 21% of the workforce in Slovakia.

Table 1  
Age structure of the population (%) by economic age groups in the SR (2007–2017) [7]

Age group	0-14	15-64	65+
2007	15.76	72.27	11.98
2008	15.45	72.46	12.09
2009	15.32	72.42	12.26
2010	15.28	72.34	12.38
2011	15.41	71.81	12.78
2012	15.35	71.52	13.13
2013	15.32	71.14	13.54
2014	15.31	70.73	13.96
2015	15.33	70.22	14.45
2016	15.46	69.55	14.99
2017	15.61	68.87	15.52

Table 2  
Aging index in the SR (2007–2017) [7]

Year	Aging index
2007	76.00
2008	78.26
2009	80.01
2010	81.01
2011	82.96
2012	85.51
2013	88.34
2014	91.17
2015	94.22
2016	96.96
2017	99.43

At present, there is a ratio between the number of people of working age in Slovakia (e.g. 15–64 years) and the number of people of pre-productive and post-productive age is still relatively favorable. However, this is a temporary situation. In the coming years, the ratio between people of working age and those of post-productive and pre-productive age will change (Table 1). Numerous generations of men and women born in the second half of the 40's and 50's are entering post-productive age, and numerous generations of men and women born in the 1970s and 1980s reach the age of over 50 years, significantly increasing the number of older people labor market. Selected demographic indicators such as the aging index, the economic burden index and life expectancy illustrate this situation ([10], p. 7–11; [9], p. 19–20).

The aging index has been steadily increasing since 2007, reaching 99.43 in 2017 (nearly 100 inhabitants of the post-productive age 65+ accounted for 100 children aged 0–14) (Table 2). Based on data from INFOSTAT – Demographic Research Center – Institute of Informatics and Statistics, the average age of the population of Slovakia will increase according to forecasting scenarios from the current 40.59 years (2017) to more than 49 years in 2060.

The economic aging index (economic dependency index), which represents the number of persons of pre-productive age (0–14 years) and post-productive age (65 years and over), per 100 persons of productive age (15–64), shows economic aging. years). The evolution of the economic burden index of the population of the Slovak

Table 3  
Economic Load Index in Slovakia  
(2007–2017) [7]

Year	Economic load index
2007	38.37
2008	38.00
2009	38.09
2010	38.23
2011	39.25
2012	39.81
2013	40.57
2014	41.39
2015	42.41
2016	43.77
2017	45.21

Republic recorded a slightly decreasing trend between 2001 and 2008 and reached the lowest value in 2008 (38). Since 2009, the economic dependency index has been rising slightly again. In 2017, there were 45.21 inhabitants of the productive age in the SR per 100 inhabitants of the productive age aged 0–14 and at the age of 65 or more (Table 3).

The life expectancy, its increase in combination with the current low fertility and fertility rate also signals acceleration of the aging process of the population in Slovakia. In the Slovak Republic, life expectancy has long been increasing, albeit relatively slowly. Within the EU-27, Slovakia is among the countries with the lowest life expectancy. In 2011, life expectancy at birth exceeded (for the first time) 72 years for men and 79 years for women. Since the 1990s, the total fertility rate (the average number of live births per woman during her entire reproductive period (15–49 years) while maintaining the fertility level of the reference year and assuming zero mortality) has gradually decreased to below the "critical value" (1.5). In 2000–2007, total fertility fell below the threshold of "very low fertility" (1.3). At present, total fertility is around 1.4.

## 2.2. Public policies in Slovakia and age management

Population aging is a phenomenon that threatens social and economic development and therefore the role of the state and public policies is to counteract the negative consequences of population aging. Slovakia accepted the need to introduce age management through the National Active Aging Program for 2014–2020. Thus, in Slovakia, the prerequisites for raising the awareness of employers, workers and their representatives about age management and possibilities of implementing the principles of age management among Slovak employers are being created.

In 2013, the national project Active Aging Strategy was completed, aimed at developing in detail the context of demographic aging with the labor market and the pension system, including the incorporation of strategic objectives in this area and a proposal for measures to meet these objectives. With regard to age management, the strategy outlines the most commonly used employment service tools for older workers: wage and job subsidies, career guidance, lifelong learning and

unemployed reintegration programs (so-called generational pacts). Complementary to the Active Aging Strategy, the National Active Aging Program for 2014–2020 was developed.

The National Active Aging Program 2014–2020 is the first national document to consider promoting active aging as one of the most important policy priorities and public interest issues. It is a comprehensive programming document aimed at promoting the human rights of older people through their activation through public support policies. These are not only policies on employment and employability of older people (which is the primary focus of the Active Aging Strategy), but also policies to promote their lifelong learning, civic and social activities outside the formal labor market, promote their independence, dignity, economic and social security, including protection against ill-treatment in all social spheres and relations ([9], p. 3–4).

The choice of NPAS structure and system has been inspired by the results of the European Active Aging Index project, which defines active aging for EU member states as: "productive activities (helping family members or volunteering) and living a healthy, independent and safe life". In order to measure progress, four areas have been identified that meet active aging, including indicators that can be measured: preconditions for active aging within a supportive environment; the contribution of older people to paid work; social activities and participation of older people; the independent and autonomous life of older people ([9], p. 5).

The National Employment Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2020 (hereinafter referred to as NSZ) represents a comprehensive strategic framework for the area of employment support and plans for supporting employment growth. The strategy among the specific areas to be addressed in Slovakia in this area also mentions the employment of older people ([9], p. 12, 59). One of the basic principles of public active aging policies is the principle of employment, which is based on the right of older people and the elderly to work and to have and achieve income from employment or self-employment even after reaching retirement age. Older employment makes it possible to capitalize on the work experience and capital of older people, to strengthen their economic sovereignty and to maintain their employment, creating new work and social contacts. The application of this principle is based on the creation of flexible and age-friendly working conditions ([9], p. 19–20).

The issue of age management is institutionally covered by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The Ministry has issued the National Program of Active Aging for 2014–2020 from the interdepartmental cooperation. The National Program was developed in cooperation with all ministries in terms of material competence and other relevant entities.

The institutional platform for age management in Slovakia consists mainly of non-governmental organizations – civic association Association of Adult Education Institutions in the Slovak Republic, civic association Slovak Association of Age Management.

### 2.3. Basics of age management theory

The foundations of the age management theory [6] consist of knowledge about the principles, objectives and measures for the implementation of age management, the age management process.

The main principles of age management include:

- good knowledge of the age structure of society and organization;
- fair attitudes to aging;
- understanding of individuality and diversity;
- promotion of working skills;
- applying strategic thinking;
- emphasis on prevention rather than response-based problem-solving;
- focus on working life and all age groups, not just older workers;
- holistic approach involving all dimensions that contribute to effective age management ([4], p. 6).

### 2.4. Objectives of age management

- a) Better awareness of and aging attitude towards aging;
- b) Managing age-related issues, as the main role and responsibilities of managers and supervisors;
- c) Management of age-related issues covered by human resources policy;
- d) Promoting work ability and performance;
- e) Lifelong learning, including non-formal lifelong learning (eg thematic club activities, professionally guided regular cycles of thematic events, personal development activities in the context of current opportunities and requirements);
- f) Age-friendly working conditions;
- g) Safe and dignified retirement ([4], p. 6).

Age management measures may include a wide range of activities, namely:

- health care, promoting and promoting the maintenance and improvement of the physical
- employees' fitness;
- educational activities, promoting intergenerational cooperation;
- support for job satisfaction and wellbeing, work-life balance measures, motivation according to different age groups;
- job restructuring, working environment development, adaptation of work organization, occupational ergonomics, change management according to employee incentives;
- development of personnel strategies taking into account the needs of individual generations in the workplace ([12], p. 7).

The introduction of age management in employers' organizations is a five-stage process. The first step is to implement entry age management audit in areas that are the main pillars of age management:

- good knowledge of age;
- aging attitudes;
- good management that understands individuality and diversity;
- quality and functional age management measures;
- ensuring good working ability and motivation;
- a high level of competence;

- good organization of work and working environment;
- satisfaction ([5], p. 31–32).

The second step is the implementation of training activities for managers at different levels, but also for employees. Educational activities for managers are focused on the specifics of age groups, aspects of aging, elimination of age stereotypes. Employee training activities should take into account the promotion of individual aspects of the working ability of all age groups of employees. Educational activities for older employees can focus on healthy lifestyle issues. Another type of educational activity is education with a focus on choosing a suitable retirement strategy (drawing up a retirement plan taking into account various aspects of the employee's life – social relations, work plans, financial situation).

The third step is to obtain information on the state of work ability of employees and, on the basis of this, to apply appropriate measures. Employment support for employees should include measures to support all factors of work ability (health, retention and competence development, subjective job satisfaction, working conditions). Based on the results of the initial audit and measurement of working ability, the application of the proposal for age management measures follows. The fifth step is regular monitoring of the implemented measures. The effectiveness of the measures taken can be evaluated by a control audit and repeated measurement of work ability ([12], p. 31–35).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

A questionnaire [13] was selected to collect data in the empirical part of the research aimed at identifying the competency framework of an Age Management Advisor. Experts from stakeholders, universities, research institutes, in-service training and counseling institutions, personnel departments of employers' organizations and experts from non-governmental organizations were addressed.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out:

- respondents' views on which managerial, technical, social, behavioral, information and communication skills are needed for an age management consultant specialist;
- what types of intergenerational activities do respondents consider useful;
- respondents' views on the benefits of sharing knowledge and experience with older / younger generations.

The questionnaire used semi-closed questions, scaled and list (nominal) types of questionnaire answers. The questionnaire was divided into six blocks (A–F) and there were demographic questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. Demographic questions looked at the job title, gender, country in which the employer organization is based, the sector in which respondents work, their education, and the length of experience.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

A positive finding of research is that employers perceive that the career progression of workers is not

determined by age. Most employers (80%) considered that older workers have the same career prospects as younger workers.

The research did not confirm the acceptance of age as a negative factor determining the working abilities of older workers. Employers have pointed out the tendency of claims that older workers work slower, make slower decisions, are not willing to educate themselves and are more often ill. The most "valued" job characteristics of older workers compared to the younger ones, as agreed by employers, is the high degree of loyalty and corporate responsibility (90.4%).

As regards the use of flexible forms of work organization and working time, employer research has not confirmed the importance of age (50+) as a factor supporting a higher acceptance of flexible working time arrangements and work organization for this age group.

The competencies identified by the questionnaire, which the Age Management Advisor should have, were included in the Qualification Standard of the Age Management Advisor and subsequently in the training program. More detailed information on the questionnaire survey, qualification standard and training program is available at [www.agemanagementuptake.eu](http://www.agemanagementuptake.eu).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Given the results of our research and the need to successfully implement age management in employers' organizations, we make some recommendations for the social, employers' and employees' level. At the company level, it is necessary to include the topic of age management in all relevant areas of national policies and thus create a background for recognizing its social importance. Since the implementation of age management tools in the environment of employers' organizations is beginning, it is necessary to support their implementation through systemic measures. The inspiration can be the process of introducing age management in the environment of Czech companies through the call of the Operational Program Employment called Age management – a smart change in management, an opportunity for growth (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Czech Republic).

This call allows Czech employers to prepare projects that include age management audits, training activities, development of age management strategies and plans, measurement of work capacity, preventive activities to support work capacity, and ergonomic audits.

We have identified counseling as an effective tool in implementing age management for employers and employees. We identify age management counseling as an effective tool for introducing age management, through which it is possible to familiarize employers with it and to teach their age management to be implemented in employers' organizations as part of personnel processes. The preparation of age management consultants concerns mainly the personnel of personnel departments, HR managers. Therefore, it is necessary on the part of employers to create conditions for the implementation of elements and principles of age management also by supporting the participation of these workers in the area of human resources management in

the course of the Consultant in age management. The course presents another outcome of the Age Management project – Uptake Erasmus+.

In order to map the attitudes and views of employers on a wide range of issues related to the issue of older workers' participation in the labor market, the Institute for Labor and Family Research [8] conducted a representative empirical survey at the enterprise level. The research signaled the difficult position of older workers in the labor market, which is also reflected in the personnel processes of enterprises, especially in the recruitment and dismissal of workers.

According to the findings, the difficult position of older workers in the labor market is signaled by the fact that employers would prefer younger jobseekers if they were to decide on the recruitment of workers. For some employers, a negative attitude towards the recruitment of older workers ties in with the acceptance of established stereotypes about lower flexibility of older workers and the unsuitability of some work activities for this age group.

To reduce the number of employees, almost half of employers opt "The least painful way" and dismisses workers who have reached the retirement age. Employers' dismissal strategies are influenced by the size of the enterprise, the economic sector and the ownership structure. Large employers, companies with international participation and employers from the agriculture, industry and services sectors prefer, based on the assessment of the quality of the workforce, to reduce the number of workers. Small and medium-sized employers in the construction and utilities sectors favor retirement-based redundancy practices.

In the area of education for older workers, most employers agreed that older workers were willing to educate themselves. The need to systematically deepen and improve the professional and qualification level of older workers as one of the key preconditions for increasing their professional mobility within and between companies and as one of the ways of maintaining their labor market is accepted by more than two thirds of the addressed employers. Research has confirmed that training and vocational courses are the most widely used form of training for older workers' employers.

The social policy of most businesses, companies and organizations is not age-based. In some companies, companies and organizations, the duration of the employer is considered. Specific programs targeted at older workers were recorded in the area of supplementary pension savings, when employers indicated that the employer's contribution increases depending on age and years of work, and in health care, where some employers pay older workers more often preventive health checks, spa allowances, treatment and recovery stays.

Finally, at the level of individual employees, it is necessary to increase their effective participation in the labor market throughout their working life by using career guidance services, continuing vocational training, to motivate them to remain in the labor market as long as possible by creating age-friendly working conditions; and working life, to promote a healthy lifestyle, to lead them to a positive attitude and to implement lifelong learning and intergenerational learning. A research study

by the Institute for Labor and Family Research [3] states that a lot of effort will be needed and arguments based on facts will be made to persuade people to stay longer in their working lives. The results indicate the necessity of introducing age management measures.

If we are to focus on extending working life, we mean program extension in order to keep older workers on the labor market on an equal footing, not just a "temporary necessity" resulting from the shift of retirement age by a few months. Any age-related sensory, mental, health limitations can be removed, for example, by using aids to correct sensory deficiencies, adjusting the job, applying shorter or part-time work, introducing more frequent breaks to prevent physical fatigue, streamline health prevention and disease. In order to streamline the education of older workers, it will be necessary to develop new learning methods that are adapted to older workers. The willingness to remain in the labor market also at an older age is probably supported by a good working climate, relationships in the workplace, non-discriminatory management approach and job satisfaction.

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