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Solutions to
age related issues
in education sector

Age Management in the Czech Republic: State of the Art, 2022

Age management: general situation in the country

In spite of the fact that some of the demographic prognoses can now be confirmed, age management still is quite unknown in the Czech Republic, both at the theoretical and practical level. However, based on the existing research results, it can be stated that implementing principles of age management will be essential in the future, which is confirmed also by Bejtkovský (2012). Adoption of age management measures brings benefits to organisations and also shows that the proposed solutions do not have to constitute a disproportionate financial burden for them. At present, when the full retirement age has been increasing not only in the Czech Republic and the dynamics of economic and political changes is longlasting, it is necessary to flexibly address the changes within the labour market by searching for and implementing new solutions. The possibilities of adapting to the ever-changing competitive environment include, among others, work rationalisation. Consequently, it can be stated that there are new forms of employment and working time organisation growing more and more in Europe that are characterised by flexibility in terms of the needs and interests of all involved, i.e. employers, employees as well as unemployed individuals.

In the area of working practices and working time organisation, it is necessary to follow trends and to create specific working conditions for employees aged 50+. How an organisation sets working time, how it modifies it and how it treats individual groups of employees with respect to age management can be seen as a tool for stimulating employees of an organisation. If working time is adapted to suit both the employees and the management, the employees will be more motivated, which might help encourage improvement in performance of individuals and thus of the whole organisation. Using individual forms of working time organisation and employment depends not only on organisational conditions (the organisational structure and culture, practices applied, etc.), but also on individual groups of employees who are employed in the organisation. Preferences of individual groups differ depending mainly on age, sex, length of professional experience, whether employees have a family or not, etc.

Age management in the education sector

Today, the gradual ageing of the population is characteristic of the teaching profession. A significant number of Czech teachers are already or will soon be of pre-retirement age. This is a time when the work of teaching may become increasingly demanding for them. On the other hand, young teachers are also leaving education. It is therefore increasingly important to find answers to the question of how to help teachers to be able to meet the demands of teaching at different stages of their careers and not to leave the profession prematurely. One of the main strategies to tackle this problem is to introduce programs supporting workability of teachers.

Work ability declines steadily with age



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Unsurprisingly, the working ability of Czech teachers declines steadily with age. The decline is particularly pronounced among teachers over 50. However, there are large differences in the working ability of this age group of teachers. Some teachers have a working ability that enables them to do their job without much difficulty and thus outperform even young teachers. Others, however, may have considerable difficulty in meeting even basic job requirements. This shows that a decline in working ability is not always linked to ageing and that other factors can also affect working ability.

Class teachers are more at risk

Teachers have to cope with high (and, it should be added, nowadays dynamically changing) work demands. High work demands deplete teachers' mental and physical resources, leading to a gradual decline in energy, health problems and, consequently, a reduction in the ability to do the job of a teacher. Specific duties associated with being a class teacher have a negative impact on teachers' workability. Class teachers are responsible not only for preparing and delivering their own teaching, but also for class management, ensuring communication between the school and parents, etc. Workload associated with classroom teaching can cause stress for some teachers, which has a *negative impact on their ability to work*.

Caring for ageing relatives is exhausting and reduces working capacity

In the non-work domain, the responsibilities associated with long-term care for ageing relatives have an adverse impact on teachers' work capacity. Long-term care of relatives is exhausting, which can have an adverse impact on physical and mental health, which is one of the main components of work ability. Caring for relatives is particularly common among older teachers who need longer recovery time. However, caring for relatives is associated with a lack of time for quality rest, which may adversely affect their work performance and consequently their work ability.

Positive interpersonal relationships in school as a driver of teachers' work ability

Another area that is important for teachers' work ability is relationships with school management, colleagues, students and their parents. Positive interpersonal relationships in the school environment positively translate into their level of work ability. This finding about Czech teachers can be supplemented with knowledge from some foreign research. These suggest that a supportive working climate is particularly important for work ability. It is beneficial when teachers receive support and help from their supervisors and colleagues, but also positive feedback on their work. Conversely, the psychological strain associated with pupil indiscipline, which teachers have to deal with both in and out of the classroom, significantly reduces teachers' ability to work. Similarly, mobbing or bossing can have a similar effect.

The work-life balance also has an impact on performance

Work ability is affected by lifestyle. Lack of exercise, unhealthy diet, poor sleep quality, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption have a negative impact on work ability. Work-life balance also affects work ability. Teachers who are able to find a balance or the right balance between work and leisure can benefit from their approach in the form of higher work ability.



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Burnout syndrome and teachers' work ability

Teachers' inability to meet work demands and chronic stress can lead to burnout. Burnout has a negative impact on work ability. However, the relationship between burnout and work ability can also be inversely related. Reduced work ability can lead to teachers being unable to cope with the demands of their work, which can manifest itself in burnout.

Recommendations to schools

Although the work ability declines with age, targeted intervention programmes would not be appropriate to focus only on ageing teachers. Instead, it is suggested that:

- workability support should be targeted at all ages of teachers, although the specifics of these need to be reflected;
- optimising the work demands placed on teachers can be recommended;
- promoting work-life balance in the workplace is appropriate;
- school management should strive to create a healthy and socially sensitive school environment aimed at nurturing interpersonal relationships and mutual social support;
- school leaders should encourage increased teacher participation in decision-making
- the ability to work will be supported by the establishment of clear career paths.